THE DELAY OF THE PAROUSIA

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IN the *Rückblick* to the third edition of his book *Christus und die Zeit*[1] Professor Oscar Cullmann takes the opportunity of reassessing his thesis in the original edition of that book and of reaffirming it. The thesis itself is by now one with which we are very familiar. Broadly speaking, it is that the mid-point in the eschatological perspective of the primitive church is to be equated with the Christ-event, at which moment time is "divided anew" (*in Christus die Zeit neu eingeteilt ist*[2]). A "tension" (*Spannung*) thus emerges in the view of history presented by the NT writers, since they are convinced that while the center of history has been reached, its end is "still to come."[3] The decisive battle has been fought and won, but the war is still in progress.

Professor Cullmann maintains in this new essay that he has been misrepresented by the Barthians and others, who have suggested that his major preoccupation is with "linear time" as such. He insists that the concept of linear time is simply a background consideration to the essential problem which concerns him, the tension between the "is now" and the "not yet" of NT eschatology, the shift in movement away from "many to one," and towards "one to many."[4] Cullmann claims that, like the NT writers themselves, the theoretical concept of time *eo ipso* does not interest him, and that this entire study is devoted to an investigation of the twin poles of tension and "orientation" (*Orientierung an der Mitte*).[5] He goes on to say that the NT does not make philosophical distinctions between time and eternity, or speculate in isolation about the being apart from the activity of God;[6] and his own approach (as we would expect from our knowledge of his christological studies) seeks to be similarly functional.

The apparent obliqueness of this leisurely introduction to the subject of the delay of the parousia, and its effects on the theology of the NT, will not, I hope, obscure either the importance of this particular con-

[1] O. Cullmann, *Christus und die Zeit*[3] (1962), pp. 9–27.
[2] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[3] *Ibid.*
[4] *Ibid.*, p. 19.
[5] *Ibid.*, pp. 19–20.
[6] *Ibid.*, p. 22.

tribution of Cullmann to our understanding of NT eschatology, or its place in the study before us. To it, we shall return. Meanwhile, we may well ask how much of a problem the delay of the parousia was to the NT writers. If, in the light of the historical life and work of Jesus Christ, a radical reorientation of eschatological thought really took place, this means on the one hand that the patterns of eschatology discernible in the NT are coherent, and do not replace one another in a fundamentally revised form as the imminent expectation of the parousia[7] recedes; and on the other that the nonoccurrence of an event that was clearly expected sometime, did not lead to agonies of eschatological reappraisal in which the disturbing fact, χρονίζει ὁ κύριός μου ἔρχεσθαι, became an all-absorbing problem.

Our investigations will take particular account of two major NT areas, the synoptic gospels and St. Paul.

The Synoptic Gospels

The problem of a delayed parousia ceases to be a problem (at least to us), if it can be shown that parousia involving a *second* coming of Jesus never formed part of Jesus' own understanding and teaching. The variations on the theme of realized eschatology are many. Dr. C. H. Dodd himself, while adopting the position in *The Parables of the Kingdom* that the kingdom of God in all its fullness has arrived, nevertheless allows that there is every reason to believe that Jesus "contemplated a further period of history after his departure,"[8] and agrees that such a saying as Mark 13 26 (τότε ὄψονται τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν νεφέλαις) certainly belongs to the earliest tradition of dominical *logia*, even if its present *Sitz im Leben* must be rejected.[9] Yet Dodd's main contention is that the predictions by Jesus of his survival and of the triumph of the cause of God in his person, were interpreted by the early church in the light of its own experience.[10] Where he had referred to *one* event, the primitive Christians distinguished two — resurrection in the past, and appearance in the future.[11]

It is well known that in order to establish this aspect of his thesis, Dr. Dodd lays considerable emphasis on word meanings, and particularly

[7] The term παρουσία in the NT is, when applied to Christ, near-technical; though this usage is in fact infrequent. Justin Martyr (*Apol. i*, 52, 3) is the first to distinguish between the first and second comings of Christ (though cf. Heb 9 28), and then he uses παρουσία for both.

[8] C. H. Dodd, *The Coming of Christ*[2], p. 17.

[9] C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*[3] (1936), pp. 102 f.; cf. G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future*, p. 100.

[10] C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 101.

