

THE ESCHATOLOGICAL NOW

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Introduction

Eschatology, by dictionary definition, is the science of last things, the logos of the "End". Modern theology, and modern Biblical criticism have rediscovered the centrality of Eschatology for the Christian Faith. Eschatology can no longer be treated as an after-thought. The New Testament meaning of salvation cannot be studied without studying New Testament Eschatology. The Title of this paper The Eschatological Now, is a phrase that, for all its paradoxical sound, may well serve as a summation of the distinctive quality of Christian eschatology.

It is not simply that eschatological references are ubiquitous in the New Testament, but further, that the event Jesus Christ, his ministry, passion, death, resurrection, and exaltation, is throughout, understood in an eschatological setting. We misinterpret the New Testament view of the ministry of Jesus, even as we misinterpret many of the "Kingdom" parables, if we take it out of its eschatological setting. In the New Testament the Church is viewed as the eschatological community. Indeed the gospel proclaimed in the New Testament is distorted if the eschatological quality of it is ignored.

Exegesis

The Early Kerygma and confessions

The critical attempt to recover the primitive Kerygma by analyzing the Pauline writings for his professions of the Gospel delivered to him, and the sermons in Acts, some of which betray an Aramaic background and therefore likely belong to an old oral or written tradition, reveals a

(1) 1 Cor. 15: 1ff
Ro 1: 1-4

(2) The most likely is
Acts 10: 34ff

proclamation of the death and resurrection of Christ in an eschatological setting. The Christ event is a fulfillment of prophecy, he is God's decisive act in salvation History. He is exalted to the right hand of God, and will come again as final judge. The summing up of Jesus' preaching in Mark 1:14-15 is characteristic also.

"Jesus came into Galilee preaching, the gospel of God, and saying 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.'"

(1)

The attempt to recover the earliest confessions and liturgical elements in the tradition reveals a proclamation affirming the lordship of Christ. He is proclaimed as reigning in the present, and in the eschatological setting this implies a tension between his reign and his manifest victory over all things. This confession that Jesus is Lord also links Christ with Israel's history and the act of creation. He is the decisive event in Salvation History.

Q, the Non Markan Tradition Common to Matthew & Luke

The tradition, common to Matthew and Luke which these do not receive from Mark is commonly called "Q". By accepting the order of the material as it appears in Luke a good case can be made for the fact that "Q" was an actual document. Even if many borderline questions remain unsettled, the resulting reconstruction in a work such as Manson's The Sayings of Jesus, presents us with what is possibly an early record of the ministry of Jesus. It is an eschatological document. It begins in Luke 3:7-9 with the eschatological preaching of John the Baptist, and closes in 17:22-37 with an eschatological poem about the Son of Man. The reason for dealing here with the hypothetical "Q" document is that it may be a very early indication that the interest in the ministry of Jesus (as well as his death and resurrection) was from the start an eschatological interest, and not one that arose after some eschatological disappointment.

(1) 1Cor:12:3, 1Jno 2:22, 1Jno 4:15, Heb 4:14, Phil 2:6f, 1Cor 8:6

In Luke 7:18-35 we have Jesus' reply to John the Baptist's question as to whether he was the expected one.

"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have the gospel preached to them.... I tell you, among those born of women none is greater than John; yet he who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than He.

In Luke 11:20, in the midst of the controversy over whether Jesus casts out demons in the power of Beelzebub or not Jesus says--

"But if it is by the finger of God I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you."

The evil one has been overcome and bound. The kingdom is indeed come for the signs of its presence are at hand.

In Luke 11:31-32 reference is made to how the Queen of the South and the men of Nineveh will rise up and judge the present generation, for the one came from the ends of the earth to partake of the wisdom of Solomon and the other repented at the preaching of Jona, and one greater than Solomon and Jona is here. The preaching of Jesus passes a decisive judgment on the present.

