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*Lectures.* Following on the course of Biblical lectures by Dr Leahy which ended last spring, we have a further series by the same lecturer, starting 6th October. The lectures are every Friday from 6.30 to 8.15 at the Newman Association, 31 Portman Square, London, W.1. This time Dr Leahy has chosen the Old Testament as his subject. The course covers a wide field and is intended to be a comprehensive introduction to the Old Testament aiming at giving some acquaintance with a selected number of its Books. It is hoped that the course will encourage people to read the Old Testament with greater attention and interest. The fee for the whole course of twenty-four lectures is £1 10s. 0d. Members of the Newman and Catholic Biblical Associations are charged £1 for the course. Full time students, 10s. All applications should be made to the Registrar, Newman Association, 31 Portman Square, W.1. Telephone: Welbeck 9958.

*Lending Library.* After a year of homelessness, this library has now been housed at the Newman Association and it is hoped that it will be in working order in a very short time. Terms of borrowing will be as before until further notice. Application for books should be made to the C.B.A. Librarian, Newman Association, 31 Portman Square, London, W.1.

## THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTORY

**I**F the subject which we have chosen is dry it may be some consolation for you to know that it is fashionable; we might even say that it is all the rage. But this would be small comfort for a serious assembly were it not that the topic is also of some moment. I should say of the greatest moment. It is inseparable from the fundamental question of the Kingdom of God. As you know, the establishment of the kingdom of God was the whole purpose of Christ's coming. Not the partial purpose but the whole purpose. Now this notion of the Kingdom is complex, and the complexity is not the result of our speculation, it is forced upon us by the plain meaning of a series of texts—of texts whose authenticity cannot reasonably be called in doubt. It follows that there are many avenues leading to this many-sided thing, affording us a prospect of some wing of it. Of these, eschatology is one and not the least.

Now that we have used the ugly word 'eschatology' we must say what we mean by it in order to avoid all confusion and, which comes

<sup>1</sup> A paper read at the Conference of Ecclesiastical Studies, held at Campion Hall, Oxford, during Easter Week, 1950.

to the same thing, unnecessary discussion. Eschatology is the doctrine of the Last Things; or better still the doctrine of the Latter Things. Now by 'last things' we do not mean what are commonly called the four last things—death, judgement, hell, heaven; these are included in but do not exhaust the term. I mean everything that lies on the horizon and we must remember that the horizon is something relative—it recedes as we advance. To distinguish these different termini of perspective the adjectives 'absolute' and 'relative' are commonly used but for the sake of clarity we shall avoid them. We prefer to distinguish Historical from Cosmic eschatology. By Cosmic eschatology I mean teaching which has for its subject what is commonly called the End of the World and the state of things which is to follow this universal collapse. By Historical eschatology I mean teaching concerning the end of one era and the beginning of a new. When speaking of the New Testament we may subdivide what we have called Historical eschatology into Present and Proximate; present and proximate, that is, from the point of view of the New Testament writers. The subject of what we call Present Historical eschatology is the person of Christ himself; it has been well called 'realized' eschatology: our Lord marks the drawing to an end of an old era and the beginning of a new; indeed he *is* that end and that beginning. Proximate Historical eschatology deals with the public and final collapse of the old order (the Destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple) and the consequent emergence of the new order, which we call Christianity, as an independent entity. We may regard this as the *nativity* of Christianity which was already *incarnate* in Christ.

#### OLD TESTAMENT ESCHATOLOGY

It is evident, given this comprehensive description of eschatology, that we cannot say with Guy in his recent book that 'no great prominence is given to eschatology in the Old Testament'. This is an undue and inconsistent restriction of the term. It is more accurate to say that there is no clear cosmic eschatology in the prophets, that the 'woe' and 'bliss' sequence, so common in prophetic literature, does not refer to Hell and Heaven but to a sequence in earthly history. The eschatology of the prophets is historical. It could scarcely be otherwise at a time when revelation of a future life, in any full sense of the word, was still withheld. This observation must also be borne in mind when we consider the stereotyped prophetic phrases: the 'End of Days' or the 'Day of Yahweh'. The former means simply the final phase of history so far as the speaker's perspective reaches. The 'Day of Yahweh' denotes the same from a different point of view—it is the great day when God himself takes a notable hand in historical events to bring an era to its close. There may be many such Days because, as we have said, the