[11] *Ibid.*

on the interpretation of ἐγγίζειν in Mark 1 15, and of φθάνειν in the Q parallel, Matt 12 28=Luke 11 20. A recent article by R. F. Berkey in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*,[12] however, draws attention once more to the hazards of this method, and to the difficulties involved (even in English) when clarifying the sense of the verb "to draw near." Berkey points to the ambiguity surrounding both Greek terms, ἐγγίζειν and φθάνειν, and their possible Semitic cognates, נָגַע=מָטָא. In the War Scroll of the Qumran documents, for example, the verb נָגַע is used with the dual meaning of "making contact" and "approaching."[13] He concludes that in the synoptic passages under discussion there is "ample evidence for both 'realized' and 'unrealized' eschatology,"[14] since the "when" of the kingdom of God in the NT is notoriouslv and deliberately ambiguous.

Uneasiness is rightly and inevitably experienced in the face of any attempt to peg down eschatological realizations in temporal confines, and this is a further reason why we are not so far compelled to eliminate from the teaching of Jesus the possibility that he himself anticipated an interval between the resurrection and the parousia mentioned, a period that would culminate in the appearance of the Son of man for judgment, with vindication and in glory. The fact is assured, but its timing uncertain (Mark 13 32 *f.*).

If, however, with Dr. Dodd, allowance is made for the dominical teaching of the synoptics to contain a note of eschatological consummation, in some sense a *future* event, is it necessarily unlikely that Jesus anticipated and taught that this would coincide with his own reappearance? Otherwise, and perhaps in any case, the meaning and manner of that τέλος are open to serious question. But if the delay of an expected parousia in fact constituted a major crisis for the early church, how may we be certain that this very expectation — with all the elements of eschatological futurity and even the deliberate ambiguity (for example) of ἐγγίζειν and its cognates — was not read back into the teaching of Jesus as the direct result of what is now seen to be, on this showing, a wrong reorientation — to the end, instead of to the middle? Was not the teaching of Jesus originally emptied of any ἐλπίς of his ἐπιφάνεια?

The views of J. A. T. Robinson on this point are well known. In his book *Jesus and his Coming*, he professes himself unwilling to build on the NT teaching about the second coming "more or less as it stands," and he prefers to "move downstairs" in an attempt to discover how the primitive Christian expectation of Christ's return "from heaven to earth

[12] R. F. Berkey, "ΕΓΓΙΖΕΙΝ, ΦΘΑΝΕΙΝ, and Realized Eschatology," *JBL*, 82, 2 (June 1963), pp. 177 ff.

[13] See 7 4 and 17 11.

[14] R. F. Berkey, *loc. cit.*, p. 187.

in manifest and final glory," which cannot be extracted from the *verba Christi*, arose.[15] He claims that Jesus' own expectation involved the twin notions of vindication and visitation, but suggests that these referred respectively to the immediate vindication *to* God of Christ and of his own, and to the visitation in judgment already inaugurated by his ministry.[16] In the face of a parousia that did not actually occur, the early church provided a second focus for an expectation already contained in its own κήρυγμα, and this involved "the splitting of a unity" rather than "the deliberate creation of a duality"; it meant "the addition of a futurist element to a gospel that originally knew no such hope."[17] We are not far from the position of Dr. Dodd already outlined; and once again Dr. Robinson (*op. cit.*, pp. 23 and 58) is prepared to concede a measure of futurity to a consummation he nevertheless does not define.

Another approach to the same problem is provided by the work of the German scholar, Erich Grässer, whose full-scale treatment of this theme of the delay steadily maintains, in the face of all the literary and theological excavation carried out by C. H. Dodd, J. Jeremias, and J. A. T. Robinson, that the eschatology taught by Jesus was entirely futurist.[18] No tension exists, since the imminent future is all-pervasive; although the kingdom as a future event (*Ereignis*) exerts ethical pressures in the present.[19] In order to come to terms with anticipation which failed to become actual, the early church resorted to an explanatory scheme which developed as time went on. Sayings were introduced which contained a note of uncertainty (*Ungewißheit*) about the time of the arrival of the kingdom (Mark 13 33), and this in turn led to sayings (cf. Luke 12 35) and parables (cf. Mark 13 34–36) calling for watchfulness, and, as with the parable of the Ten Maidens (Matt 25 1–13), suggesting that the promise was merely delayed (*Der Herr verzieht die Verheißung! nur billig ist*).[20] Finally, the situation demanded the promises (such as Mark 9 1 and Luke 18 7) that the end would come despite its delay; and this was supported further by the synoptic apocalypses which outline all that must take place before that could happen.[21]

[15] J. A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and his Coming*, pp. 11 ff. and 24 ff. He dismisses summarily the λόγος κυρίου of I Thess 4 15 (concerning the relation of living and dead Christians to Christ at the parousia) in this discussion. But if it refers, as it easily could, to an authentic logion now embedded in the Johannine tradition, its bearing is significant.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 36 ff.

