

THE KINGDOM OF GOD AS A VISION: A POST-CRITICAL UNDERSTANDING OF LUKE 17:20-36 IN RICOEUR'S HERMENEUTICS

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Abstract:

If post-critical moment is applied to the metaphor of the Kingdom of God, that is, the biblical text of the Kingdom, understanding constitutes incorporation of the world-reference and the project of hope. As a result, the central truth-content of the Kingdom of God in Luke 17:20-36, *the Kingdom of God is within you*, must be seen as provoking a 'proposed world', a world of possibilities which must be projected. The texts of the Kingdom reveal a surplus meaning: an eschatological vision, reflecting existential limitation of articulation of the Kingdom as well as a project of the Kingdom of humanity. From the perspective of mimesis theory, how the contemporary readers 'identify' themselves with the world of text demonstrates a followability of text. In post-critical moment, the power of the text becomes an actual 'will' to project the 'impossible demand' as the impact of textual participation with the interpretive mode of engagement-detachment. What prominent in post-critical moment is that a 'program' of the Kingdom is placed under the project of hope. In hermeneutic principle, the revealed truth as, part of faith truth, must be interpreted as both ontological and eschatological vision. 'Vision' functions as a meta-critical understanding that always destabilizes existing awareness and brings it to a futuristic horizon or eschatological openness.

Keywords:

*Kingdom of God • vision • post-critical • hermeneutics • eschatology • hope
• manifestation • becoming true*

Introduction

In approaching the ‘Kingdom of God’ metaphor in the light of Paul Ricoeur,¹ faith truth is considered as a matter of *the revealed truth*, i.e., truth of Kingdom of God in a *textual issue*. This is the case, sample and illustration of how implementing Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, especially how faith truth must be understood and interpreted involving a specific text. In this case of the Kingdom of God, faith truth is probed from a biblical text and considered as an existential truth and examined by the criterion of “manifestation” rather than objectivity or propositional truth.

The theological position of this issue needs to be firstly clarified. The emphasis of the revealed truth assumes that the Kingdom of God is the source of abundance of truth so that we can assume it as the kingdom of Truth that, at the same time, vibrates *anthropological implications*. It means that faith truth becomes an ‘event’, an existential human concern. The issue of religious truth, for instance, becomes a concern in the Vatican Council II that challenges the discourse of truths in anthropological level:

“...so, similarly, does it often claim no religious truth but only a commitment to formal-judicial procedures which make possible a free market of religious truths and rational debate about such truths”.²

The next theological position is concerning to eschatological character of truth. The basic tenet of interpretation is to bring understanding beyond epistemology to ontology,³ i.e., faith truth has existential direction. In such frame of interpretation, the theological project of faith truth affirms that *making meaning* (ontology) and *defining reality* (epistemology) are substantially relational.⁴ In this sense, truth and life reflect a correlated domain; borrowing Heidegger’s words: “we are in the truth”⁵ relativizing the dichotomy of subject-object. Then, however, in this discussion, to make faith truth ‘meaningful’ is also to define truth that constructs our ownmost reality: the reality of the Kingdom of God as *das Sollen*. In the case of the Kingdom of God, faith truth and human existence are correlated, manifested and projected where ‘making meaning’

and ‘defining reality’ works together in the frame of *the Kingdom of God is within you*.

Furthermore, in the hermeneutic framework of post-critical level, the interpretive analysis and exploration of faith truth in the case of the Kingdom of God do not emphasize on chronological facts or historical data. Rather, it is presented to see the *mode of thought* that might be offered by hermeneutics in understanding existential faith truth and it is exercised by following the procedures of manifestation or the model of gradual disclosure provoked especially by the post-critical level of understanding. Interpretation itself, therefore, is working not in linear but ‘circular’ method or a long detour as Ricoeur puts it. Both Ricoeur’s hermeneutics as a method of interpretation and truth-content as its object demonstrate the complexity of faith truth as a matter of “existential truth” explored through the text of the Kingdom of God.

The Dimensions of ‘Project’ and ‘Utopia’ in the Kingdom of God

This article focuses on the post-critical moment which is applied to the metaphor of the Kingdom of God, the biblical text of the Kingdom, understanding constitutes incorporation of *the world-reference and the project of hope*. As a result, the central truth-content of the Kingdom in Luke 17: 20-36 must be seen as provoking a ‘proposed world’, a world of possibilities which must be projected. In this level of understanding, it becomes a living discourse. Thus in manifesting itself as a faith truth, the biblical symbol of the Kingdom serves to limit, as an existential project, but also to break open our reasoning process, as open possibilities:

“Far from being a monopoly of any particular individual or any particular group, let alone Israel, that Kingdom belonged to anyone who sought it. The all-embracing Kingdom crossed all boundaries and dissolved all lines of demarcation. The outcasts, the sick, those buried in debt, the filibusters and the peasant rebels, the socially disadvantaged and the poor – all those who found themselves on the periphery of society – were invited to feast with Jesus in a table fellowship that assaulted the sensibilities of the pious observers of purity laws and invited the wrath of Imperial Rome. Of that Reign, Jesus is the reluctant mediator, “the announcer that neither should exist between humanity and divinity, or between humanity and itself.”⁶

At this point, it is “the task of hermeneutics to disentangle from the ‘world’ of texts their implicit ‘project’ for existence, their indirect

proposition of new modes of being.”⁷ As hermeneutic effectiveness, what we can grasp from this process is the capacity of words *within you* to open our interpretation of the Kingdom toward ‘more explicit’ and concrete project of faith involving the world of contemporary interpreters, hearers and readers. In such way, the understanding of the Kingdom becomes a living project’ that demands: (1) initiatives of interpreters to heighten their deeper receptivity of text through the process of hermeneutic circle; (2) a concrete reflection in order to propose new meanings of the Kingdom in front of the text and reader’s awareness.