(1) Manson summarized the rest of "Q" in this fashion. 1. The present is a time of Crisis in view of the approaching end, for the disciples of Jesus, for Israel; 2. The peril of neglect and refusal of the decisive message; 3. The demands of discipleship in view of the end; 4. The final consummation. Some of the more significant passages need special attention.

Luke 12:35-38 urges watchfulness as men who are waiting for a master to return from a marriage feast. Blessed are the servants whom the master finds awake. Verses 39,40 warn of the unexpectedness

(1) Manson, T.W. The Sayings of Jesus, SCM Press, London, 1957
His reconstruction (bracketed verses are doubtful):-
Chapter 12: (35-38) 39,46, (47-50) 51-59. Ch 13:18-30,34,35.
Ch 14: 15-24, 26, 27 (34-35) Ch 16: 13, 16-18. Ch 17: 1-6,22-37.

of the coming of the Son of Man, echoing Daniel 7. This "Coming of the Son of Man" is a concept referring to the full manifestation of the kingdom of God in Power, the vindication of the righteous. Verses 41,46 make reference to the absent Lord again but here the watchfulness required is more than a waiting for promises to be fulfilled as in 37 but rather a faithful stewardship of the tasks given.

In verses 49-59 Jesus refers to his crucifixion as a decisive act kindling fire on the earth and dividing households, that is, precipitating judgment and decision. Verses 54-56 contain a lament that the present generation is so busy looking for a sign that will fix a date for the end, that it does not recognize the crisis of the present time. In 57-59 the parable urging that the quarrel be settled on the way to the magistrate is put plainly in an eschatological setting rather than the moral setting it is given in the other tradition. Repent while there is yet time!

In 13: 18-21 the parables of the mustard seed and the leaven are given an eschatological setting. It is not simply that small beginnings have large ends, but that a process has been started which must go on, even in secret. The kingdom of God is God's work. The end awaited is a manifest corroborating of a present fact.

Luke 14:15-24 is the "Q" parallel of the parable of the great feast. This is one of the many New Testament references to the crisis of decision that the event of Christ brings. God will not drag people into the kingdom. Those do not enter who do not wish to.

In Luke 16:16 it is clearly stated that the new age has begun with the preaching of the gospel. Manson translates the troublesome verse(1)

"The law and the prophets were until John, since then the gospel of the kingdom of God is preached and men of violence snatch at it."

(1) page 134 Ibid

In 17:22-25 we have a recurring New Testament theme. If looking for a sign means trying to fix the date of the last day, then the disciples are to have none of it. The coming of the Son of Man is to be expected momentarily. Verse 25 is a corrective of contemporary apocalyptic views of the Son of Man as a mighty military deliverer.

Verses 26-30 are an eschatological poem. It contrasts with the current apocalyptic tradition (some of it in the New Testament) that emphasizes unusual natural portents of the end. Here it is indicated that things will be going on as usual.

The closing sayings 31-37 emphasize again that the Kingdom of the Son of Man is always impending. Although there appears to be a recommendation to flee in the references to Lot's wife (verse 31,32), the reference in verse 33 is clear. Whoever seeks to gain his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life shall preserve it. Christian eschatology is the proclamation that it is the Crucified one who is lord. This is the nature of God's sovereignty.

The enigmatic reference in verse 37 to Vultures, which the RSV with good grounds translates Eagles, is probably a reference to the bird's swiftness of arrival. If this is so, the meaning here is another reminder that it is futile to seek to know the date or the place of the Son of Man's return.

Mark and the "Little Apocalypse"

There are many eschatological references in Mark's gospel. We have already mentioned the summary of the preaching of Jesus (L: 14-15) which sets the whole work in an eschatological setting. The parable of the seed growing by itself (4:26-29) which is unique with this evangelist, is plainly eschatological. In 8:11-12 the warning is given again against a generation which keeps looking for a sign. In his reply to the Sadducees regarding the resurrection (12:24-27) Jesus points out that in the heavenly

kingdom people do not marry but live like angels. It is characteristic of New Testament eschatology that it does not have the usual apocalyptic concern for describing the details of the heavenly state.