[17] *Ibid.*, p. 158. For a treatment of five parousia parables in this vein, see J. Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (Eng. tr., 1954), pp. 38 ff.

[18] E. Grässer, *Das Problem der Parusieverzögerung in den synoptischen Evangelien und in der Apostelgeschichte* (*ZNW.*, 1957).

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 74. [20] *Ibid.*, pp. 77 ff., 127.

[21] *Ibid.*, pp. 128 ff.; cf. N. Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, pp. 145 f.

A critique of this position is provided by Dr. Norman Perrin, in his recent volume *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, where he shows that Dr. Grässer's theory of a nonexistent tension between the present and the future in the teaching of Jesus rests on the repeated ascription to the early church of sayings that he himself admits *could* have originated with Jesus.[22] In any case, the authenticity of the synoptic apocalyptic material, to take only one example, remains very much an open question, and the contention of Dr. Beasley-Murray[23] has yet to be answered satisfactorily, namely, that in the discourse of Mark 13 (and parallels) Jesus seems to be preparing his disciples for a future period which would involve both mission and persecution;[24] and this is precisely the situation normatively found in Acts as the context of evangelism. Small wonder, then, that both in Mark 13 10 f., as in the Q logion of Matt 10 19 f. and Luke 12 11 f., the aid of the Holy Spirit is promised for proclamation in a juridical setting: "when they bring you to trial . . . it is not you who speak, but the Holy Spirit" (Mark 13 11).

It is impossible to assess in critical detail all the arguments so far outlined. It has simply been suggested that no *prima facie* reason exists for eliminating from the synoptic teaching of Jesus his own expectation of a postresurrection period of history, to be closed by a τέλος involving his parousia. It remains to provide a focus within the gospels against which this conclusion may be tested, and to discover how much shaping (if any) of synoptic material was provoked by the delay of a second parousia clearly (if, on the showing of some scholars, wrongly) expected by primitive Christianity.

What, then, of the synoptic logia of Jesus which suggest not only that the parousia would take place, but also that it would take place speedily, and even within the lifetime of his hearers? Two verses, each a monumental *crux interpretum*, may be selected for consideration: Mark 9 1 and Matt 10 23.

1. *Mark 9 1.* The saying of Mark 9 1 possibly does not stand in its original context.[25] It concludes a block of teaching (8 34 ff.) from which it does not naturally arise, and it precedes the account of the Transfiguration (9 2–8) which Mark may well have regarded as its partial fulfillment. Several interpretations of the meaning of "some standing here who will not taste death before they see the kingdom of God come with power" have been advanced. C. H. Dodd construes the verse according to his "realized" formula, and presses for "understand" as the meaning of ἴδωσιν, and "to have come already," in the strictly past

[22] N. Perrin, *op. cit.*, pp. 146 f.

[23] G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future* (1954); and the companion volume *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen* (1957).

[24] *Jesus and the Future*, p. 192.

[25] So Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark, ad loc.*, p. 386.

sense, as the meaning of ἐληλυθυῖαν.[26] Other suggestions take θάνατος to mean "spiritual death"; refer the advent of the kingdom to the destruction of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 or to Pentecost; and generalise the meaning of εἰσίν τινες ὧδε τῶν ἑστηκότων, until the phrase applies to any group of disciples in the undefined future. But the natural point of reference, as Mr. Cranfield notes, is the Transfiguration itself.[27] A short while (six days, vs. 2) after this announcement, the disciples "see" (ἴδωσιν) a further irruption of the power and sovereignty of God, and this, in typically dynamic fashion, is proleptic of the resurrection, and in turn of the parousia itself. Immediate events in this way contain the eschatological future, and only the present is invested with chronological definition. As a result, this particular saying would cause no difficulty if its ultimate fulfillment were delayed, since its immediate fulfillment, itself proleptic (and in any case understood in the light of the kingdom already inaugurated[28]), soon came to pass.