As known, Luke 17: 20-21 reminds us: “The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo, here it is!’ or ‘There’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”⁸ And, in effect, this text becomes the discourse of ‘meanings’; the meanings remain for *us*. Now in linguistic analysis, we have two constitutive meanings of textual interpretation:

First, in terms of historical-cultural distance, the signs of the kingdom are now ‘unobservable’ and we have no access to imagine ‘what really happens’ in the past.

Second, the textual aura ‘in the midst of you’, however, would confront our present reality with creative imagination of values of the Kingdom for the contemporary readers:

“The Kingdom lay at the heart of Jewish identity. But Jesus understood it differently. He preached a Kingdom that would challenge everything the world cherished the most—pretension, power, hatred of one’s enemies, patronage. And it is in this regard that this in breaking Rule of God manifested itself as world-negation, a vision calling forth a new humanity in view of a radically new world order. This was the only way the land could be healed.”⁹

By such world-negation, for instance, we are brought to an existential openness which, in turn, would lead us to “innovation of meaning”, a possible situation that might be created in the context of our time, problem and need. Regarding our limitation in understanding the Kingdom of God, we reach only limited expressions in describing it in social reality that leaves ‘unobservable’ components. In the textual language of John 18:36, for instance, the limitation is expressed in ‘not of this world’. However, if the text of the Kingdom in Luke 17: 20-21 is understood as a proposed world and a project, then the Kingdom breaks

our process of reasoning by presenting the Kingdom ‘in the midst of you’ inserted as existential passion representing our infinite *desire to be*.

Hermeneutically speaking, both the texts of the Kingdom reveal, therefore, a *surplus meaning*: an eschatological *vision* because it reflects existential limitation of articulation of the Kingdom as well as a *project of the Kingdom of human* because it enables an existential-concrete engagement in operation of interpretation through linguistic creative descriptions and unceasingly existential appropriation.

Hence the act of text of Kingdom in Luke 17: 20-36 must be seen as a dynamical sense that suggests a ‘direction’: both utopian-eschatological and existential project. Both are a world of possibilities offered by the Kingdom of God and these must be reflected as a tension between a vision and a project of action. For the readers, these possibilities become the content of a world proposed ‘in front of the text’ that also refers to more concrete context in front of our life. Then such this world involves the ‘second-order reference’ meaning our being-in-the-world and our new ways in understanding our life. Meanwhile the first-order-reference represents the original author and situation and also the addresses.¹⁰ Here the central power of text of the Kingdom in Luke 17: 20-21 lies on textual ability to bring us to a horizon and initiatives within ‘its sense’ that stimulates the surplus of meaning, a *new experience of being by revitalizing the presence of the Kingdom among us*. However, rather than placing the new being in eschatological situation, Ricoeur contends that the Kingdom insists “an instantaneousness of the present decision at the expense of the temporal historical aspects in the hope of the Resurrection”.¹¹

Thus the project of interpreting life and desire to be are the possibilities of establishing program provoked and proposed by existential ‘sense’ of the Kingdom of God as a faith truth. However in the hermeneutical process of post-critical moment, the Kingdom is not properly conceived solely as ‘any program of action’ although it is enabled, as mentioned above. It is better to compare this issue with, for instance, the linguistic structure of the John 18:36 that reminds us about ‘limitless’ and also much better conceived as ‘impossible demand’ inserted in any existential interpretation and expression of the Kingdom of God.¹² ‘Impossible demand’ of the Kingdom’s manifestation, however, is not a hopeless situation in interpretation but it is immediately an inspirational

power which, at the same time, cannot be merely articulated in political or humanitarian or ethical programs or actions. In this sense, in post-critical interpretation, the Kingdom of God must be interpreted validly in utopian terms.

Manifestation of the Kingdom of God in Liberation Theology

The development of interpretation and understanding of the Kingdom of God as a faith truth arrives at the so-called 'manifestation'. Here manifestation signifies a correlation between the idea of the Kingdom and fundamental principles as we can see in liberation theology. It means the criteria of religious interpretation and experience must be a *manifestation* as possibility, a manifestation of symbolic values of the surplus of meaning of the Kingdom of God within you. Then to insist the 'experience' in the reign of Kingdom of God *among us*, manifestation becomes the main implication of the term 'within you'. Furthermore, through linguistic analysis, indirect propositions and creative imagination of values of the Kingdom for the contemporary readers, it seems that Luke 17: 20-36 leads to the certain understanding, i.e., the meanings of testimony of freedom and justice, encouraged by the metaphoric sense of the God as King *to do something more* in the world. In one way and another, such interpretive components and testimony become inherent values of liberation theology.

Hermeneutically speaking, the act of reading can never ignore the contexts in which texts are produced, to which they refer, and in which they are read.¹³ We take, for instance, an assertion 'in the midst of you' as analysed by John Drane. He interprets this statement 'in the midst of you' substantially as a testimony towards a 'new community' but not a political reality, namely a new social reality with freedom and justice and as the power of prophetic Presence in the midst of human life that penetrates nowness within the future. The viewpoint of the nature of the Kingdom is called *inaugurated eschatology*. It explains that God's kingdom has already come through Jesus, but that it will not be completely fulfilled until the last day. This seems to be the view that of the gospels, as they have key points from both futurist eschatology and inaugurated eschatology.¹⁴

Thus one of the possibilities of *Kingdom of God within you* in Luke is the Kingdom of God in the nowness, i.e., *within negative situation*

(unjust structure and poverty) that demands a manifestation of the values of freedom and justice. Considering inaugurated eschatology of the Kingdom and proposed world it offers, then the powerful words ‘in the midst of you’ transmit indirect propositions for an ‘identification’ of the values of freedom and justice that indirectly *judges* the existing dehumanization (as the given fact) and encourages moral commitments for a social transformation (as the possible). Thus we see the expression and identification of ‘within you’ with the idea of testimony in community and inaugurated eschatology.