However the most significant passage in the tradition is chapter 13 and there follows a more detailed analysis of it.

The critical problem here is twofold: 1. The unity of the Chapter, 2. The relation to the Lukan parallel in Chapter 21:5-36. It is hard to see how this chapter could have been a single discourse. The material is disconnected and in places even appears conflicting.

Verses 1 and 2 foretell the destruction of the temple. This is in line with the preaching of the canonical prophets. Verses 3-9 have the disciples asking for an indication of when the last things are about to be accomplished, and Jesus replying that there will be many false predictions and political upheavals and natural portents, precede the beginning of the end. This appears to be in conflict with the many warnings against seeking a sign which will fix the date of the end. It also is in conflict with the repeated suggestions that the Return of the Son of Man will take place while things are going on as usual.

Verses 9-13 are an interruption in which Jesus speaks of the coming persecutions of, and divisions within, the church.

In verses 14-23 we come upon the first serious departure from the Lukan parallel (Luk 21: 20-24) Mark's version refers to the abomination of desolation which may reflect the attempt of Caligula to set up his image in the temple. Luke's version, which is in poetic form and shows signs of being a translation of an Aramaic original, is probably the earlier tradition and refers to the Destruction of Jerusalem.

Verse 21 and 22 warn against the advent of False Christs and false prophets and has no parallel in Luke.

Verses 24-27 return to a consideration of the unusual natural

portents that will herald the Son of Man's coming. Christian eschatology, like the contemporary apocalyptic writings, does view the consummation as an end of the world. The Lucan parallel differs here again by adding verse 28, a message of hope.

Verses 28-29 contain the parable of the fig tree. The understanding person can always see signs that the Son of Man is nigh, even at the doors.

Verse 30, which predicts that this generation shall not pass away until these things shall be accomplished may refer to the fall of Jerusalem, the persecution of the church, or the coming of the Son of Man in power and glory as in Mark 9: 1. However this problem is settled, the question remains whether the coming of the kingdom of God in Power necessarily always refers to the consummation, and therefore whether Jesus did or did not predict the final consummation to come within a generation. Verse 31 could very well be the words of Jesus referring to his whole preaching ministry, rather than to this set of predictions alone.

Verse 32 states a persistent New Testament theme that no man knows the time or the hour, even the angels and the son don't know. It is futile and irresponsible to attempt to fix the date. This tradition forces us to consider the suggestion that where Christian Eschatology does concern itself with signs its concern is not with date fixing but with the reassurance that the coming of the Kingdom with power is always impending.

Matthew here adds "Q" material which Luke uses in its original order and which insists upon the unannounced nature of the Lord's return. The lesson of all this is drawn in Mark 13:33-37.: be constantly watchful, for the Lord will return when you know not.

Finally Luke 21:34-36 adds a warning to the disciples which seems to have originally belonged right after the message of hope in verse 28.

In verse 14b of Mark 13 there appears the remark "Let him that readeth understand". This suggests that the "Little Apocalypse" existed as a unit in written form and was among the sources used by Mark.

The best explanation accounting for the differences in the Lucan parallel is the hypothesis that he had before him a variant version of the same material into which he dubbed the account he found in Mark.

These two matters combine in suggesting that the Little Apocalypse did exist, perhaps in two forms. While this hypothesis throws no necessary doubt on the authenticity of the sayings attributed to Jesus, it does suggest that they existed as isolated oral traditions and were collected into a document early in the history of the church. This may have been done to provide a document for use in the church in facing its disappointment over the delay in the consumation. However I find it difficult to make this disappointment account for any fundamental changes in the eschatology of the early church even though, as 11 Thessalonians indicates, the delay in the consumation was an early problem.

The Tradition Peculiar to Luke

In the tradition peculiar to Luke there are two passages of significance for this paper.