2. *Matt 10 23.* However this verse is taken, it contains difficulties. The injunction to flee from one town to the next in the face of persecution, reads perhaps strangely after the action recommended in vs. 14 ("shake off the dust from your feet"). Further, vss. 17–22, descriptive of the signs before the end, seem to interrupt the connection of thought between vss. 16 and 23. But taking vs. 23 as it stands, what is meant by the verb ἐλθῇ, in "you will not have gone through all the towns of Israel, before the Son of man comes"? Robinson has no hesitation in claiming that these words referred originally to the "reign of terror associated with the fall of Jerusalem";[29] and, as with Mark 13 30 and 9 1, he suggests that the saying has possibly received an eschatological "twist," designed to eliminate a chronological reference which became embarrassing because it was wrongly understood. The new temporal reference shifts the emphasis, and the "coming of the Son of man" is projected happily into "an imminent but ever receding future."[30]

One telling reason, however, for asserting the genuineness of this saying, is that in the sense in which the early church would have understood the verb ἔρχομαι of the Son of man in such a context, the prediction remained unfulfilled prophecy. If the evangelist were really troubled by it, he would (on Robinson's argument) have surely "twisted" it out of existence, and not left it in a form which, *pace* Dr. Robinson, contains a reference that is difficult precisely because it *is* more or less immediate, rather than distant. How, then, are we to understand it?

[26] C. H. Dodd, *Parables of the Kingdom*, pp. 53 f.

[27] C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark, ad loc.*, pp. 287 f.

[28] A term we have learned to associate with the theology (*inter alios*) of R. H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus.*

[29] J. A. T. Robinson, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

[30] *Ibid.*, p. 93.

I see no reason at all why vs. 23b should not be taken as the conclusion to advice given in a mission-persecution setting, in which ἔλθῃ refers to the parousia, and which, as a result, is designed to encourage the disciples and their successors. But at the same time the reference in the mind of Jesus himself may also have been to the immediate events of the fall of Jerusalem, and εἰς τὴν ἑτέραν in vs. 23a could easily have foreshadowed Pella. In this case we are presented with a further example of the double perspective already encountered in the teaching of Jesus, in which the fall of Jerusalem now becomes proleptic of the end.[31]

If we are right to discover in the teaching of Jesus a reflection of the eschatological tension between the present and the future, which is most clearly seen (as Dr. Perrin shows[32]) in the Lord's Prayer itself, and comes to rest in the associated theology of βασιλεία and παρουσία, we are not compelled to posit, with Günther Bornkamm, for example, that the experience of delay in the parousia of the κύριος was "written into" certain parables (notably the Wicked Servant, Matt 24 48; the Ten Maidens, Matt 25 5 and the Talents, Matt 25 19) "with unmistakable allegorising."[33] Apart from the fact that the element of delay is a perfectly reasonable primary feature in any parable of crisis, χρονίζει here, as in Luke 12 45, calmly states a fact, rather than agonisingly seeking an explanation.

St. Paul

What justification is there for insisting, as Professor A. M. Hunter does in his book *Paul and his Predecessors*,[34] that "Paul grew in eschatological insight as in grace"? And what does this imply? Are we to suppose a steadily evolving and developing line of eschatology, in the course of which (within about fifteen years) an unmistakably Pauline view of the end emerges, jerkily freeing itself, like a hatching moth, from the cocoon of a pre-Christian apocalyptic apparatus? And does this in turn mean that to cut across the Pauline *corpus* at one point, say Ephesians, is to discover doctrine of a sort different from that at an earlier point, say I Thessalonians? Given that Paul was indebted to a substructural *paradosis*, is it possible to detect beyond this basis lines of eschatology which in fact derive from it, but which actually converge at a number of different growing points? In other words, to what extent

[31] Similarly, the connection in the apocalypse of Mark 13 between vss. 5–23, 24–27, and 28–37 is made less difficult if we take seriously the contrast between (for example) ταῦτα in vs. 30, and ἐν ἐκείναις ταῖς ἡμέραις in vs. 24.

[32] N. Perrin, *op. cit.*, pp. 191 ff.

[33] G. Bornkamm, "End-Expectation and Church in Matthew," in G. Bornkamm *et al.*, *Tradition and Interpretation in Matthew* (Eng. tr., 1963), p. 42, n. 3.

[34] P. 98.

is any unitary exegesis of Pauline eschatology possible, and what effect upon his perspective (if any) was caused by the delayed parousia of Christ?

Before suggesting lines of approach in answer to these questions, it will be useful to have before us some of the factual evidence. In the earlier Pauline epistles, I and II Thessalonians, the parousia seems to be expected in Paul's own lifetime (I Thess 2 19); it is associated with the "day of the Lord," which is felt to be "at hand" (5 2), though it will be heralded by apostasy and the revelation of the "lawless one" (II Thess 2 8), and will precipitate judgment (1 8 f.) and resurrection (I Thess 4 16 f.).[35] But there remains room for ethical exhortation, and upon this basis indeed; so that Paul is able to make plans for a visitation (I Thess 3 10), issue instructions about Christian marriage (4 4 ff.) and social conduct (4 11 f.), and plead for edification (5 11; II Thess 3 5).