In the framework of inaugurated eschatology, identification of the contemporary readers with text or textual assimilation and appropriation with ethical commitments could be seen in the movement of Liberation Theology (LT). Generally speaking theologies of liberation are good examples of how post-critical understanding is implemented by theologians and an effort of interpretation to provoke ‘the possible’ expressions of the Kingdom in the certain social context and contemporary readers. Cardinal Ratzinger asserts that, “The fundamental concept of the preaching of Jesus is the “*Kingdom of God*”. This concept is also at the center of the *liberation theologies*...”¹⁵ In the case of liberation theology as a hermeneutic discourse, the reference of world and the insistence on the dialog of biblical text, represented by church, and the world of the readers constitute determining factors that change theological orientation radically to a praxiology. “The first theological reflections that were to lead to liberation theology had their origins in a context of dialogue between a church and a society in ferment, between Christian faith and the longings for transformation and liberation arising from the people.”¹⁶

The basic idea of liberation theology is liberation from oppressive and unjust social structure by incorporating social analysis and biblical inspiration of liberation. Liberation theologians believe that the orthodox doctrine of God tends to manipulate God in favor of the capitalistic social structure. They claim that orthodoxy has been dependent upon ancient Greek notions of God that perceived God as a static being who is distant and remote from human history. These distorted notions of God’s transcendence and majesty have resulted in a theology which thinks of God as “up there” or “out there.” Consequently the majority of Latin Americans have become passive in the face of injustice and superstitious

in their religiosity.¹⁷

Liberation theology responds by stressing the incomprehensible mysteriousness of the reality of God. God cannot be summarized in objectifying language or known through a list of doctrines. God is found in the course of human history. God is not a perfect, immutable entity, “squatting outside the world.” He stands before us on the frontier of the historical future (Assmann). Suffering and pain become the motivating force for knowing God. At this point, the suffering and the Kingdom of God *within you* in Luke 17: 20-21 arrives at the idea of prophetic Presence for both the present and the future. And, the God of the future is the crucified God who submerges himself in a world of misery. God is found on the crosses of the oppressed rather than in beauty, power, or wisdom.¹⁸

From the perspective of mimesis theory, how the contemporary readers ‘identify’ themselves with the world of text demonstrates a followability of text. Manifestation of the Kingdom in liberation theology is a matter of followability of text. The followability of text in Luke 17:20-21 can be seen in a brief process: It is firstly as an inspiration of ‘in the midst of you’ as the world of text and incorporated with the world of the readers as an event of freedom and justice. Intersection between these worlds, in turn, becomes a new awareness of the context as well as an ethical foundation for constructing a liberating action. Then a serial of inspiration and action are theologically framed in that truth had been adequately lived and witnessed to in its proper place (in the faith of the Church).¹⁹

In one way or another, LT fundamentally integrates the notion of the Kingdom of God as the existential faith truth, i.e., as the testimony of freedom and justice in a Christian community (in the faith of the Church) as well as social movement. There were frequent meetings between Catholic theologians (Gustavo Gutiérrez, Segundo Galilea, Juan Luis Segundo, Lucio Gera, and others) and Protestant Emilio Castro, Julio de Santa Ana, Rubem Alves, José Míguez Bonino), leading to intensified reflection on the relationship between faith and poverty, the gospel and social justice, and the like. In Brazil, between 1959 and 1964, the Catholic left produced a series of basic texts on the need for a Christian ideal of history, linked to popular action, with a methodology that foreshadowed that of liberation theology; they urged personal engagement in the world, backed up by

studies of social and liberal sciences, and illustrated by the universal principles of Christianity.²⁰ In a certain manner, in *narrative dimension*, the acts of narrating of text of the Kingdom create new plots and characters that are existentially associated with the stories of sufferings and unjust social structures. Here, plot functions to mediate text and event, especially contemporary event as a continuation of story of the Kingdom.

Furthermore, the text (of the Kingdom) confronts the world of the readers with its new own direction; it transmits also a 'force' to be narrated to others. Therefore the 'world' is especially the life-world reflected by liberation theologians and the world of Christian communities in Latin America (and Asia). These implicate self-understanding as a result of 'sharing' of faith with others in a particular world, namely the world characterized by poverty and oppression that, in turn, influences their mode of interpreting concrete life-situation as a religious community. It is then becoming an expanded narration, i.e., the narration of the *Kingdom of God in the midst of human suffering and unjust social structure*. In the language of liberation theology, "God is the driving force of history causing the Christian to experience transcendence as a "permanent cultural revolution" (Gutierrez)."²¹

In turn, it is narrated as a communal event of liberation, an immanent experience. Thereby the acts of narrating are producing the surplus of meanings in new particular moment of time and concrete context: Latin America. The idea of 'in the midst of you' in the story of the Kingdom of God becomes symbolic catalyst as well as narrative voice that open and provoke a possibility of 'followability' or mimetic act among the readers so that they gradually create *their own narratives*. The contemporary readers, especially liberation theologians, put themselves as responding-self towards their own history and context.