In Chapter 22, verses 16-18, in the midst of Luke's version of the Last Supper, Jesus says-

"I have earnestly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer, for I tell you I shall not eat it until it is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God".

The exegesis of the verse is difficult but at least we have here a suggestion that the kingdom of God has begun.

The other passage is 17:20-22 which is immediately followed by

the "Q" material in 23-30 which seems to contradict it. This is the well known passage saying "The kingdom of God is within/among you". The words are a reply to the question "When is the Kingdom of God to come". The exegetical problem arises because of the preposition εντος . The greek word does mean within. Elsewhere Luke uses εν μεσω when he means among. However if Luke here is using oral or written material with an Aramaic background, which is entirely probable, the original preposition used would be one that had an ambiguous meaning. No where else is the kingdom of God spoken of as a state of mind. The fact that this reply is reported as having been given to the Pharisees and not to the disciples also adds weight to the view that the meaning among ought to be given the preposition.

A further problem is the juxtaposition of these verses with 23-30. Both sections reply to the question "When?" 20-21 replies "It is idle to ask "When?" The kingdom is already present. 23-30 replies "It is idle to ask "When?" the kingdom will come any minute, without warning." Which answer does the New Testament make? The decision is inescapable, from evidence in many places, that the New Testament makes both answers and means both. This is the unique quality of New Testament eschatology.

The Tradition Peculiar to Matthew

In the tradition peculiar to Matthew four passages are significant for this paper.

In Chapter 24:10-12 Matthew adds predictions regarding the apostasy that will appear in the Church. This theme appears in the epistles and in Revelation also. It is part of New Testament eschatology that while the reign of God is sure, and his kingdom already beginning, that this does not mean that the world is getting better and better. Evil increases along with Good and the church is not free of taint.

Matthew adds three eschatological parables at the end of his version of the Little Apocalypse.

1. Matthew 25:1-13 The Parable of the Ten Virgins. This points up the recurring summons to watchfulness in anticipation of the Lord's return.

2. The Parable of the Talents 25:14-30. This is another reminder that the absent, and about to return Lord is expecting not just watchfulness, but faithful stewardship over the tasks he has left behind.

3. The parable of the Last Judgment 25:31-46 needs more careful treatment. In his interpretation Manson sees four Characters or groups of characters in the scene. This picture is suggested in parallel pictures in contemporary apocalyptic writings. There are the Nations of the earth, the Son of Man, the King, and his brothers, (these last referred to when the people of the earth protest their ignorance). This interpretation makes the basis of judgment to be that those who served the Brothers of Jesus (that is, his disciples or the Church) will receive blessing. Those who gave the cause of Jesus a helping hand will be the accepted ones at the Last Judgment.

This appears to be an extremely different view from the generally accepted one which sees the last judgment as favouring those who, unknown to themselves, served the king because they served the needy. In this interpretation the absent King is identified with needy people whoever they are, especially the least. However even in the restricted interpretation, the fact that all the nations of the earth are to be at the judgment means that the puzzlement of the people in not recognizing the king would be equally true of his brothers. The point that they didn't know they were serving the King would still be true. The absent King is still hidden in the "least". And what else can "Helping the king's cause along" mean but seeking to save that which is lost?

The Writings of Paul

We have already briefly considered the Eschatology in the primitive Kerygma which Paul received. There now follows a consideration of what the Apostle calls "My Gospel".

The Pauline writings contain a more explicit eschatology than the traditions so far examined. However I believe that this can be accounted for more by the fact that the apostle as well as the whole church had by this time worked out more of the implications of the faith delivered to them, than by the fact that something had to be done to explain the delay in the expected consumation. A lot of things are more explicit in Paul. Nor am I sure that the label Christ Mysticism (a phrase that Dr. Dodd himself appears to be a little hesitant about) (1) adequately describes Paul's enriched eschatology.

