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The Evangelical Quarterly

OUR LORD'S TEACHING CONCERNING THE END

JULY 15TH, 1947

I. THE APOCALYPTIC DISCOURSES OF JESUS

IN ANY attempt to form a coherent picture of what our Lord taught in His apocalyptic discourses, the following considerations must be kept in mind.

(1) The Evangelists do not pretend to give full verbatim accounts of our Lord's discourses. Jesus obviously said much more than what is incorporated in the Gospels, and much of the difficulty in understanding what He meant in certain declarations in the apocalyptic discourses is due to the fact that because we do not possess the full report of His words the connecting links between His different pronouncements cannot always be discovered. This fact makes it so much more essential that each one of His declarations should be studied in the light of all His other teaching concerning the Consummation and the events leading up to it.

(2) We must take into account the Oriental prophetic character of the apocalyptic discourses. While speaking concerning things so entirely different from ordinary phenomena our Lord nevertheless had to speak in terms understandable to His hearers and surely did not mean that His vivid, pictorial descriptions of things to come had to be taken in a mechanically literal way.

(3) Jesus predicted the Consummation events in "prophetic perspective". The whole future lay as it were as one great unity open before His prophetic vision—just as when we look at a mountain range in the far distance all the mountains, although some are nearer and some farther, seem to be blended into a single unity. So in His prophetic vision into the future Jesus saw the judgments about to come over Jerusalem and the Jewish nation who rejected Him blended into unity with the final Judgment at the Parousia. The result is that it is extremely

difficult and sometimes seemingly even impossible to decide which events our Lord had in mind in the different parts of His apocalyptic discourses. In any case it is clear that in these discourses He had two main future events in mind, namely the destruction of Jerusalem, with all the events preceding it, and the Consummation of the Age, with the preceding convulsions in the life of mankind, and in the universe as a whole. And it is also clear that in the approaching divine judgments over Jerusalem and the Jews our Lord saw the foreshadowing or prefiguring of the final Judgment. Accordingly, in His predictions concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the wrath of God over the guilty nation He ever and anon points beyond these events to the Last Things when the judgment of God will overcome not only a single guilty nation, but the whole guilty humanity who have rejected Christ, the Lord. And in His promises that amid all the coming persecutions and turmoil His disciples will be divinely protected (in the spiritual sense) He points forward to the eternal salvation all His true followers will inherit at the Consummation.

(4) It was not our Lord's purpose to give a full, detailed, chronological scheme of future events. His aim was to stress the certainty of His coming and the certainty of Judgment and of Salvation, and to challenge His disciples to sincerity and faithfulness.

When these considerations are borne in mind, a study of our Lord's discourses in Mark xiii; Luke xvii. 22-37, xxi. 5-36 and Matt. xxiv yields at least the following main results:

Our Lord explicitly predicted that the temple in Jerusalem together with the city and its unbelieving inhabitants were heading for a dreadful ruin—within a lifetime the judgments of God would overtake them in catastrophic severity. Since our Lord foresaw all this so clearly, can we wonder why He wept over Jerusalem when He entered it a few days before His crucifixion? (Luke xix. 41)

Before these judgments would come over the Jews, so Jesus predicted (Luke xxi. 12), the disciples would go through severe trials and be persecuted even unto death (Luke xxi. 16). Remarkable things would happen in nature, and a clash between nations would ensue which would ultimately lead to the destruction of Jerusalem and to the scattering of the Jewish nation all

over the world. The believers in and near Jerusalem were warned to flee when the danger approached (Luke xxi. 20) so that they could escape the divine judgment coming over the unbelieving nation. Significantly our Lord also predicted that the catastrophe that was going to overcome the guilty nation would be so complete and permanent that henceforth Jerusalem would be under the heel of one non-Jewish nation after the other until the End (Luke xxi. 24).