Then, as a hermeneutic discourse, manifestation is a linguistic matter. However linguistic descriptions need to work together with historical-self of theologians and the Christians in Latin America. It means they open themselves for 'being created' by metaphor of the Kingdom when appropriation process of the text of Luke 17: 20-21 implemented in liberation theologies. Here mimetic process takes place when the readers locate 'the Kingdom within you' in their own situation and following the plot of story of the Kingdom as an identification process

of their own problem (poverty and political oppression) and solution (social movement). However *as a post-critical moment*, interpretation of the Kingdom of God is to “decenter the self and its aspirations, to strip us of desire for power, possession and honor, applies even to political and religious we enter because we believe the Gospel calls us”.²² From this interpretive key principle, the truth-content of the Kingdom is manifested as understanding beyond fixation as an existing program of social movement; in other words, it provokes ‘prophetic voice’ of liberation. Consequently, forceful words ‘in the midst if you’ would confront the present reality of oppressive structures in Latin America through a certain “social imagination”: it correlates the biblical inspiration of the Kingdom to a powerful social analyses in transforming certain social conditions.

Truth of the Kingdom as Truth *to be Lived* and a Matter of *Becoming True*

The testimony of freedom and justice brings about ‘existential’ truth of faith since the interpretation of Kingdom becomes a social episteme as well as it has broader implications for social and political reality.²³ Therefore truth values of the Kingdom of God are not a matter of epistemological equation between written messages and God’s will that result in a kind of a dogmatic truth. Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Peruvian priest and theologian, was the first to write literature specifically identifying the existential principles of liberation theology. His book, *A Theology of Liberation*, provided the basis for liberation theology by establishing the relationship between human emancipation (in social, political, and economic contexts) and the kingdom of God.²⁴ In the context of liberation theology, we can affirm that the truth values in the Kingdom of God are much closer to existential truth, i.e, truth which is *to be lived* as an existential engagement.

In Latin America, contemporary interpretation of the Kingdom of God is the result of the militancy of reading bible in confrontation with *Lebenswelt* that shapes the certain world-horizon to comprehend a negative social reality. Concretely it means bible is read from the perspective of the oppressed and persecuted in searching for truth.(Mat 5: 10)²⁵ Likewise the text of the Kingdom of Luke 17:20-21 is interpreted in the midst of historical struggle for a liberation spiritually and socially. In Ricoeur’s

theory of interpretation, such confrontation with life-world is known as 'interpretation as a mode of being'. As Tertulianus had shown in the third century about practical sense of the Kingdom, the challenge for churches today is not only to bring good news of Kingdom of God as anticipation to the situation 'life after life' or Heavenly Kingdom as other-worldliness. Regarding actualization 'in front of text', the beliefs that "Jesus' references to the Kingdom of God meant as a *present reality* rather than a future apocalypse.²⁶ Then the other-worldly or eschatological approaches are relativized."²⁷ As a hermeneutic issue, therefore, historical conditions of poverty and oppression are reference of interpretation leading to truth to be lived.

Supported by operating a transcendental logic as a mode of thought in the mind of the readers, the given situation – characterized by oppression and unjust structure-- is elevated towards a project of hope. The history of liberation in Latin America is actually a work of biblical interpretation 'the Kingdom is within/in the midst you' conceived as the coming Kingdom. Therefore, on the basis of that frame of reference, and considering the eventful character of text itself, existential truth values in the Kingdom of God – freedom and justice – are articulated as the model of transformative Kingdom. It means that the power of text 'the Kingdom is in the midst of you' is actualized and revitalized in the program of participation of faith. Whereas such participatory movement involves both critical (objective-social analysis) and post-critical level of understanding (imagination and linguistic creativity).

However the components of reference must be viewed in the frame of history as 'fiction'²⁸ in order to guide the contingency of meanings in contextual situatedness and the direction of historical powers for a transformation. In other words, hermeneutic analysis of truth values of the Kingdom is the case where objectivity and imagination, truth and hope have ontological correlation. Considering these factors, hermeneutic assertion wants to signify the truth of the Kingdom of God as also a matter of *becoming true* in textual interpretation, especially Luke 17:20-21. It has two directions:

The first, it would challenge people to face life by calling forth memories of everyday experiences, mainly the memories of suffering caused by structural poverty and political oppression, in the case of

liberation theology. In this regard, as hermeneutic discourse, we can see interpretation of making 'possible' from the perspective of existential 'participation' and 'originality'. Originality in hermeneutics refers to "an understanding that is specific and peculiar to a person in history that makes individuality shaped by certain space and time."²⁹ Considering *critical moment*, the movement of text of the Kingdom in Luke 17:20-36 may be proposing potentially an objective 'awareness' of describing surrounding social reality. It provides a contextual consciousness or the mode of engagement with text of the Kingdom and concrete life-world provoking the sense of justice and humanity:

"Starting in the 1960s, a great wind of renewal blew through the churches. They began to take their social mission seriously: lay persons committed themselves to work among the poor, charismatic bishops and priests encouraged the calls for progress and national modernization. Various church organizations promoted understanding of and improvements in the living conditions of the people: movements such as Young Christian Students, Young Christian Workers, Young Christian Agriculturalists, the Movement for Basic Education, groups that set up educational radio programs, and the first base ecclesial communities."³⁰

As a hermeneutic issue, it portrays the mode of *explanation* involving social analyses. As a result, we have sufficient knowledge and understanding about our situation *in the midst* of structural poverty, unjust structure and oppression.