perspective shifts. For Amos (viii, 9) the fall of Samaria in 721 is no doubt the Day; for Jeremias the defeat of Egypt at Karkemish in 609; in Lamentations the fall of Jerusalem in 586 (Jer. xlvi, 10; Lam. i, 12); in the last of the prophets it is the great day of religious revival when the Lord himself comes to his temple to take its worship in hand. (Mal. iii.) We need not expect from the prophets, therefore, what we have called cosmic eschatology. They deal not with the end of *the* world but with the end of *a* world, the end of an era. In a text which few critics would care to call in question and to which we shall return later, St Peter shows the legitimacy and traditional character of this interpretation. For him the life, death, resurrection, apotheosis of his Master and the effusion of his Spirit prove that the 'last days' spoken of by Joel have already dawned:

This is that which was spoken of by Joel the prophet:

It shall come to pass *in the last days*, saith the Lord, that I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh (Acts ii, 16 ff).

The 'last days' are therefore the final stage of world-history; nothing is said of their duration either in the Old or in the New Testament. Of this historical eschatology the prophets are full. The prophets were, of course, in the familiar cliché, rather forthtellers than foretellers but their forthtelling, their preaching, persistently invokes promises, encouragements, threats of God's decisive intervention in the future.

It is important to underline this statement that the genuine prophetic expectation is focused on this world and not on the next. It is true that certain pre-Christian apocalypses are affected profoundly by the hopelessness of their position, oppressed as the Jews were by the Romans. The author of the *Assumption of Moses* for instance (40 bc) turns his messianic thought to the hope of a new creation built on the ruins of the old. But this is a deviation from the original hopes. There is no doubt, that the prophets expect a kingdom on this earth. One need not, and should not, invoke the material and adventitious imagery which lies on the fringe of their mentality but there is a substantial and persistent tradition attaching to the Davidic dynasty which cannot be ignored. The evangelists themselves are not troubled when they cannot prove that their crucified master has crushed his enemies like a potter's vessel or rules with a rod of iron or makes his foes his footstool but neither Matthew nor Luke thinks it prudent to omit the Davidic genealogy of Jesus. Now a Davidic king implies an earthly kingdom and this, therefore, the prophets expected. Theirs was not the transcendental messianism of the *Assumption of Moses*.

#### DANIEL

But we should like to deal a little more fully with a text that lies (in its present form) at the end of the long messianic tradition. This

for two reasons: partly because it demonstrates the temporal nature of the expected Age, partly because it is a text of the greatest significance for the understanding of certain New Testament texts which we shall call upon later.

Using the huge canvas of apocalyptic, Daniel paints four hundred years of the history of his people; in placard-fashion he presents the successive suzerainty of Babylon, Persia, Greece and Syria. Each empire has its banner: Lion, Bear, Leopard, Dragon. But when the Ancient of Days, or the one crowned with age as Knox has it, assumes his judicial throne all these empires pass, cut off in mid-career by divine judgement. And then, the prophet continues:

I beheld till thrones were placed and the Ancient of Days sat . . . and lo! one like a son of man came with (or 'upon') the clouds of heaven and came up to the Ancient and was presented to him. And he was given power and glory and royal rank and all peoples, nations and tongues were his subjects. His power is an everlasting power never to be taken from him and his kingship a kingship never to be destroyed (Dan. vii, 9-14).

It seems clear that this kingdom, is, like those it supplants, a kingdom on this earth. Its symbol is not a brute rising, like the four, from the abyss; it is a mysterious human shape, human in origin (as the phrase 'son of man' suggests) and yet one whose investiture is in heaven. The banner of the new kingdom is not Lion or Bear but Man—though the prophet did not guess that it might be a man nailed to a cross. Now in view of what we have to say it should be carefully noted that the 'coming with the clouds' is not a coming to earth but a coming to the Ancient of Days. We are dealing with a vision and the vision is in another dimension; the coming is symbolic and horizontal not physical and vertical; the one like a son of man comes to the Ancient of Days for investiture not to the earth for judgement.