All these predictions, and they form a large part of the discourses, have been fulfilled in a remarkably literal fashion (in Acts, in Josephus' works, especially his *Bell. Jud.*, and in Tacitus' *Annales* most of the details are to be found). And everyone who has become aware of the unparalleled severity of the divine judgments that overtook the Jewish nation, city and temple, in the years between A.D. 66 and 71 can readily understand why our Lord saw the foreshadowing of the Final Judgment in these events, and why He connected the predictions concerning the Consummation so intimately with those concerning the destruction of Jerusalem.

After the declarations as to what was on hand for the disciples and for the unbelieving Jews of that time, our Lord, who already in these predictions constantly pointed forward beyond these events to the Consummation, uttered several explicit pronouncements concerning the End. Although He does not (in the résumés of the discourses as we have them in the Gospels) directly say that there will be a long space of time between the destruction of Jerusalem and the End-events, it is obvious that He meant to be understood thus. To name only one proof for this: in Luke xxi. 24 our Lord intimates that Jerusalem will be dominated by a succession of non-Jewish nations (cf. Zahn, *in loc.*) after its destruction and only after that period of time will the final tribulations come.

It is important to notice that whereas, in the predictions concerning the events leading to and accompanying the divine judgments over Jerusalem, our Lord mentioned only events of more or less local occurrence or significance (*κατὰ τόπους*, Luke xxi. 11), in the predictions concerning the things that will precede the End He stresses their universal character (Luke xxi. 25-27; Mark xiii. 24f.). A complete convulsion of things in human society, in nature and the universe will precede His coming with power and glory.

But, although such remarkable events and phenomena will point to the approach of the End, no one, our Lord teaches clearly, will know exactly when He will come. And the unbelieving world will continue in their unbelief and unrighteousness notwithstanding the catastrophic events which ought to bring them to the realisation that the End is near (Matt. xxiv. 37-41). So when the moment arrives and as a flash of lightning the Parousia has become final reality, the nations will with terror and mourning see Christ coming, this time with power, as Judge, and not in humility, as Saviour.

The inescapable fact, that at the Parousia the eternal destinies of all shall be finally fixed, is pictured in different vivid descriptions which, now from the one side and then from another angle, teach the fact that at the Consummation the believers will be united with Christ and the unbelievers excluded from His presence for ever (Matt. xxv. 46).

An intensive exegetical study of the discourses of our Lord in the Gospels and of Paul's words in 1 and 2 Thess. reveals a remarkable unity of teaching concerning the Last Things (when exegetical principles, such as those outlined at the beginning of this paper, are kept in mind). Of course, when these New Testament passages are taken in a mechanically literal way, there appear to be some serious divergences, but it was surely not our Lord's or the New Testament writers' intention that these descriptions should be taken in such a way. But at the same time the main facts are sufficiently clearly taught to give us a consistent, coherent teaching concerning the final purposes of God, and concerning the eternal destinies of men.

II. THE PREDICTION OF THE PAROUSIA

It is impossible to do any justice to this subject in a limited article. We can only state in short what an intensive exegetical study of the different New Testament passages on this matter seems to reveal regarding it, without entering upon a detailed defence of the views we arrive at.

In speaking of His return at the time of the Consummation our Lord clearly emphasised two facts. On the one hand, tremendous events in the realm of nature and history will precede His advent (Mark xiii. 24b; Matt. xxiv. 6-8). These events will be so universal in scope that they will be for the the faithful believers clear signs of the approaching End: "Now

from the fig tree learn this parable: when her branch is now become tender, and putteth forth its leaves, ye know that the summer is nigh: even so ye also, when ye see all these things, know ye that He is nigh, even at the door" (Matt. xxiv. 32-33). The same thought is expressed in Luke xxi. 28, where our Lord says: "But when these things begin to come to pass, look up, and lift up your heads, because your redemption draweth nigh." There can thus be no room for doubt that our Lord taught that events of such a kind will precede His Parousia that the spiritually alert believers will be able to discern that the End is nearing.