In the context of liberation theology, the term 'participation' refers to similarity with the idea of originality. Participation constitutes an active mental disposition to shape 'consciousness of context' or *conscientia* of the reader or agents of transformation. As a result of deep participation in context, liberation theology challenges the rationalization of the status quo on several key points: (1) the inappropriateness of using God to justify the 'sacrifice' of the poor and downtrodden to a system based on their exploitation; (2) the need for a fundamental redefinition of God to expunge the need for victims as the basis of the socioeconomic system; (3) the need to understand that history is a process of conflict; (4) the necessity to 'desacralize' all violence.³¹ These portrays re-descriptive dimension of truth in the Kingdom as a 'present reality' or an advanced principles of transformative Kingdom for today.

Furthermore, *the second*, the 'originary' aspect is also needed in

interpretation to avoid fixation of truth in present reality. The originary aspect in hermeneutics could be seen as understanding that is “common to all successful interpretations, which attain to a grasp of trans-historical truth”.³² Reflection towards originality results in a trans-historical truth of the Kingdom; it is a principle of ‘transformative Kingdom’ that transcends the given situation of sufferings among the readers in the context of Latin America. Thus dialectic incorporation of *reference of life-world, conscientia* and transhistoricity give great energy for a ‘concrete possibility’ or possible realization as the manifestation of the Kingdom ‘in the midst of us’ both as a concrete event and hope. For Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, the revealed truth, as represented by the Kingdom, is not supposed to be *already* true. Rather it *becomes true* through the dynamical efforts of interpretation in a social movement as exposed by liberation theology.

Then in *post-critical moment*, the power of text becomes an actual ‘will’ to project ‘impossible demand’ as the impact of textual participation with the mode of detachment. As a result, detachment or distanciation with text provides a futuristic hope in that “our contemporary society could participate in the kingdom of God or implement Kingdom’s values as a ‘model’ to transform human life toward better order”.³³ Thus the truth of the Kingdom is justified by participating with the open values of the Kingdom of God *within you*. It could be, say, a transformative community as a means of liberation movement struggling for the values of freedom and justice as known in liberation theologies.

Truth *in* the Kingdom of God is *justified* because the Kingdom is not the matter of final answer; it is the works of interpretation and revitalized as a transformative power that elevates negative situation into possible solutions, as found in the theories and praxis of liberation theology. As known, in post-critical moment, the function of imagination is “transcendentally to give us a world in which certain fulfillments of our being are possible”.³⁴ Interpretation in the post-critical moment is therefore to make the aspects of ‘impossible demand’ becomes a certain and particular ‘possible demand’ for humanity which, in part, is the work of imaginative power.

By considering the components of reference, textual participation, originality and originary, interpretation of the Kingdom of God results in an open existential truth, i.e., *inexhaustible truth of actualizing human kingdom*.

the kingdom of justice and freedom manifested as the fundamental values of liberation theologies as a social movement. Thus it is in the post-critical moment and trans-historical truth, the Kingdom presents a power for a fruitful imagination of articulating 'the Kingdom in the midst of us' in order to *becoming true*. In such a way, existential truth of the Kingdom is truth to be lived not as finality but the possibility.

As hermeneutic discourse, the ideas of 'situationality' is crucial for self-realization of context in liberation theologies. It functions as 'question' where the contemporary readers are placed in every point of context, a deep engagement with question: questions of structural poverty and political oppression. Whereas 'question' in Ricoeur's hermeneutics is the mode of thought that brings us closer to 'truth', i.e., to find out situational sources for the answer.³⁵ Therefore the different *mediations* of truth or tools for understanding) are integrated in liberation theology such as social science, philosophy and theological reflection in the strict sense.³⁶ These provide the interpretive tools for bringing us to possible *sources* for re-actualizing of the Kingdom as becoming truth rather than the search for Kingdom as the final truth. In other words, such tools are used to bridge hermeneutically the situationality (as an ontological question) and as an openness of our being as (the possible answer).

Towards the Kingdom of God as a Vision

What prominent in post-critical moment is that a 'program' of the Kingdom must be placed under the project of hope; this is very recommended and demanded in post-critical level. In hermeneutic principle, the revealed truth must be interpreted as both ontological and eschatological. In the case of the Kingdom of God as revealed truth, post-critical interpretation provokes the surplus of meaning of text of the Kingdom. As known, it is a catalyst for new possibilities in remaking reality in a social order as a self-manifestation of *desire to be*. However it must be placed in correlation to the role of hope projected by frame of Resurrection as fundamental principle of biblical hermeneutics, as Ricoeur puts it.³⁷

Theologically speaking, liberation theologians recognize the irreducible principle of revealed truth. Social transformation in liberation theology, "is not a subject to our control but comes as a gift. As a gift,

it presedes our effort and elevated to the level of hope.³⁸ In the level of subjectivity, the hearers and the readers exercise the process of transcendental logics that interprets the Kingdom not as linear socio-political project in human history but as the unfinished and as the coming Kingdom: the Kingdom as a vision. Thus the text of the Kingdom of God interprets and defines the texts of liberation theology both as *an* existential project of faith and as a vision. As a vision, the transcendental character of Kingdom of God represents a broader spiritual frame of ultimate hope, a utopia where liberation theologians are enabled to place human struggle and social engineering within the frame of eschatological ends. Here theologically speaking, the symbol of the Kingdom conveys its distinctive primary function as a visionary horizon where “eschatology is realized by human being acting in accord with divine ends”.³⁹

It is in post-critical interpretation, the sense ‘impossible demand’ makes the program of Kingdom has no final certainty and always subverts the subjective consciousness of theologians of liberation and audience in order to be re-defined and re-formatted. For Ricoeur’s hermeneutics, these challenge the human efforts to achieve an innovation of meaning awaiting for us. These characterize and demonstrate that the search for revealed truth is a wager, as the ‘not yet’. In this sense, the textual appropriation of Luke 17: 20-21 in liberation theology functions as inspiring power for ‘movement’. “In the midst of you” gives imagination for inexhaustible and dynamic presence of the Spirit; it gives human ability to create discovery of meaning so that the movement of liberation would be endless project of faith and open for fresh ideas in a social transformation.