#### DANIEL AND THE NEW TESTAMENT

This remark brings us to a most portentous eschatological sentence of the New Testament. It occurs in the eschatological discourse itself and in the Trial before Caiaphas: we shall shortly make the modest but unusual claim that it is to be understood in the same way in each. I refer to the words of our Lord before the Council. Our Lord promised the Sanhedrists that very soon indeed (*ap'arti*: Matt. *apo tou nun*: Luke) they would see the son of man coming in the clouds of heaven. The Sanhedrists understood the style of apocalyptic well enough; they understood Daniel well enough to know that he spoke not of a sudden and catastrophic apparition in the heavens but of the establishment of that kingdom of God whose sign, or rather whose personification and as it were incarnation, was a son of man. They understood, more-

over, the enormous claim that lay in his calm assumption of the title 'son of man'. Our Lord's clear meaning is that, despite present appearances, it will very shortly be seen that he is in fact the sign and centre of Daniel's kingdom. That the reference is not to a single dramatic event is further underlined by the otherwise strange phrase used in Matt. *Henceforth* you shall see . . . which suggests not a single experience but an insistent and permanent impression.

We shall return to this Gospel text in another setting in a few moments but we have introduced it here first because it is inseparable from the Daniel prophecy and secondly because it prepares us for an eschatology connected not with heaven in the transcendental sense but with a heaven on earth which is the Kingdom of the Saints, as it is called in Daniel. Converging on this same notion are a number of biblical *rapprochements* at which we can only hint here. There is the interesting series of Temple texts, for instance, our Lord himself suggests a new era on earth—an era of the Gentiles counterbalancing the old era of Judaism. Indeed this very issue is raised at the Trial and there was some truth in what the false witnesses alleged. In fact our Lord had spoken of the temple of his body, of his risen body, but it was quite clear even to the public that the passing of the old order would not disturb him because he claimed the power to set up a new. This claim provokes the indignant question of the high priest: Art thou the Son of God? In reply, our Lord does not impeach the witnesses; rather he insists that he is the centre of the new messianic era prophesied by Daniel. In this sense, as he said elsewhere, he is greater than the Temple.

It is possible, too, that the odd title 'Son of Man' contains more than is usually thought. The second part of Isaias had already looked forward to the new age as to a new creation, a *palingenesia* as our Lord calls it. Now the term son of Man (*ben adam*) itself perhaps suggests this same notion—the 'second Adam' of St Paul is possibly no more than a development of our Lord's own idea. But whatever be doubtful about the detail of such texts it seems indubitable that our Lord contemplates a coming epoch in which worship is centred not on this mountain or on that but upon his own person. With his advent, therefore, the focus of worship changes. With the coming of Christ in person a new era has already dawned. This, in the phrase associated with Prof. Dodd of Cambridge, is what is meant by 'realized eschatology'; it is what we have called 'historical present' eschatology.

#### GOSPEL TEXTS

It is now time to pass to the Gospel texts which deal more explicitly with this 'present' or 'realized' eschatology in terms of the coming of the Kingdom. We have said that a sense of inconclusiveness and of

expectation is characteristic of the Old Testament as a whole. The New Testament has a very different outlook—its writers regard it as an era of fulfilment, an era in which the Kingdom of God stands revealed. We shall review one or two texts which emphasize this view of history. In this we shall find, no doubt, a powerful antidote for two diseases of Gospel criticism. The first is the out-and-out eschatology, exclusively cosmic eschatology, of which Schweitzer is the outstanding representative. He holds that our Lord expected the end of the world and his own glorious return in the lifetime of his disciples. The second is equally extreme. It claims that Jesus was not at all concerned with another world but only with the ethical improvement of this. The 'kingdom of God' is merely a world reformed in moral conduct. Against the former view we shall see that cosmic eschatology, far from being the obsession of our Lord's teaching plays, in reality, a relatively small part in it. Indeed, even apart from the formal texts this hypothesis is unacceptable. It ignores the passages which make it clear that Christ's intention was to found a society with constituted authorities and a defined programme ; it takes no account of the parables which show the kingdom as a gradually growing thing, not as a catastrophic imposition from heaven ; it forgets that the Sermon on the Mount cannot be described as a prescription for what it calls 'interim ethics' to fill in the short period between Christ's death and the imminent End ; the Sermon holds no hint of an imminent parousia but legislates clearly for a world which goes on in the same old way. But against the opposite extreme of error, the merely ethical view of our Lord's ministry, it will become apparent that even cosmic eschatology plays some part but that historical eschatology plays a very great part indeed. The texts will show that, with the coming of Christ came not only a new stimulus to ethical action but something substantial and new, almost alien to the world : a spiritual yet physical force which our Lord calls the Kingdom of God. The coming of this kingdom is a gratuitous divine intervention independent of the good or bad actions of men. It is at once a grace which re-creates the world and a domain into which man is invited to enter.