On the other hand, however, our Lord just as clearly predicted that although there will be signs pointing to the comparative nearness of His coming, no one will know *exactly* when He will come. His actual advent will be sudden and rapid as a flash of lightning (Luke xvii. 24) at a moment when humanity as a whole are still completely preoccupied with the ordinary secular life. "And as it came to pass in the days of Noah, even so shall it also be in the days of the Son of man. They ate, they drank, they married, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all" (Luke xvii. 26-27, cf. also *vv.* 28-37). In Noah's days the coming Flood had been foretold and Noah's action in building the ark was a challenging sign that the prediction was meant seriously. Nevertheless the people at large lived in unconcern, so that when the Flood came all of a sudden, only the faithful man of God and his family were saved. So also, taught our Lord, will the unbelieving world continue to despise the predictions of His Second Coming and remain blind as to the significance of the events that will precede the End. [We can imagine how unredeemed humanity will try to give explanations for all the extraordinary events in the realm of nature, and how they will, amid all the turmoil and chaos among the nations (Luke xxi. 25), still speak of "peace, peace" and try in their own strength to rectify things.] The result will be that that day will come on them "suddenly as a snare" (Luke xxi. 34). The believers who are faithful will, however, be able to see in the distressing events the sure sign that their Lord is coming soon (Luke xxi. 28-31, 34). Thus, although they too will never know the exact time of His coming, they will be able to be spiritually prepared so that when He finally comes they will enter into the eternal glory of their Redeemer.

Is there a time limit? Much of the confusion regarding the question whether our Lord predicted that His return would fall within the life of those living when He spoke, seems to arise because insufficient attention is paid to the fact that in the eschatological discourses our Lord was speaking of two entirely separate events: (a) the destruction of Jerusalem and the divine punishment of the Jewish nation which rejected Him (Luke xix. 41-44; xxi. 20); (b) the final Consummation. It is obvious that where our Lord said that "all these things shall happen within this generation" (Luke xxi. 32) He was pointing to what was going to precede and accompany the destruction of the Jewish nation. And because that divine judgment over the guilty nation was to be so severe (history confirmed that it was incomparable in character) it served, as we have already said, immediately as a foreshadowing of the Final Judgment. Therefore our Lord's predictions concerning the one passed over almost imperceptibly into predictions concerning the other. Only when insufficient attention is paid to this intertwining of the prophecies, and to the prophetic foreshortening of perspective, do the words of our Lord seem to teach that He expected His return within a lifetime. Admittedly it is in some cases difficult to distinguish between the two lines of predictions, but this makes it only so much the more imperative that every one of our Lord's statements must be understood in the light of His other statements on this subject.

When all of this is kept in mind, a study of our Lord's predictions concerning the time-limit for His coming reveals that He taught very clearly that a long time would pass before His final return. This is proved by the following. In Luke xxi, after our Lord had spoken of many things that would happen (events that would need a long time) He warned His disciples that they must not think that the end will come immediately after those events (xxi. 9). And in xxi. 24 He foretold, as already stated, that after the destruction of Jerusalem the city would be ruled over by one gentile nation after another (cf. Zahn, *ad. loc.*). Only after that will the signs preceding His Parousia appear, and even then the End is not yet immediately there. All this certainly envisages a long period of time. In Matt. xxv. 19 our Lord, speaking of His Return in parabolic form, says explicitly, "after a long time the lord . . . cometh". In Matt. xxiv a whole series of events is predicted to precede His

coming—events that could not happen within a lifetime or even within a few generations. For *many* false prophets will appear (xxiv. 11), “nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom” (v. 7), the love of *many* shall wax cold (v. 12) and the gospel will be preached in the *whole world* for a testimony unto *all the nations*, and only then shall the end come (v. 14). In v. 48 our Lord clearly warns that His return will tarry so long that believers will become impatient and some even unfaithful. The same thought of the “tarrying” is expressed in Matt. xxv. 5.

When, after the Resurrection, the disciples wanted to know when the Consummation would be, our Lord replied: “It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority” (Acts i. 7). And far from hinting that He would in any case return at least during a lifetime, He again made it clear that the Gospel message would first have to be proclaimed over the whole world “unto the uttermost part of the earth” (v. 8).