I Corinthians suggests similar themes, even if the atmosphere lacks some of the colorful apocalyptic of the earlier epistles. The parousia is still, apparently, expected within the lifetime of the writer (15 51; cf. 4 5), so that *marana tha* becomes a genuine heart cry (16 22). The resurrection of the righteous, which depends upon that of Christ (15 20–23; cf. 6 14), will be signalled by the parousia itself (15 51 f.).[36] This is once more anticipated by "distress" (7 26), and it is accompanied by the destruction of death (15 26), the changing (ἀλλαγησόμεθα) of the living (51), and the consummation of the τέλος, when every ἀρχή, ἐξουσία, and δύναμις conceivable, gives way to the βασιλεία of God himself (24–28). The epistle includes fresh emphasis on Christian conduct during the interval before the parousia, freely illustrated, together with a classic formulation of the doctrine of the church (I Cor 12), and a famous plea for spiritual growth (12 31 and ch. 13).

The perspective of II Corinthians[37] alters very little. The parousia is still near (1 14), and it is still associated with judgment (5 10). Paul adds a slice of teaching about the resurrection body (5 1–10), which can only with difficulty be made (as it is by Dr. Robinson[38]) to carry a corporate reference, and which again does not dwell on the moment at which the "heavenly dwelling" (vs. 2) is assumed.

Romans, in contrast to II Thessalonians, enlarges the soteriological scope so as to replace the fact of widespread impenitence (II Thess 1 8) with the prospect of widespread conversion. "Israel" can no longer be conceived in purely national or merely geographical terms (Rom 9 6),

[35] The authorship of these two epistles is assumed to be identical.

[36] There is no conflict in the time sequence between I Cor 15 35–49 and 51–53, since the "agricultural" exposition of the earlier verses is not temporally precise.

[37] The number of documents distinguished in the epistle, and their sequence, will not greatly affect this analysis.

[38] J. A. T. Robinson, *The Body*, pp. 76 ff.

and God's mercy and salvation are inclusive in their design (10 12 f.; 11 32). But, although marginally, the theme of an imminent parousia (13 11 f.) involving judgment (14 10) still appears. And both epistles, Romans and II Corinthians, contain an ethic which is eschatologically determined, poised midway between the ἔσχατον already passed, and that to come (cf. II Cor 13 5; Rom 13 13 f.).

The Philippian epistle combines an equally decisive faith in the parousia (1 10; 2 16, using ἡμέρα Χριστοῦ) with a serene belief in the better life σὺν Χριστῷ beyond that moment (1 23). At one point the two thoughts are brought together: "we . . . are citizens of heaven, and from heaven we expect our deliverer to come" (3 20, NEB). The suggestion of Thorleif Boman[39] is that the movement in Paul's eschatology from the Hebraic concentration on time (the end) to the more hellenistic preoccupation with space (the beyond), illustrated particularly by Philippians, meant that any crisis produced by a delayed parousia was "conquered before it arose."[40] If so, this adds weight in another direction to the conclusions we shall be reaching.

We are left with the Pauline eschatology, as I take it to be, of Colossians and Ephesians. In both epistles ζωὴ αἰώνιος (though the phrase itself does not appear) is the present possession of Christians (Col 1 13; Eph 1 7 and 2 1), and this is seen to be universally addressed both in its application (Col 1 20) and consummation (Eph 1 10). Meanwhile the church grows in Christlikeness and maturity (Eph 4 11–16). But in neither of these epistles is the end spiritualised out of existence. Paul still speaks of the ἡμέρα ἀπολυτρώσεως as the *terminus ad quem* for the sealing of believers in the Spirit (Eph 4 30; cf. Phil 1 6); and a reference in Colossians (3 4) to the φανέρωσις of Christ, upon which that of the Christian depends, recaptures some of the earlier flavor of suddenness. Meanwhile, Christians (by their conduct) are to make the most of the interval (4 5), however long that may be. Similarly, the notion of the irrupted kingdom of God (though once more the phrase itself is rarely used) is for Paul a vivid *point de départ* for his theology throughout the *corpus*. Upon this basis, eschatological life "in the Spirit" may begin. The Thessalonian Christians (for example) are bidden to wait for God's Son from heaven (I Thess 1 10); but their attendance involves a demonstration of the trinity of Christian moral virtues, faith, hope, and love (1 3), and for this purpose they have received the gift of God's Spirit (4 8). Again, the high ecclesiology of I Corinthians is not far removed in thought, even if it differs in expression, from that of Ephesians. Those who are ἐν Χριστῷ belong to the com-

[39] T. Boman, "Hebraic and Greek Thought-Forms in the New Testament," in *Current Issues in New Testament Interpretation*, edd. W. Klassen and G. F. Snyder (1962), pp. 6 f.