The "Pauline Gospel" is thoroughly eschatological. This remains true even if we take the view that his decision on ethics, church and domestic polity and social relationships arise as much from his view of the seriousness of the times and the crisis of the age as from his expectation of the end on an early date. In 1 Thessalonians 1:9-10 his summary of the Christian Faith includes "waiting for God's son coming from heaven". In the same letter (5:1-10 he re-issues the traditional call for watchfulness. The kingdom will come unheralded, as a thief in the night. Always present is the traditional expectation of the end when "Every knee shall bow" and all creation acknowledge openly the lordship of Christ (Phil. 2:10-11).

Dodd and others are perfectly right in pointing out that Christian eschatology is realized eschatology. Paul especially proclaims that God's

(1) page 151 Dodd, C.H. The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments, Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1936.

action in Christ has been decisive. Col 1:11-20 makes this claim many times. God has provided an inheritance for the saints to share in. He has delivered them from darkness into the kingdom of his beloved son. The son is the first born of all creation, from the beginning he was Lord. He is the first born from the dead (c.f. 1Cor 15:20). In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. In Col 1:26f he speaks of the mystery hidden for ages and generations that has now been made manifest to his saints. Ro 3:21-26 claims that the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law although the law and the prophets bear witness to it. The judgment of sin in the flesh has already taken place in Christ. (Ro 8:3) With the event Jesus Christ there is a new creation, which includes the creation of the true Israel of God (11Cor 5:17-21, Gal 6: 15-16) The theme of the indwelling Christ (Gal 2:20) pervades the writings. A parallel theme is the doctrine of the presence of the spirit in the Church. (Phil 2:1, 1 Cor 12:13, 11 Cor 3:17)

However recognition of the "Realized" eschatology in the Pauline writings must not blind us to the fact that a "Not Yet" quality is equally persistent. In Col 3:1-4 the ethical constraint proclaimed is the coming Christ as well as the exalted Christ. In 11Cor 1:22 the gift of the spirit is called a guarantee, meaning of course of the fulfillment to come. 1 Cor 4:1-5 echoes the parable of the wheat and the tares in insisting that judgment must be left to God and not pronounced before the time.

The Pauline understanding of life in Christ is distorted if it is not seen as having a pronounced dimension of expectation. Romans 5:2-11 speaks of the grace in which we stand being evidence that God will finish his work. This is our basis of hope that we will share the Glory of God. Romans 8 is perhaps the most moving exposition of the Faith/Hope dimension of life in Christ. Like the whole creation, the

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reconciled sinner, who has the first fruits of the Spirit, groans, waiting for the full realization of his sonship,--the time when all things, and all men, and all of himself will be clearly under Christ's lordship. In 11 Cor 4:7-18 Paul speaks of our treasure being in earthen vessels so that the Glory will be of God. In Phil 3:1-21 Paul speaks of the righteousness that is God's gift which has apprehended him but which he is unable to claim to have apprehended but must say rather that he is apprehending. The same "already but not yet" theme is echoed again in the closing verses of his hymn to love (1Cor 13).— 12-14

It is not enough to say here that the problem is simply that of the relationship between Justification and Sanctification. The point is that Paul and the whole primitive Church sees this problem and deal with it as an eschatological matter. In Christian thought, the tension between what a man is, and what he is called to be, is completely inseparable from the doctrine of the end. This is what is included in the Christian meaning of the term eschatology.

Ephesians

Even if it is to be considered that Ephesians is not by Paul himself it cannot be denied that the thought here is from the same school. The eschatology is certainly similar. There is constant emphasis on its realized quality. The work of Christ was destined from the beginning (1:5) In his blood God presented us with our forgiveness (1:7) and made clear the mystery of his will (1:9) to unite all things, in the fullness of time under his sway (1:10). All things are now under the feet of Christ (1:22-23) The gospel creates the Church so that the manifold wisdom of God may be made known to the principalities and powers (3:10). In the Prayer 3:14-20 we have the eloquent description of the life which Christ indwells.