It is thus abundantly clear that our Lord repeatedly tried to impress it upon the minds of His disciples that although they could not know exactly when He would come again, they could at least be sure that a long time would elapse before the Consummation. Now the objection will be raised: why then did He warn them to be watchful? As soon as we realise that our Lord saw everything *sub specie aeternitatis* and that His Parousia is the greatest and most important event for everyone, we can see how fitting it was that not only the first generation of Christians, but every generation, should be warned to live as people waiting for the Lord. It is the most certain fact that everyone (believers as well as unbelievers) will have to appear before the Son of man at His coming for Final Judgment. Whether He is going to come within a year or is going to come after ten thousand years, it makes no difference regarding the necessity that everyone must be watchful and live as people expecting their Lord. Seen in the light of eternity, even a million years is but a moment. The first believers and all their spiritual successors were thus not misguided by the urgent expectation of the approach of the End. In reality every generation is living in “the last days” and therefore our Lord gave the command, “Watch and pray, for ye know not when your Lord cometh”. In other words, He commands every generation to live *sub*

specie aeternitatis, above all remembering that the supreme event waiting for everyone is the meeting with the Lord at His Parousia—a meeting that will spell eternal woe for the unrepentant and eternal joy for His redeemed ones.

The Apostolic Expectation. Right through the apostolic writings we feel the throbbing of urgent expectation—they hoped and longed that the Lord would come as soon as it is His will. The words of 1 Cor. xvi. 22, “Maranatha” (“Our Lord, come!”), give typical expression to this intensive longing. But although we so clearly see and feel how they hoped that He would come soon, it remains a remarkable fact that nowhere in the epistles is it explicitly stated that the Lord *would* come within the lifetime of those apostolic leaders. It is true they lived and worked as men who expected their Lord every moment, and they longingly kept the possibility in mind that even in their lifetime He might come. They felt that His coming was near, and that they lived in the last days. But nowhere does Paul or any other New Testament author explicitly teach that our Lord would definitely come during their lifetime. While living and working *sub specie aeternitatis* and under the deep consciousness of the fact that the most important of all in this age is the Return of the Lord, all of them obeyed Him in not trying to forecast exactly when He would return. Undoubtedly most of the early Christians expected and hoped that the Parousia would come soon. They did not grasp the full significance of our Lord’s predictions concerning the many things (e.g. the proclaiming of the Gospel unto the uttermost parts of the earth) that had first to happen. Nevertheless, they did at least keep clearly in mind the fact that He taught that no one will know “when that day and hour shall be”. The result is that although we so clearly feel the pulsing throb of intense yearning for and expectation of His Advent, there is not a single passage in the New Testament which teaches as part of the apostolic *κήρυγμα* that the Risen Lord would come within a lifetime or within any fixed period. On the contrary, even in the letters of those men longing so intensely for their Lord to come, we have intimations that even they realised that His coming might still tarry long. For instance in Philippians, the very letter in which Paul wrote: “The Lord is at hand,” he spoke in quite a natural way of “dying” and so “to depart and be with the Lord” (i. 20). And even his word: “The Lord is at hand” says (when read

in its context) nothing as to when the Lord will return. In actual fact, taking reality in the light of eternity and in the light of the certainty of the Parousia, the Lord was and is at hand, at every stage of history—this will be true even if He tarries many thousands of years. Peter already gave clear expression to this when stating that believers must not doubt concerning the Parousia because it has not arrived yet for “one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day” (2 Peter iii. 8).

In 1 Thess. iv. 13ff. Paul did not mean by his words, “we that are alive, that are left unto the coming of the Lord”, that the Lord would definitely come within his lifetime. For in v. 1f. he makes it clear that nobody knows when the Parousia is coming. In iv. 13ff. he, as one of the believers who are still alive, in contrast with those who had passed away, speaks as representative of those believers who will be alive at the Second Coming, without, however, implying that he will definitely be one of them. He did long and hope for this, but in the light of v. 2 and his other teachings (e.g. 2 Thess. ii. 1-12) it is clear that he never committed himself to a definite declaration that the Lord would come within his lifetime or within any other fixed period. When the Thessalonians got the idea that the Lord was definitely coming at that time, Paul wrote to them to explain that they had misunderstood his letter (2 Thess. ii. 1ff.) and that, far from the Parousia being actually then already present (v. 2), a tremendous development in history must first take place, namely the appearing of the Anti-Christ (vv. 3ff.). When this “son of perdition” would appear, Paul did not say. He was faithful to His Lord in stressing on the one hand the fact that, seen in the light of the highest realities, the Lord is at hand, but on the other hand he refrained from any definite predictions. And this same fact we find right through the New Testament.