[40] *Ibid.*, p. 12.

munity of the Spirit, in which is cultivated not so much individual piety, as the corporate development and application of an interdependent κοινωνία (I Cor 12 24b–31; cf. Eph 4 11 f.).

Enough has been said to suggest that the task of analysis before us is not necessarily assisted by imposing upon it traditional patterns. I want to suggest that instead of a radical departure from Paul's earlier view of the parousia, the delay of which gave rise to hasty revisions, we are confronted in the Pauline epistles with a homogeneous eschatological outlook, in which Paul's own background and intellect, as well as the differing milieux and problems of his readers, cause more or less the same thing to be said in different ways. The differences of eschatological *genre*, in fact, are apparent rather than real.

It will be important, before we come any nearer to this conclusion, to glance at the influences which helped to shape Paul's eschatological outlook. The influence and bearing of the apostolic *kerygma*, and therefore (as I would say) of the teaching of Jesus himself, are obvious.[41] It is well known in addition that, taking the terms as they stand, Père Cerfaux[42] has attempted to discover the hellenistic as well as the Jewish forces at work in this area of Paul's thought. He has pointed out the technical, festive connotations attaching to the word παρουσία itself — in the realm of politics, where it was used to describe the triumphal entrance of rulers (as in the case of Attalus III, according to the decree issued in a city of Pergamum); and also in the sphere of religion, where it signified "the presence or manifestation of a god."[43] In time these two senses inevitably colored each other, and both lend significance (for example) to the representation of a "procession" which goes out to meet the Lord "in the air," in I Thess 4 17; a *motif* which in turn recaps the liturgy of the Last Supper, and therefore the fact of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem.

But however constraining we may consider the Greek pressures on the language of NT eschatology to be, we are not able to side-step (any more than Père Cerfaux himself would wish) the fundamentally Jewish setting from which Paul's own eschatological position derives. This has been traced and described by Professor H. J. Schoeps, in his important book, *Paulus: Die Theologie des Apostels im Lichte der jüdischen Religionsgeschichte*. Schoeps considers that eschatological expectation belongs to the most primitive part of Israel's faith, and is to be seen against the background of covenant theology itself.[44] He detects the twin threads of political and (from the second century B.C.) supernatural messianic

[41] See my article "Patterns of New Testament Eschatology," *Churchman*, 76, 3 (September 1962), pp. 141 ff.

[42] L. Cerfaux, *Christ in the Theology of St. Paul* (Eng. tr., 1959), pp. 32 ff.

[43] *Ibid.*, p. 32.

[44] H. J. Schoeps, *Paul* (Eng. tr., 1961), pp. 88 ff.

expectation, and reminds us that the second trend of thought, according to which the Messiah was awaited as Savior, whose appearance would usher in the final stages of cosmic catastrophe, finds expression in a body of apocalyptic literature (Daniel, Enoch, and IV Ezra) which was "much more calculated to harmonize with the speculation of the apostle Paul."[45] The appearance of the figure of the בר אנש, invested by the apocalyptists with all the visionary apparatus belonging to a transcendental futurity, drives a wedge between this aeon and the next, and causes a reinterpretation of the messianic idea (not least in the consciousness of Jesus himself, who combines with it the notion of suffering), which finally becomes "deeply harmonious with the conceptual world of Paul."[46]

This brings us back to the question of the interval. Jewish eschatology, whether that of the Psalms of Solomon or of the apocalyptists, is seen to be entirely futurist. Paul's eschatology differs fundamentally, in that for him the ἔσχατον has already begun. But for both *some* event lies in the future — either the advent of the new aeon, mundane or supramundane, or the ἀποκατάστασις itself. The question remains: "My master is delayed in coming" (Luke 12 45). But how *long* is he delayed? The Jews themselves were not slow to speculate about this. The question, "when will the end of the first aeon and the beginning of the second take place?" (IV Ezra 6 7) was not uncommon. Indeed, it was on the lips of the disciples of the Lord: τί τὸ σημεῖον τῆς σῆς παρουσίας καὶ συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος; (Matt 24 3). The suggestion of Professor Schoeps is that Paul, like his Jewish antecedants, anticipated only a short interim period — "forty years at most"[47] — itself messianic, before the appearance of Messiah himself and the resurrection of the dead.