But all of this has its dimension of expectation. In Chapter 4 the author sets forth the idea that the worth of life is constituted by its end...by what it is called to be, and in 5:27 he sees the church as being constituted by its end, by what it is called to be by him who is able to present unto himself a church without spot or wrinkle or any such thing.

Hebrews

The author of Hebrews appears to emphasize the Not Yet quality more than the realized quality of traditional eschatology. However the position is essentially the same as in the rest of the tradition. Although παρουσια almost always appears in the futuristic sense, (1) decisive events have already taken place.-

"So Christ having been offered once to bear the sins of many, will appear a second time, not to deal with sin, but to save those who are eagerly waiting for him" (9:12)

"In these last days he has spoken to us by a son whom he appointed heir unto all things, through whom he also created the world"(1:2)

In verse 2:8 we are told that although we do not see all things in subjection to him, he has already provided man's salvation through his suffering. In 6:4ff we are told that those who partake of the Holy Spirit have tasted the powers of the age to come. In 12:22-24 the faithful are told that they have come to the city of the living God and to the assembly of the first born. And in 12:25ff the author insists that he who is about to shake the earth is already speaking.

Three themes are treated in Eschatological fashion.

1. Chapter 4 concerns the Heavenly Rest, which because it is God's is both present and future. Men enter in, and must strive to enter in. It is impossible to decide whether in verse 3, the tense of

(1) Heb 1:4 6:9
 2:3-10 9:28
 5:9

εἰς τὴν νῦν ὡραία ἐστὶν ἡ πόλις ἡ ἐκείνη is present or futuristic present. Probably it is both.

2. In 13:14 the theme of the city which is to come the other pole to the heavenly Jerusalem which the faithful enter now as in Chapter 12, sets forth the traditional paradox. The picture here is rightly that of a pilgrim. But for Christians the unseen truth which God will one day enact is no longer entirely unseen.

3. The theme of the Heavenly Temple with its perfect high priest again illustrates the distinctive Christian eschatology. Jesus, after his death on earth enters at once into the heavenly temple. He will return in due course. Meanwhile his self offering is decisive and requires a decision now. Redemption has already been wrought but awaits manifest fulfillment.

1 Peter

1 Peter is also an eschatological document. Though the lamb without blemish or spot was destined before the foundation of the world, he has been made manifest at the end of the times. (1:19-20) The end has already begun. The faithful are a chosen race, called of God, made a people who were no people (2:9-10). Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven is already Lord over angels, authorities and powers. Through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, man has been born to a living hope, to an imperishable undefiled inheritance. (1: 3-5). Nonetheless the Grace of Christ is referred to as "being brought to you" (1:13). There is a distinction between the grace already known and the glory that shall be revealed (1:4,5,10,13, 4:13).

The writer is not involved in any problem over the delay in the consummation, or over the calculation of its date. The point of the epistle is that we must live as always on the threshold of great joy.

It is often stated that the Johanne writings spiritualize or philosophize the primitive Christian eschatology. Certainly this tradition appears to come closest to emphasizing the realized quality of the eschatology at the expense of the not yet quality. Christ is glorified in his passion. Eternal life is to know God. The coming again of Christ seems to be fulfilled in the gift of the Spirit. The time of judgment is now, with the coming of light to men who prefer darkness.

However the already and not yet tension is far from absent. In the discourse about the vine and its branches in Chapter 15 the condition for abiding in the vine is set forth as the requirement of the branches to bear fruit, and the condition for bearing fruit is that the branch abide in the vine. The believer must still become what he already is, and he is already what he shall become.

The paradox is set forth again in the epistles.-

"No one born of God commits sin, for God's nature abides in him and he cannot sin because he is born of God" (1 Joh 3:9).

and

"If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." (1 Joh 1: 8-9).

There is no room for complacency, no one has arrived, and no one need feel discouraged about whether he has arrived.