We need to elaborate the Kingdom as a vision deeply where vision can be considered as a *crystallization of hope*. About the term ‘vision’, Fuellenbach, the theologian of the Kingdom of God, acknowledges that “We need a vision of the world and of human society that transcends our present solutions and propels our imagination to new and broader horizons than we are accustomed to.”⁴⁰ In this sense, if we puts ‘in the midst of us’ as a historical axis of liberation, then it is a vision when it is correlated to the Kingdom as a ‘hope’. Here ‘vision’ functions as a meta-critical understanding that destabilizes existing awareness and brings it to a futuristic horizon or eschatological openness.

As a hermeneutic discourse, the post-critical interpretation puts

textual appropriation of the Kingdom as freedom to envision a social transformation and exercise the program of liberation in the mode of 'becoming': The Kingdom is in the midst of you, not only here and now but in the future.

In the level of post-critical analysis, such vision, anyway, could not also be divorced with the power of language in biblical interpretation, namely the capacity of language to *re-describe reality* as a movement or action in contemporary context. However its re-descriptive power leads also the temporal orientation of our being to futurity.⁴¹ In the process of re-creation by language, "we discover reality itself in the process of being created"⁴². From this description, Jesus' words in Luke 17: 20-21 implies dimensions of unobservable power that, in connection to the greater frame of Resurrection, provides eschatological imperatives (of the Kingdom) for creating the constellation of reality which is called "liberation theology". It becomes a visionary power to re-describe certain social reality towards a new situation through social methods and transformative strategy.

The Kingdom of God itself provides the power of vision (as the Presence of freedom and justice) in order to transform reality, especially reality of poverty and oppression, in the context of Latin America. In the process of interpretation, the agents or interpreters, theologians and Christian community are mutually *being created by such vision*. It is the indirect power of linguistics to provoke propositions of the Kingdom of God not only an event or 'movement' but also a historical 'vision'. But, how does it work?

First, The essential relationship between prophetic 'words' and a 'movement' and 'transformation' are crucial issue in Liberation theologies. In hermeneutic principle, such relationship is possible only by breaking the rule connecting *words* to *world* in a strict propositional formula and change the rule through imaginative capacity of language to propose productive 'words' and propositions about social reality we are facing: unjust structure and poverty in Latin America that provoke the idea 'liberation'. It is known as a 'becoming in language' where imagination would invite interpretation beyond linguistic formulation itself. Thus as a hermeneutic discourse, a *vision* in the sense of the power 'being created' is conceived, as Ricoeur puts it, in terms of *beyond interpretation itself*. Thus the Kingdom of God as a linguistic discourse enables it to penetrate any

program of action by a visionary meaning. In visionary meaning, the human action itself must be understood as 'open work' that is always open for the fresher interpretation:

“...the meaning of human action is also something which addressed to an indefinite range of possible ‘reader’. The judges are not contemporaries, but, as Hegel said, history itself. That means that, like a text, human action is an open work, the meaning of which is ‘in suspense’. It is because it ‘opens up’ new references and receives fresh relevance from them, that human deeds are also waiting for fresh interpretations which decide their meaning”.⁴³

As a result, the open character of vision and human action meet together in the movement of liberation theology. Then the force of Jesus’ words in the text of the Kingdom are not *descriptive language* in mind anymore but, instead, we are ‘created’ by the words of Jesus so that ‘becoming in language’ provokes ‘indirect propositions’, a vision, for provoking a more open possibility of action as well as a futuristic orientation.

Second, the power of language needs in the analysis of post critical understanding is to be emphasized because it is qualitatively equated with *prophetic words* in Christian tradition which is usually vibrated to criticize and judge negative situation and establishment of society in order to ‘transcend’ it into a new awareness, possibility and situation in the future. Then we cannot place the power of words, i.e., ‘the force of what is said’ in the gospel Luk 17: 20-21, as described in a critical moment, without referring the relationship between biblical words with tradition of prophecy which fundamentally provokes openness *toward futurity*. According to Brueggemann, “The prophet’s task is to keep alive the ministry of imagination, to keep on proposing alternative solutions and futures not yet conceived”.⁴⁴ In this sense, this symbol of the Kingdom as a vision has ability to *inspire the next*; it provides a prophetic voice for any liberation theology or any religio-social movements, especially in dealing with human sufferings and injustice.