It is important, if this be true, to reckon with the compelling immediacy of expectation under which Paul wrote. Ὁ καιρὸς συνεσταλμένος ἐστίν (I Cor 7 29), and the time of salvation is nearer than at the moment of incorporation (Rom 13 11).[48] He sees the "form of this world" as "passing away" (I Cor 7 31); and although it is true that the old has in one sense disappeared, and that the new has come (II Cor 5 17), the old aeon is still in fact in force, but disintegrating (I Cor 2 6). Quite clearly, whatever Paul expected, he expected it to happen soon, and no doubt within his own lifetime.[49]

[45] *Ibid.*, p. 93. [46] *Ibid.*, p. 96. [47] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[48] On this showing, the time left before the parousia would be about fifteen years (cf. H. J. Schoeps, *op. cit.*, p. 101, n. 1). There seems to be no justification for construing eschatologically the reference to the Lord being "at hand" in Phil 4 5 (so *ibid.*, p. 101).

[49] Dr. L. L. Morris has pointed out, privately, that it is nevertheless true that St. Paul has a habit of classing himself with his readers. Accordingly, if we are to claim from one passage that he expects the parousia during his lifetime, it is equally possible to claim from another (*e. g.*, I Cor 6 14) that he expects it after his death.

The *factum brutum* of a delayed parousia cuts across this expectation, however, and causes what Martin Buber calls a caesura in history. What is now to be made of Christian death which occurs before the appearing of Christ? The answer is that, in general, resurrection is to be expected only after death.[50] And what of the delay itself? The reply of Professor Schoeps is that Paul developed a theology *ad hoc* to explain the delay, and to remove uncertainties within and criticisms without. He "became an author" (*sic*), and mastered the situation by transferring the event to a more distant future.[51] But will this do?

Professor Cullmann's position is dismissed fairly swiftly by Schoeps.[52] In Cullmann's view, the Christ-event has given a new center to time, which means that the focus of Paul's hope lies in the past, not in the future, and that neither a delayed parousia, nor anything else, affects it; rather, "the hope for the future can now be supported by faith in the past."[53] The theologically important fact about the kerygmatic proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom is not so much the temporal location of the parousia, as the assertion that "we already stand in a new period of time."[54] If the early Christians, and indeed Paul himself, thought in terms of decades, rather than centuries or millennia, this was an "error in perspective,"[55] which he and the other NT writers quickly corrected.

As it happens, I do not find this treatment as faulty as does Professor Schoeps, who describes it as simply an example of Cullmann's "eloquence." Surely the NT perspective *is* altered by the bringing forward of the ἔσχατον; certainly we *do* stand poised between an *Urzeit* and an *Endzeit* in a manner which affects ethics as much as eschatology. But there is a further clue to be mentioned, which helps to make even more sense of this particular problem, and also illuminates the total Pauline eschatological *schema.*

This is the quite simple expedient of taking seriously the way in which the Semitic mind worked. How literally, in fact, was the parousia predicted by Jesus himself and interpreted by the early church as *imminently* occurring? I have suggested that Paul certainly appears to write under this pressure, but in saying that, have we said all? Dr. Caird (for one) does not think so. He argues[56] that biblical eschatology was never intended to be interpreted literally, that it was primarily concerned with the present and not with the future, and that "it is in

[50] *Ibid.*, p. 103 and n. 3.
[51] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[52] *Ibid.*, p. 122. See Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, pp. 86 ff.
[53] *Ibid.*, p. 86.
[54] *Ibid.*, p. 87.
[55] *Ibid.*
[56] G. B. Caird, "On Deciphering the Book of Revelation," *ExpT*, 74, 3 (December 1962), pp. 82 ff.