There is no doubt that the advent of this Kingdom was the very core of our Lord's teaching. The imprisonment of the Baptist spelt the end of the old régime, because 'the Law and the Prophets were until John and from that time the Kingdom was preached'. 'After John was delivered up', says Mark significantly, 'Jesus came into Galilee preaching the good news from God and saying : The time is accomplished and the kingdom of God is at hand'. As many commentators have pointed out, the term 'at hand' (*eggiken*) is equivalent to 'is here'—we need invoke no further arguments than the phrase 'the time is fulfilled' which precedes. From another source equally unassailable (call it 'Q' if you like) the disappearance of the Baptist from the scene is given the same

significance. Jesus informs the embassy, sent by the imprisoned John, that the Messiah is in their midst ; he uses terms that Isaias had reserved for the 'day of the Lord' and 'the year of the recompense of Sion' (Isaias xxxiv, 8 cf. xxxv, 5 ff). As for the Baptist himself he is the last word of law and prophets ; a new age has dawned in which prophecy has no part. The Kingdom is there for the taking if one has the energy for its conquest. Indeed, already 'the kingdom of the heavens is being stormed and the stormers are capturing it' (Matt. xi, 12). Many a prophet had looked to this fulfilment and many a Davidic king had dreamt of such a perfect kingdom but the circle gathered round Jesus had the joy of seeing it (Matt. xiii, 16 ff). The kingdom was already present in the royal power exercised by our Lord through the seventy-two. He saw in their success the end of the old empire, its king falling like lightning from heaven (Luke x, 18). He claimed it as the clear conclusion from his own exorcisms (Matt. xii, 28) : 'But if I by the finger of God cast out devils, why then the kingdom of God has come to you'. The Greek phrase used here (*ephthasen humas*) is that of Daniel vii, 22 (Theodotion). When the authenticity of this text of 'Q' is called in question we have the right to object that an *a priori* synthesis is being imposed upon the evidence.

There is another text which, though it does not mention the present Kingdom in so many words nevertheless indicates just as clearly that our Lord's emphasis is on fulfilment ; it may also serve to remove an impression of cosmic eschatology standing where it ought not. You will remember that after the Transfiguration the appearance and disappearance of Elias had been troubling the apostles. Elias had appeared after our Lord and had disappeared without furthering his mission in any way. This was not the Elias, herald of the Messiah, described by the Scribes from their reading of Malachy (iv, 5-6). Our Lord grants their expression but not their perspective. This herald, Elias, he says, has already come—in the person of the Baptist. Now Malachy had declared that this coming was to precede the great Day of the Lord ; the great Day must therefore have arrived already. Our Lord clarifies every aspect of the prophetic hope and here he clarifies its obscure eschatology. In face of the limited horizon of the prophets and in face of this text it would seem rash to speak of a return of Elias in person before the day of final judgment. Nevertheless, this is an independent question and all would at least agree that our Lord implies that the messianic kingdom has indeed arrived. The 'latter days', or 'the end of days', to use the common prophetic phrase, is now in Christ's time an accomplished reality.

Whatever the difficulties of other texts we must not loosen our hold on this conclusion. When other passages speak of the kingdom yet to come the logical inference will be that the kingdom and its coming



are complex notions. This complexity is well known to us though we rarely analyse it. Every day we pray 'Thy kingdom come', though it has come already; every morning we cry the royal messianic salute: 'Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord', though the first Palm Sunday is a thing of the past; every year the liturgy sighs for the coming of the King who has come. The truth is that the combined evidence of the texts shows that the kingdom transcends time and yet it impinges upon history; it 'comes' continuously and unobtrusively but at set times it comes with special pomp.

