INTRODUCTION
The expression 'Kingdom of God' (βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ, Basileia tou Theou) occurs 67 times in the New Testament, 52 of which appear in the Gospels. Including its synonym 'Kingdom of Heaven' that number increases to 101 throughout the New Testament, and this is without mentioning variants such as 'Kingdom', 'Thy Kingdom', 'Kingdom of the Father', 'the Gospel of the Kingdom', 'the Kingdom' and 'the Kingdom of Christ'.

To understand its importance we must remember that John the Baptist announced to his countrymen that 'the kingdom of heaven has come near' (Matthew 3:2), and he challenged the people to convert and change their lives, to reverse the pursuit of materialism and demonstrate solidarity with the poor and destitute of the society of his time: "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same" (Luke 3:11).

Jesus also begins his ministry by inviting his listeners to repent because 'the kingdom of God has come near' (Mark 1:15). In fact, Jesus begins and ends his ministry talking about the Kingdom of God. What does the expression Kingdom of God mean? How has this concept evolved throughout history? Is the Kingdom of God something present or only for the future? If, as Christians, we are all citizens of the Kingdom, which values are we called to embrace?

THE MEANING OF GOD'S KINGDOM
The concept of the Kingdom of God was familiar to the listeners of Jesus. Thus, this announcement was nothing new. In fact, it carried various concepts:

- The invisible and eternal reign of God
- The values under which a person or a group undertook to live in daily life
- The eschatological Kingdom of God at the end of history.

The concept of Malkut (מלכות, kingdom), has had a long history in Israel. Its counterpart in Greek is Basileia (βασιλεία). These terms have two basic meanings: one is abstract and
the other is concrete. The first refers to a 'kingdom' or the beginning of a 'reign' or the 'heavenly government of God as King.' In a specific sense, it is the territory on which a reign is exercised. In biblical terms, 'Kingdom of God' is the establishment of the values and the will of God, which prevailed before the chaos, disorder and disharmony. Thus, where the 'Kingdom' comes, its effects can be perceived.

To the apostle Paul, reign means 'righteousness, peace and joy' (Romans 14:17) and this can be observed in everyday life on earth, both in a person and in a community. Yet today, this is one of the most controversial concepts of Christian theology. On the other hand, Jesus not only proclaimed the Kingdom (Luke 9:11; Acts 1:3), but he also instructed his disciples to do the same (Matthew 10:7, 24:14; Luke 9:2, 60).

DIFFERENT SENSES OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN HISTORY
Throughout history the concept of the Kingdom of God has been used both to defend the status quo and to inspire revolutionary ideals, such as Montanism, a heretical movement founded by the prophet Montanus in the Christian church in Phrygia, Asia Minor, in the second century. Origen, in the third century, stated that Jesus was the Kingdom. Over the centuries, the Kingdom of God has been described as:

- The Church itself
- The proper relationship with God
- The social order transformed
- Apocalyptic intervention from God
- The Kingdom of Christ
- God’s sovereignty.

The movement of the 'Social Gospel' – in the late 19th and early 20th centuries – led by Walter Rauschenbusch, emphasised social transformation and the redemption of society. Thus, the Kingdom of God was not something abstract, distant and beyond life, but concrete and plausible: it would be a Kingdom of righteousness on earth.

THE TENSION BETWEEN 'ALREADY' AND 'NOT YET' AND ITS MEANING FOR TODAY
It is true that in Jesus the Kingdom 'has come' and, since then, is present in history. Moreover, it is also true to say, it has 'not yet' come in its entirety. These two aspects – 'already' and 'not yet' – point to the possibility of seeing in history the signs of joy and justice which, one day, will be seen in their entirety. Though in this age the presence of the Kingdom is barely noticeable, modest and mysterious (Mark 4:11). It breaks out gradually and solidly, both in personal and social life.
This dynamic tension between ‘already’ and ‘not yet’ points to the fact that the presence of the Kingdom requires our participation and involvement, embracing the vocation of being ‘salt of the earth’ and ‘light of the world’ (Matthew 5:13-14), making ourselves signs of this Kingdom and giving hope to those who suffer. It also requires us to work to free individuals and groups from evil powers which oppress them, obscure their identities and prevent them fully developing their God-given potential.

VALUES THAT WE ARE CALLED TO PROMOTE
Even though we cannot bring about the Kingdom of God and its final manifestation, because it is the work of God, we are commanded to pray, as citizens of that Kingdom, ‘your kingdom come’ (Matthew 6:10). We are also encouraged to proclaim and defend the values that ensure life, and to participate in actions that promote peace and combat dehumanisation and death. In doing so, we work so that, in this age, the signs of the Kingdom may be multiplied and increasingly visible. Therefore, we pledge to affirm – among others – the following values:

1. **Proclamation of the gospel**, which is the good news of Jesus Christ that reaches and transforms individuals and communities, challenges world views and demonstrates the Lordship of Christ in every aspect of existence. This proclamation goes beyond verbal preaching of the gospel – ‘Preach the gospel and, if necessary, use words,’ said Francis of Assisi – because it seeks for the values of the Kingdom to exert influence on everyday life and awaken in people regret, cooperation and a spirit of inclusiveness, solidarity, tolerance and acceptance towards those outside the Church.

2. **Participation in actions of public concern**. Such concrete actions go beyond religious boundaries and the individual dimension. They include helping those in need, providing emergency relief, fighting against corruption, volunteering, caring for the destitute, providing food and clothing, as well as all kind of services to alleviate the suffering of humanity.

3. **Showing compassion for the poor**, the disenfranchised and those who live on the margins of society. I read that the character of someone is not measured so much by wisdom, or even by religious commitments, but by their willingness to help the poor and the needy. The Samaritan who saved his neighbour is closer to the Kingdom of God than the priest who passed by (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus felt compassion for the poor and acted for their benefit. He worked to empower them and made them protagonists of the Kingdom of God.

IN CONCLUSION
The expression ‘Kingdom of God’ is central in the Gospels and throughout the New Testament. Even having acquired different meanings throughout history and maintained
tension between the ‘already’ and ‘not yet’, we are still called to pray ‘your kingdom come’ and to ‘seek first his kingdom and his righteousness’ (Matthew 6:33). In fact, this expression is the key to understanding the teachings of Jesus, because when analysing more deeply the concept of the Kingdom of God, it is possible to conclude that Jesus is both the Kingdom itself in human form and the way to the Kingdom of the Father. Thus, it can be said that the Kingdom is not only a theological phrase, but a name with a face. It is a person who announces that Kingdom, puts sandals on and walks to live the values which we, his followers, are called to stand for, and to defend and promote daily.

FOR REFLECTION

➢ What are the implications of assuming a spirit of inclusiveness and tolerance in our daily life?
➢ Why, in some places, are Salvationists afraid of getting involved in matters and actions of public concern?
➢ In the light of the concept of the Kingdom of God, how do we interpret James 1:27? (Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.)

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