We are fully convinced that these views, held by the greatest number of conservative scholars, are in fullest accord with the actual teachings of the New Testament. There are a few difficult passages, but when seen in their context and in the light of the apostolic teachings as a whole, they give no ground for the oft-repeated view that the New Testament falsely taught that the Lord would return within the lifetime of the generation which lived at that time. He did, of course, according to His promises in John xiv-xvi, “return” in spiritual sense at Pentecost.

And as the Divine Son of God, one with the Father and the Holy Spirit, He is always with the believers (Matt. xxviii. 20). But He and His apostles clearly taught that His visible, final return lies in the future.

The supposed silence of the Fourth Gospel. In many respects it is clear that the Fourth Gospel was written to supplement the Synoptic Gospels. Time and again we notice how St. John presupposes on the part of his readers a thorough knowledge of what is contained in the Synoptists. Only in a few cases does he give material in a form which is already found in the other three Gospels. It is thus not at all surprising to find that he left out the eschatological discourse of our Lord that is incorporated in all three Synoptists. Taking for granted that his readers are sufficiently acquainted with that part of the Lord's teaching, he incorporates much more of our Lord's "more intimate" teachings regarding His "return" to His believers in and through the Holy Spirit.

Although there is this difference of emphasis in St. John, it is, however, a totally mistaken idea that the Fourth Gospel does not also proclaim the fact that at the Consummation the Lord will return in a visible and glorious way. We name but a few of the instances where John incorporated teachings of Jesus stressing the eschatological hope in the same way as the Synoptists. John v. 27-29 reads: "and He [God] gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of man. Marvel not at this, for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth, they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgment." In John vi, our Lord no less than four times declares that He will "at the last day" raise up those who believe in him (*vv.* 39, 40, 44, 54).

It is true that John emphasises our Lord's teaching concerning the fact of a present judgment and of a present raising of the spiritual dead to eternal life (cf. John vi. 25). But at the same time he incorporates teachings of the Lord stressing the fact of a future, final judgment and of a future final raising up of the believers to eternal life (cf. John xii. 47ff.). And that this final judgment and final raising of the dead will coincide with His return in glory follows already from the way in which Jesus spoke of Himself as the Son of man (John v. 26f.), and by statements like the following: "And if I go and prepare a place

for you, I come again, and will receive you unto myself, that where I am *there* ye may be also" (John xiv. 3). These words cannot be taken as referring only to His *coming to them* in and through the Spirit. Of this He speaks in entirely different terms (cf. xiv. 18, 21). W. F. Howard has rightly said regarding our Lord's teaching in John concerning His coming in and through the Paraclete and His coming personally at the End: "The two ideas are complementary and not identical. There is nothing fundamentally inconsistent with the rest of the Gospel in the words that come near the end of chapter xxi: 'If I will that he tarry *till I come*, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me'" (*Christianity according to St. John*, p. 110).

We see thus that the whole New Testament presents a remarkably consistent view of our Lord's teaching concerning the Parousia. Now from one angle and now from another, the different writers of the New Testament shed light on the subject, and notwithstanding the difference in emphasis between them, they all proclaim the one glorious truth in a vital and unequivocal way.

III. THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF "ETERNAL LIFE" IN THE FOURTH GOSPEL

In Rabbinic literature we often come across the expressions *hā-'ōlām hazzeh* ("this age") and *hā-'ōlām habbā* ("the age to come"). At least during the first century A.D. they had become the technical terms respectively for the age before the coming of the Messiah and for the age that would be inaugurated at the coming of the Messiah.