Inspiring moment of vision reveals the surplus of meaning, an inexhaustability of the truth of the Kingdom in human history that challenges to be realized, interpreted and explicated. The surplus of meaning of the Kingdom of God lies on an open-ended project because ‘in the midst of us’ as a prophetic power, presence and event leading to a vision. As a vision, the Kingdom of God constitutes a vital and abundant

source of ‘imagination’, and, as a linguistic matter, it is presented through creative expression of *words*. In the post-critical moment of interpretation, both imagination and the power of words work together for programming “the possible”, namely: (1) to transcend existing social reality: and (2) to re-describe reality toward beyond ownmost possibility: new earth and heaven as reality *in the world that is always moving forward*. Therefore the surplus of meaning of the Kingdom of God lies on an open-ended project because ‘in the midst of us’ as a prophetic power, presence and event. Then this idea counters the critics that the adoption of Marxist in liberation theology has resulted in a misleading eschatology: classless society.⁴⁵

Considering inexhaustability of the truth of the Kingdom and new earth and heaven as reality *in the world that is always moving forward*, then we have a visionary and projective discourse of the Kingdom of God for future or a process of ‘becoming’ in terms of constructing humanistic values. In the perspective of Islam, in one way or another, the Kingdom of God could be compared or similar to the idealistic frame of Islam as mercy for the universe (*rahmatan li al-‘alamin*). In Indonesia translation, *surat Aal-Anbiya* (21) 107 affirms a universal message: “Dan kami mengutus engkau (Muhammad) melainkan untuk (menjadi) rahmat bagi seluruh alam.⁴⁶ In English version: “We did not send you except as mercy to mankind”.⁴⁷ As a result, the presence of Islam in this world becomes a dynamical blessing for all creation. In simple formulation, it reflects a humanistic ‘situation’, a kingdom of humanity where the values of divine blessing ‘reign’ or ‘preside over’ humankind and universe.

The term ‘mercy’ or ‘blessing’ for universe can be described at least in 3 meanings: *The first*, it means the prophet Mohammed himself is *rahmat* through which the universe is entirely blessed. The word *al-‘alamin* means *alam*, namely all creatures including animals and plants. They accept *rahmat* or blessing through the presence of the prophet Mohammed.⁴⁸ *The second*, it means *manhaj* or teaching. It is a teachings brought by the prophet Mohammed to bring humankind towards an authentic happiness. It also a response to the human sufferings and guides us to essential bliss.

The second, it is a perfection, a process to complete human need in terms of their task as a ‘khalifah’ in this world. Islam as blessing is to maximize and complete human need in order to be more perfect; ‘blessing’, in its fundamental meaning, does not limit human potentials.

The third, mercy or blessing means the way of goodness. It could be teachings consisting of the ways to achieve the better life, in this world and hereafter.⁴⁹

In its implementation, however, all these values must be expressed in its essential interconnection to 'syariah'. *Shari'a* is often conceived in a narrow understanding as law containing rules and regulations. Here *Syariah* constitutes a cultural context of the theological principle of *rahmatan li al-'alamin*.⁵⁰ Whereas culture itself can be defined as a system of life: "Manifestation of culture as a complex of beliefs, ideas, values, and rules (system of knowledge); Manifestation of culture as a complex of human patterned behavior in a society (system of social)".⁵¹ The core value 'rahmat' or mercy penetrates the universe, the universe of nature and human culture. In a complementary formulation, *Shari'a* penetrated by 'rahmat', in turn, could be *Shari'a min al-Amr*: A Good Way of Life. The *shari'a* as a cultural framework for Islam as *rahmatan lil 'alamin* in the Qur'an *sura al-Jatsiyah* 45 verse 18 is formulated in the concept *shari'a min al-amr*.⁵² *Sabria*, consequently, is a pragmatic-cultural framework to bring about a 'good life' because it is lived by 'rahmat', the universal mercy, coming from the Divine.

For a long time, *shari'a* has been reduced as a 'law' or 'regulation'. Culturally speaking, the acceptance of *syari'a* as the frame of Islamic culture animated by *Rahmatan lil'Alamin* reaffirms the position of Islam as a universal religion, a religion beyond space and time. It reaffirms Islam as religion grasping universal humanism, namely as the way of goodness. However, the good life cannot be manifested without good culture. At this point, humanistic values in Islam meet human culture in general as a values system, a kingdom of humanity. Therefore the way we live involves good culture. In *al-Jatsiyah*, 45: 18 it is called *syari'ah min al-amr*, the way of life. In this regard, the active presence of the Kingdom of God reflects a cultural project to revitalize its humanitarian value.

In the context and perspective of Indonesia, take for instance, an attempt to comprehend the term *the Kingdom of God is within you* could be correlated to strengthen family-ness and volunteerism principle which construct humanity of Indonesian. This becomes the 'possible' testimony and discourse for Indonesia today and future if the Kingdom is conceived as the spirit to defend and develop humanity.

As a hermeneutical discourse, put in the context of contemporary and future Indonesia, the manifestation of the values of the provocation “the Kingdom of God is within you” might refer to a certain vision of Indonesian-ness and represent a part of the ideal values of national ideology: *Pancasila*. Considering the primacy of language in hermeneutics, Ricoeur stresses revelatory in a testimony which means modalities of discourse that are most originary within the language of a community of faith. Thus interpreting Bible would be parallel to the *recovery of the revelatory power of testimony*; it means the emphasis of interpretation will be on “the force of what is said” in text of the Kingdom of God. The phrase ‘within you’ emphasizes a “truth”: “...truth which has shown itself does not reach us but by a series of witnesses and testimonies”.⁵³ It is a ‘testimony of force’ that *Allah* takes our side. He defends us, human being. Clearly, that He defends for human and humanity is a testimony that will be shown in our contemporary Indonesia. If the Kingdom of God is considered to be an inspirational source for humanity, hence it can assist the establishment of the ideal Indonesian values which based on family-ness and volunteerism. In this sense, it is a testimony of kingdom of humanity, since it pays greater respect to human dignity.