"See what love the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God, and so we are.....Beloved, we are God's children now. It does not yet appear what we shall be, but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 Jno 3:1-2)

Revelation

There is neither time nor space for an adequate treatment of the one Christian writing that is thoroughgoing apocalyptic. It is not that there is nothing fruitful to be gained here by unravelling the layers of seven woes with each seventh woe having seven woes more, but that the exegetical problems are so vast and so controversial that no new light could be certainly gained by a quick treatment. The one matter that requires mentioning is the overall theme.: That what was begun in suffering will be finished in glory. The one exalted, the one who will be Lord of the kingdoms of this world is the lamb slain from the beginning of the world.

Interpretation

The Doctrine of the End

Enough evidence has been presented to show that Eschatology is not peripheral but central to the Christian Faith. While New Testament eschatology is unlike contemporary apocalyptic in its lack of interest in detailed descriptions of the heavenly kingdom, in its rejection of a purely national theme and its discouragement of the practice of date fixing, it does take the apocalyptic doctrine of the end seriously. History has an end. It is an end outside history. Christian eschatology thus emphasizes that it is God who gives meaning to history and declares that God is sovereign in it. Apart from an expected end all would be futility.

But the End impinges on the present. This is not an other-worldly preoccupation but a this-worldly preoccupation. Eschatology connects Creation with Salvation History. This view of the End is anti-nihilistic on the one hand, and on the other prohibits either religious imperialism or a trust in religious evolution. A tendency to religious imperialism quickly becomes a demonic hubris, something very much like original sin.

And religious evolution is a pipe dream.

The Christian doctrine of the End is not utopian, for it recognizes the depth of the human predicament and assumes that good and evil increase and wane together. Nor is it quietism. The End impinges on the present. Men are called to be what they are not. The Church is constituted by its End. It is the hope against hope, when all evidence for hope is gone, which can sustain realistic, responsible and decisive action in the world. Any lesser hope than hope in God is inadequate or destructive or both.

Realized Eschatology

However as we have seen Christian eschatology is not only hope. It has a realized quality to it. In Christ God acted decisively. There is such a thing as Salvation History. All before was fulfilled in Him and all that happens after him has been decided in him. The reign of God began in Jesus. The New Age has dawned. In Christ the power of the age to come has been given to men. Man's forgiveness, justification and reconciliation have been accomplished. The evil powers of the earth were overcome. Christ is Lord. He reigns at the right hand of God. The crucified One, the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world, suffering love which saves others and cannot save himself is even now lord of all. Sinners are called God's children. The kingdom of God is open to all who repent and believe the gospel. It is right to speak of an eschatological now.

This eschatological now is not to be interpreted as immanentism. The saving work of God, the coming of the kingdom is seen as an eschatological act, a thing done with objective and corporate consequences and not as an abstract reality in heaven, nor a subjective religious experience. The tension in the New Testament is between the

present and the future, and not between the Ideal and the actual. The Kingdom is not something that enters a man, but a state of affairs he is called into. It is an existing reign he participates in, not a situation he brings about, or "builds".

Further, the New Testament never minimizes the futuristic side of its eschatology. The Eschatological Now means precisely a now that is inextricably bound up with the future.

Already and Not Yet

Christian eschatology sets men in a tension between the present and future. The sovereignty of Suffering Love is not manifest either in history or the Church or in the individual believer. There is a persistent insistence in the New Testament on a Not Yet as well as an already quality to its eschatology. Throughout the preaching, the parables and the epistles the theme of the return of Christ is continually sounded. God will finish what he has begun. Although Christ is called the living Lord of all he has yet to make manifest his lordship so that it will be clear to all. The New Testament views the exalted Christ as

1. Present Lord, (whose reign is hidden as well as dimly manifest)
2. Absent King, about to return, and 3. Coming Judge.

1. The Reigning Christ is seen as present though also hidden. The sovereignty of Love is true although not universally recognized. What Luther calls the alien work of love is meant here. Every attempt to put the world together on the basis of anything but love has its inevitable consequences. But this also means that the Church must continually expect to meet the clear manifestation of her Lord's reign outside the camp, in the world over which he is sovereign. The church must expect to meet her lord's judgment and grace in the world.