Now, the typical Johannine phrase *ζωὴ αἰώνιος*, which we usually translate by "eternal life", actually means "life of the age" (the "age *κατ' ἐξοχήν*", "the coming age") and thus points to the life that is "suitable to the Age", the life of those who share in the "coming Age".

There is then unmistakably a certain connection between the phrase "eternal life" and the rabbinical usage of the eschatological expression "the age to come". But on the other hand there is also a very notable difference. For, whereas the rabbinical *hā-'ōlām habbā* looked exclusively to the future, the Johannine expression is in most cases used of a present reality. Indeed, right through the New Testament, we find that, while the Greek equivalent of *hā-'ōlām hazzeh*, *ὁ αἰὼν οὗτος*, is often

used (Rom. xii. 2; 1 Cor. i. 20, ii. 6, 8, iii. 18; Eph. i. 21) the Greek equivalent of *hā-'ōlām habbā, δ μέλλον αἰών*, is practically never found.¹ In the Synoptists the latter is replaced mostly by the expression "the sovereign rule (or kingdom) of God", *βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ*, and a few times by "eternal life". In the Fourth Gospel it is uniformly replaced by "eternal life". And just as in the Synoptists "the kingdom of God" is spoken of sometimes as a present fact and sometimes as something whose final manifestation lies in the future, so also is "eternal life" in John used with this double connotation.

In contrast to the rabbinical expression which looks only to the future, the New Testament terms used antithetically to "this age", and especially the *ζωὴ αἰώνιος* of John, teach that, although the final consummation lies in the future, the "age to come" has already come in and through Jesus, and that those who are united to Him in faith and love already possess the life eternal belonging to the final Age.

That the use of "eternal life" in this sense is not peculiar to the Fourth Gospel can be seen e.g. by the way the Synoptists sometimes use "eternal life" as a synonym for "the Kingdom of God" (cf. Matt. xix. 17 compared with Mark ix. 43-47).

It is often declared that the Fourth Gospel points only to the present significance of "eternal life". No one will doubt that, just as in the Synoptists "the kingly rule of God" is often looked upon as a present reality inaugurated by Jesus, John used "eternal life" pre-eminently with this emphasis. That he used the phrase with an eschatological connotation too is, however, clear from the very form and origin of the expression, as shown above, and also from the following passages. In John xii. 25 our Lord says: "he that loveth his life loseth it; and he that hateth his life in this world *shall keep it unto life eternal*". Here the reference is clearly to the "coming age" in eschatological sense. Then there are those repeated statements of our Lord in John vi. 39, 40, 44, 54: "And I will raise him at the last day". Thus He teaches that although the possession of "eternal life" is a blessed present reality for all those who believe in Him, it is only at the Consummation that He will in a final way raise them up to perfect glory and life eternal in fullest sense.

Furthermore, from the fact that the Fourth Gospel clearly

¹ The expression occurs in Heb. vi. 5; cf. *ἡ οἰκουμένη ἢ μέλλουσα* in Heb. ii. 5.

teaches that the judgment over the unrepentant (which is already taking place in this life) will be exercised in final manner at the last day (John xii. 47ff.), it follows that the giving of "eternal life" also awaits a perfect completion at the End.¹ As Dalman puts it: "Both 'eternal life' and 'Gehenna' have as necessary presupposition a judgment which awaits all men, in which the fate of men is for ever decided. There is thus involved a symbolism derived from a judicial process. The penalty of death threatens him who has been found guilty at the bar of justice; the gift of life is bestowed on him who is acquitted" (*The Words of Jesus*, p. 161).

On the one hand our Lord said: "He that rejecteth Me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I spake, the same shall judge him *at the last day*" (John xii. 47); and on the other hand He promised to raise up the believers at the Last Day (John vi. 39, 40, 44, 54).

It is thus abundantly clear that while the Fourth Gospel certainly emphasises the fact that by the response of obedient faith believers receive eternal life as a present reality, the eschatological character of "eternal life" is never lost sight of. The powers and blessings of the coming Age are already present in and through Jesus, but only when "this age" has come to its final end will the believers enter into "life eternal" in its highest, most complete sense. This is the uniform teaching of all four Gospels.