fact a figurative way of interpreting current history." He suggests that biblical thought which is mostly concrete, and biblical language which is often paratactical, allow an easy interchange between the literal and the symbolic in the realm of eschatology, and may give rise to the apparent contradiction in the Thessalonian epistles (for example), which Paul seems to find no embarrassment, between the injunctions, "Keep awake and be sober" (I Thess 5 6) because the day may come at any moment, and "We beg you not to be excited" (II Thess 2 1 *f.*) because the day cannot come just yet. Dr. Caird concludes that the Hebrew prophets saw the future with "stereoscopic vision"; they predicted an imminent crisis in history, but they also saw beyond that an ultimate and consummating crisis of divine judgment. But the visions coalesce, so that the historic implies the eternal, and the absolute becomes clothed in the concrete. The day of the Lord is as a result never mentioned in the OT, "but what it is said to be at hand."[57]

This is, I take it, an important principle to have in mind when looking at the eschatology of Paul, as well as that of the Apocalypse, which happens to be Dr. Caird's initial concern. It will explain and help to unify the Pauline outlook in general; and it will also begin to account for the continuing effects of the tension between the imminent and delayed parousia, which we have noted in all of the epistles. Let us test this at one or two points.

We saw at the outset that the "day of the Lord" features in the first Thessalonian letter, where its advent is interpreted as imminent (5 2). Paul interprets the immediate progress of history in the light of eternal events, and we are given a vision of surprise and sudden destruction (5 3 *f.*). But he will not be thrown into confusion, or be forced to resort to desperate literary and theological invention, if the parousia does not take place so swiftly. Indeed, II Thessalonians is written a few weeks later to show why it cannot. The Christians (at least) of his generation live in the era of the Spirit (4 8; 5 19), in which life goes on. The word of God is at work (2 13), plans are made (3 11), marriages arranged (4 4), and the daily round maintained (4 11). If there *is* theological parataxis here, it eliminates inconsistency; precisely because of it, we are never really sure which picture St. Paul has in focus at any one moment.

Again, we have noticed that the figure of the "day" persists into Ephesians. We are no longer asked here to dwell on the typically Jewish apocalyptic apparatus of advent, and the length of the interim (forty years, more or less) is not Paul's chief concern, any more than it is in I Thessalonians. We still know that the consummation, cosmic and inclusive, will arrive, and meanwhile the "day" exerts its constant moral

[57] *Ibid.*, p. 84.

pressures — demands that read strangely like some of Paul's earlier injunctions (cf. I Thess 5 15 and 5 6 with Eph 4 32 and 5 14).

In view of the ground we have covered, is it too much to suppose that we do not witness in Paul's letters the fabrication of a vast "eschatological reconstruction,"[58] but rather look with him at the effect of God's saving action in Christ on both history and history's relation to eternity, at present articulated in the church, the body of Christ; and as we do so, that we perceive a shift of emphasis, but no generically different perspectives?

Conclusions

The orientation proposed by Professor Cullmann, with which we began, is seen to be a profoundly important perspective from which to view the eschatology of at least the synoptic gospels and St. Paul. Nor shall we find this less important when it is applied to other NT areas. The fourth gospel, for example, is undeniably shot through with exactly this tension between the "is now" and the "not yet" (4 23, *passim*). Its eschatology is almost entirely nonapocalyptic, and the κρίσις has already invaded time.[59] Unlike John, II Peter does seem concerned with the delayed promise, and with itemizing the nature of the coming cataclysmic dissolution, and the signs preceding it (3 5 ff.). But then the question, "Where is the promise of his παρουσία?" (3 4), is one addressed by the scoffing *outsider*, and may not have constituted an unbearable challenge to the readers themselves except by imputation.

We have already had cause to notice the link in synoptic eschatology between the parousia and the kingdom of God. In terms of the thesis we have been examining, the association of these two concepts (as in II Tim 4 1)[60] is now seen to be natural as well as inevitable for NT theology *in toto*. Neither concept is static, and both involve a τέλος. The kingdom of God, his sovereign rule in the hearts of men, is seen to arrive at a number of points from the incarnation onwards; and yet the prayer, "Thy kingdom come," is always relevant. In the same way, the parousia of God in Christ took place plainly and fully at Bethlehem and during the earthly ministry of Jesus;[61] yet he is still to appear in glory at the end of time. Meanwhile the tension persists, exerting its moral demands as much in the realm of mission as ethics, and both truths cohere — that Our Lord comes in, even as we wait for him.

[58] The phrase of W. D. Davies, in *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 286.

[59] 6 39 f. is one of a few exceptions; C. K. Barrett (*The Gospel According to St. John, ad loc.*, p. 244) accepts this as an authentic part of the tradition.

[60] Here the actual word used for the parousia is ἐπιφάνεια.

[61] So that the reverse, in the death of Christ, can be spoken of during the Transfiguration as his "exodus" (Luke 9 31).