2. A recurring New Testament theme is the absent King who is about to return and requires not only watchfulness from his followers but also faithful stewardship of the tasks he has given them. The absent King is present in the task. How else can sovereign love reign but by leaving the called to their own responsibility? What other kind of obedience can the sovereignty of Love command than an "in spite of" kind of obedience, one without other compensations and rewards? The absent King is also present in the least of the Brethren. What more fitting place for the crucified one to manifest his Glory first, but in the need of the least brother. Life in Christ is life lived in constant expectancy of the revealing of the present Lord's hidden glory.

3. The theme of Christ as the coming judge is also central. History, institutions and people will be judged by the future and finally by the End. No man can say of himself that he is undividedly in the situation of faith. No man can say what the judgment shall be. Judgment goes on all right but it is by no means clear what this shall be. This theme is a realistic view of the depth of man's sin as well as an affirmation of God's sovereignty. It precludes complacency as well as the hubris of identifying one's own judgment with the judgment of God.

The only attention paid to signs in the New Testament is to signs that the Coming again of Christ and the manifestations of his hidden reign is impending. These are put forward as signs that every present moment is a moment of expectancy.

Dr. Otto Piper, while lecturing at the 1960 Union College Summer Session kept saying that there was no reason for equating the New Testament expectation of Christ's return with the expectation of the consumation.

Paul Minear, in The Christian Hope and the Second Coming, has an interesting treatment of New Testament use of the term $\pi α ρ ο ν τ ι α$. It remarkably flexible. It is used of any person who moves from one place to another. It refers to recent arrivals as well as pending arrivals (1Cor 16:17, 11Cor 7: 6-7, Phil 1:26). Occasionally its primary meaning is presence rather than coming, for the implied opposite meaning is absence (11Cor 10:10, Phil 2:12). In using the term about Christ the word can mean his hidden presence as well as his expected arrival (1Thes 2:19, 3:13, 5:23, 11Pet 1:16). And even his absence does not mean his inactivity or his unreality but that it is possible for men to deceive themselves about his power and their faithfulness. (1Cor 15: 23, 1Thes 4:15, 11Thes 2L 1-8, James 5: 7-8, 1Jno 2:28).

It is just a revealing of this sort of thing that the Christian is expecting momentarily. Indeed it keeps happening, but not quite happening, he must expect a further revelation and a further judgment. The Christian's present remains in tension with his future.

Expectation with a difference

Finally we must return to the point that while Christian eschatology necessarily preserves an element of expectancy at the heart of it, it is expectation with a difference. He has tasted the power of the age to come. He has the first fruits of the Spirit, the earnest, the fragment of that same stuff as the fulfillment to come. The ground of his hope in the fulfillment is what God has already done in Christ. He knows whom he will meet, the Crucified one, the Lamb slain from the beginning of the world, Suffering Love that saves others but cannot save himself. Although he does not know what this will be like in the actual situation he knows it will be more of the same and that he will recognize his Lord.

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(1) page 111 Minear, Paul S. Christian Hope and the Second Coming,
Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1954.

This Word that has come to him in Christ, this justification that is God's act apart from the law, this radically new offering of a means of establishing his existence confronts him continually as demand for radical decision that he forego every alternate method of justification. This forgiveness of his sins and this participation in the Kingdom of God can be his, only as event, and never as possession. Life in Christ is therefore always life in expectation of both judgment and grace, or rather gracious judgment, for he will always be surprised by his Lord's presence where he thought he was not, and will continually be discovering that what he took to be a matter of his Lord's absence was actually a matter of his own betrayal of one who was there all the time. His confidence will not be in himself but in the fact that he is chosen. His confidence will be in the expectation that he, who while they were yet enemies gave himself for him, will finish the work he has begun. Life in the new age is indeed life in the eschatological now.

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