IV. THE TEACHING OF JESUS CONCERNING THE FATE OF THE UNREPENTANT

In the reports of our Lord's words in the Gospels there is left no uncertainty about the fact that He taught that the unrepentant are bringing upon themselves the most absolute form of damnation. In vivid pictorial descriptions Jesus portrayed this fact. He describes for instance the fate of the man who went to the wedding-feast without the wedding-garment in the following words: "Then the king said to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and cast him out into the outer darkness; there shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth" (Matt. xxii. 13). In almost identical words the fate of the man who,

¹ The term "eternal life", says W. F. Howard, "is eschatological in its origin" (*Christianity according to St. John* [1943], p. 109).

as a result of distrust in his lord, hid his talent, is depicted in Matt. xxv. 30.

From these and other words of our Lord in which He described the fate of the unrepentant in parabolic pictorial form, it becomes clear what, according to the teaching of Jesus, the essence is of the fate of those who refuse to repent and to believe in Him.

That our Lord did not want His words concerning this matter to be taken in a literal, materialistic way, follows for instance from the fact that He sometimes pictured the misery of the unrepentant by using phrases like the above-mentioned "cast into outer darkness", but at other times spoke of "depart from Me into the eternal fire" (Matt. xxv. 41). Where there is fire, there cannot be utter darkness. So our Lord obviously intended that we should understand His words symbolically.

To be "cast into utter darkness" then stands for the fact that they will be completely cut off from all communion with God. For God is the God of light. And, in Scripture, living in communion with God is described as living in the light. To be cast into utter darkness thus means to be utterly God-forsaken and to be living in complete spiritual alienation from Him, Who is the source of all true light and life.

That in this state of God-forsakenness the unrepentant will suffer the greatest anguish, our Lord taught by each time adding the forceful words: "there [where they are cast into utter darkness] shall be the weeping and the gnashing of teeth." The definite article before both expressions (*ὁ κλαυθμός* and *ὁ βρονγμός*) emphasises the absoluteness of the misery and terror that will reign there where men are cast away from the blessed presence of God (in the sense that they are totally excluded from fellowship with Him).

"Fire" in Scripture is the symbol of the holy and righteous wrath of God (Deut. ix. 3; Isa. xxxiii. 14; Ps. lxx. 5; Num. xvi. 35; Isa. lxvi. 15, 16, 24; Jer. xvii. 4). Thus, where our Lord speaks of the unrepentant being cast "into the eternal fire" (Matt. xviii. 8, xxv. 46), He gives expression to the fact that they will live, far removed from His kingdom of grace, under the eternal, holy wrath of God, because they rejected His love and grace.

According to our Lord's teaching the unrepentant are already in this life lost and judged (John iii. 18, 36). All except

those who believe in Him *are* under the righteous wrath of God and will remain lost if they do not repent. Jesus came to seek those who *are* lost, who *are* dead in their sins (Luke xv. 32). The unrepentant, by living out of communion with God, and with their guilt still resting on themselves, are already in this life lost.

But at the same time our Lord clearly taught that at the Consummation, when the Last Judgment arrives, the unrepentant will be *finally* banished into "the outer darkness" and into "the eternal fire" (Matt. xxv. 41, 46).

This raises the question what happens to the unrepentant from the time of their death until the Final Judgment. Although our Lord did not teach much explicitly concerning the intermediate state, He did in any case, for instance through the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, make it clear that immediately after death already, the unrepentant are in "Hades" irrevocably in anguish, while the saved are in blessedness. Although the parable is not to be taken as a literal and topographical description, it nevertheless brings out forcibly the fact that there will be continued personal consciousness after death and that the unrepentant will then already in a certain sense be cast into utter darkness—irrevocably excluded from the Lord and His redeemed worshippers.

It is true that our Lord, when speaking of death, used words like "sleeping" or "fall asleep" (Matt. ix. 24, John ix. 4, xi. 10), but by this He was only describing their condition in relation to the life on earth. The dead are no longer *en rapport* with this earthly life, and are in this sense "asleep". That they are however awake and conscious regarding the "other world" is clearly taught in Luke xvi. 22, xxiii. 43; John xi. 25, 26.