To explicate further, the basic principle of family-ness is to live together in a mutual and egalitarian manner; it means, we respect other because we consider ‘other’ as part of ‘our family’. This spirit becomes a blue print and ideal characteristics of Indonesian-ness, indeed, it is the heart of Indonesian society deriving from traditional spirit and values. Therefore, if the development of democracy in Indonesia is doubted for its effectiveness in ordering and contenting its people, actually it is because democracy has lose its cultural and humanistic root: the aforementioned principle of family-ness.

As an illustration to this case, several bylaws that based on exclusivity of certain religious claim has been passed while neglecting humanistic aspect of the other; it is, for sure, killing the godly spirit of our civilization. Another interesting example, financial organization and international corporation were allowed to intervene the legislation by sacrificing “just and civilized humanity” as idealized on second principle of *Pancasila*. Yudi Latif, a political observer, commented:

“... nepotism, tribalism, the politic of nativism during local election have unleashed the unity of the nation. So is the politicians who corrupt people’s money from aspiration fund that they promote while [their act] is neglecting the rights of people and forgetting the spirit of volunteerism which is based on the inner wisdom.”⁵⁴

That is why, the principle of family-ness becomes a crucial project for the future Indonesia. The manifestation of the Kingdom of God as a social values can be applied on the idea of ‘family-ness’. If we put emphasis on ‘presence’, which is ‘all around us’, hence Kingdom of God has been presence in principle values that we already hold: the principle of family-ness and volunteerism. As a hermeneutical issue, it should be a *das Sollen* but also become the social energy for a gradual social transformation. Put in a wider context, the further goal is to pursue what has been aspired from Indonesian independence, namely, to establish a just and prosper society... In order to reach this idealistic goal, a harmonious society is highly required. To respect and protect the nobleness of human dignity as the creation of God is possible if people live in a harmonious and peaceful way. Therefore, Indonesia as a social community has to be established in a firm humanistic foundation, in this case, the kingdom of humanity.

Since June 1st 1945, the founding fathers of Indonesia has formulated a collective ideology for Indonesian society. It becomes our worldview that helps us to reach the goal of independence. This worldview is called *Pancasila*. Thus, Pancasila is the crystallization of some basic values that constitutes Indonesian society. The important thing to be noted is, this society should have a humanistic values. However, the values as proposed by the saying: “the Kingdom of God is within you” might help to establish a society that pays greater concern to human dignity. This is to say that the the core values of the Kingdom of God is identical to principle of family-ness.

The necessity to establish more humanistic society as intended in the Kingdom of God has a strong philosophical foundation. The formulation of Pancasila as ethical foundation to Indonesian society originates from the belief that human dignity can be respected only by respecting each other in a ‘family-ness’ atmosphere. Even formally, those values are articulated in a economical system; kindly note that we already acknowledge an economical system which based on family-ness and volunteerism principle. It is widely known as Pancasila economical system.

“Pancasila economical system is an economical system which using Pancasila as its ideological foundation and family-ness and volunteerism as its basic principle. This economical system is quite different from those hold by any other countries in the west. Pancasila-based economical system based on the principle of mutualism and family-ness, while, on the contrary, western economical system based on the principle of liberalism and individualism.”²⁵⁵

To sum up, the principle of collective living on Pancasila reflect the belief that respecting humanity is the main core of Indonesian humanity as far as it can be formulated in the principle of family-ness, which is also the main core of the Kingdom of God. Taking this perspective, the importance of the idea of respecting plurality in religious aspect becomes more clearer because we all live in a society which is so harmonious and peaceful. This is exactly what Soekarno formulated as family-ness (the first principle).

In this case, the revealed truth of the Kingdom must be recognized as a multiple ‘disclosure’: beyond epistemology to ontology, and then beyond ontology to eschatology: a vision. In the context of Indonesianess, such vision of the Kingdom of God can be partly articulated in living humanitarian values: *kekeluargaan and gotong royong* or family-ness and voluntarism. It represents the efforts of how faith truth, the truth of the Kingdom, *becomes* true in the context of contemporary Indonesia.

Concluding Remarks

The component of impossible demand in biblical hermeneutics of the Kingdom of God affirms a certain faith truth: a visionary or the projective aspect of faith. Post-critical moment is the imaginative level that correlates a pragmatic ‘program’ of the Kingdom to the project of hope or the frame of Resurrection. Consequently, as a part of existential project, the Kingdom of God in Luke 17: 20-36 challenges the given situation and subverts our contemporary consciousness about ‘something beyond’, the coming Kingdom. Here the hermeneutic components and *desire to be* and hope meet to project the power of ‘in the midst of you’ as a vision. As a vision, the transcendental characters of Kingdom of God is gradually revealed and represent a broader frame of ultimate hope, a utopia where liberation theologians are enabled to place human struggle and social transformation or any social engineering within the frame of

eschatological ends.

As a matter of linguistics, i.e., in order to be a 'becoming in language', the agents or interpreters, theologians and Christian community are mutually creating and *being created by such vision*. It means that the indirect power of linguistics works among the interpreters to provoke propositions of the Kingdom of God not only as political event or social 'movement', but also a historical 'vision'. It means that in the level of a vision, hermeneutic process tries to expose the inexhaustible truth of the Kingdom. Thus an understanding of the truth of the Kingdom operates between an *identification* with the liberating spirit of Kingdom as well as a *disclosure*: an interpretive force to remake reality creatively, not only dedicated for the sake of existing situation or practical needs. In this case, the revealed truth of the Kingdom must be recognized as a multilayered 'disclosure': beyond epistemology to ontology, and then beyond ontology to eschatology: a vision.

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Endnotes:

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