The unrepentant person sins *as man*—as one possessing body and soul. Therefore it is natural that our Lord teaches (John v. 29) that after the intermediate state in which the unrepentant suffered only as disembodied spirits, at the Parousia they will be raised. And as people possessing once more body and soul, they will be judged and banished from His gracious presence and cast into Gehenna—the place of eternal damnation.

Jesus taught that the Judgment in ultimate sense belongs to God (Matt. xviii. 35), but that the Father will act through Him (Matt. xxv. 32; John v. 22; Matt. xiii. 46).

The norm according to which the unrepentant will be judged

will be in highest instance their attitude towards Jesus—as exhibited in their thoughts and deeds (Matt. x. 26, and especially Matt. xxv. 41-46). Each one shall be righteously judged according to the measure of light he possessed. And so also will there be different degrees of punishment (Luke xii. 47; Matt. x. 15, xi. 22; Luke x. 12-15; John xv. 22, 24).

That the fate of the unrepentant is going to be that of eternal, unending misery seems to be taught by passages like Matt. xxv. 46: "these shall go into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life". Where the same word *αἰώνιος* is used in the same sentence to describe the duration of the life of blessedness and that of damnation, there does not seem to be any possibility of limiting the *αἰώνιος* in the case of the unrepentant to a period (however long or short) to which there will come an end. Thus, although it is true that etymologically *αἰώνιος* may mean only "that which extends through a certain *αἰών* or period of time", the context seems to show that an unending character is ascribed to the punishment. This seems also to be pointed to by the figurative descriptions of the fate of the unrepentant our Lord used, such as "unquenchable fire" and the "never-dying worm" (Mark ix. 43-48).

There seems thus to be no place in the teaching of Jesus for the theories of "hypothetical universalism" (teaching that the unrepentant will always, even after death and the Judgment, have the opportunity to repent and be saved), of "total universalism" (teaching that every one, even Satan and his angels, will inherit eternal life), nor of "conditional immortality" (teaching that the human soul is not naturally immortal, but only becomes immortal through obedience towards God, so that the unrepentant will ultimately cease to exist and only the redeemed will live eternally).

When turning to the Epistles and Revelation, we find they teach, sometimes from different angles, the same as our Lord taught regarding the fate of the unrepentant.

The Meaning of the Word ἀπόλλυμι. Since this word is so often used in the New Testament to describe the present state as well as the future fate of the unrepentant, it is important to investigate what its exact meaning is.

According to Liddell and Scott it is used in Classical Greek for "to destroy utterly", "kill", "slay", "demolish", "lay

waste", "lose utterly", "perish", "die", "to fall into ruin", "to be undone", "to be lost", "fall away", "fail", "to be wretched or miserable".

In other words it is a term with a remarkably comprehensive meaning—pointing to the most utter form of misery and ruin. It lends itself thus naturally for use in describing the fate of those who in this life live without the fellowship of God and who are, finally, as a result of continued guilt, banished from the gracious presence of God.

In the Septuagint ἀπόλλυμι is used mostly to translate Heb. 'ābhad, which means "to stray", "wander", "be lost", "perish" or "be destroyed". These meanings thus also point to complete misery and ruin.

Where it is used in the New Testament of the condition in this life of unsaved man, it describes the fact that he is, by living without the fellowship of God, essentially dead (without spiritual life) and under the righteous curse of God (Luke xv. 32; cf. John iii. 36). And where it is used of the fate of the unrepentant after the Final Judgment, all the meanings of ἀπόλλυμι are, as it were, taken together, to put into human terms the indescribable God-forsakenness and spiritual darkness and suffering of those that have rejected the redemption of God.

However incomprehensible all this is to our human minds, we rest in the assurance that God is perfect in love and righteousness and will never act unjustly even to the least of His creatures. And we know that God so loved the world that He sent His only-begotten Son, so that everyone who believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life.

J. NORVAL GOLDENHUYS.

*Pretoria,
South Africa.*