#### TEXTS FOR PROXIMATE ESCHATOLOGY

With this in mind we shall approach the passages which deal with the kingdom as being soon to come. We have called this 'proximate' eschatology. It is a group of texts on the meaning of which commentators are particularly in disagreement. I hope you will excuse me if I postpone the controversy until after this lecture. I have no doubt that it will follow for I am about to propose the new and provocative views of Father Feuillet of Angers whose book on Eschatology is in course of preparation, but whose ideas are already outlined in recent articles. They have cleared up so many of my own difficulties that I feel it worth while at least to put the outline before you in case it might help you too.

We may take it as certain and undisputed that our Lord does speak at times of the kingdom as if it were still to come. 'There are some standing here who will not taste death till they see the Kingdom of God coming with power'; 'I will not drink of this fruit of the vine till the kingdom of God come', and so on. But the real question is (and the question is only one question): to what aspect of the Kingdom and to what period do such remarks refer? The question arises most acutely in the interpretation of the famous eschatological discourse towards the end of all three Synoptic Gospels, but by way of introduction to this *crux interpretum* we may select a text of Luke (xvii) which, though not contained in the discourse itself, has close affinities with it.

'When shall the kingdom of God come?' asked the Pharisees. The rabbis were much concerned with the question of the date of the son of David's coming and, in the absence of sufficient data from the Old Testament, with the warning signs of its approach—hence the monotonous insistence on a sign from heaven. The question supposes that the kingdom is still to come and it appears probable that our Lord answers it in this sense if, that is to say, we judge by the future *erousi* (shall they say) of v. 21 under the influence of which comes the *ouk erchetai* (cometh not) of v. 20; if, also, we remember that the 'is' of v. 21 may well be 'shall be', since the Aramaic would probably not use the verb. If these remarks are just, our Lord's answer means that the kingdom has a future aspect but its coming will not be heralded in the

sky, i.e. not 'by observation' (*paratērēsis*=normally astronomical observation); rather it will be manifested upon earth in the midst of the Jewish race (*entos humōn*) suddenly and without warning like the lightning of v. 24.

It is possible that many will prefer to explain vv. 20-1 of the present kingdom. In this case it may be pointed out that the audience and perhaps the time and place of v. 22 ff are different, that therefore the aspect under which the kingdom is being considered may have been changed. We are free to interpret v. 22 ff of the kingdom still to come if the text thus invites us. And it does seem to invite us. The natural objection is, of course, that there is no mention of the kingdom in these verses. This enables Lagrange, for instance, to refer all to the last judgement—except vv. 31-3 which he finds troublesome since there is no point in flight at the Last Day. Yet, though there is no express mention of the kingdom, the term 'son of Man' recalls the kingdom of Daniel. The picture our Lord paints is apparently that of the disciples longing for the radiant establishment of the messianic kingdom. The 'day of the son of Man', like the 'day of Yahweh' of the prophets, suggests the great day of messianic intervention and of judgement. The image of lightning, implying not a warning sign (which has been already excluded by v. 20), also suggests the idea of sudden judgement. Lightning is a usual concomitant of divine judgement in the Old Testament but it must be carefully noted that such acts of judgement are many and none of them, of course, final. Thus, for example, in the theophanies of the psalms the lightnings are the arrows of God shot at the enemies of the psalmist. Our Lord, therefore, thinks of a judgement—of a divine intervention and, admittedly, with some *éclat*. Against whom is this judgement directed? It is most natural to suppose that it is the judgement executed upon those in who v. 25 have just rejected the son of Man; that is to say, upon the Jewish nation. Now the lightning of divine judgement struck the Temple and the City forty years after its rejection of Christ. Understood in this way the whole passage gains in clarity. We begin to comprehend the practical instructions of vv. 31-3, useless if the end of the world were the subject of the discourse; moreover, this very advice is applied to the time of the destruction of Jerusalem in Mark xiii and Matt. xxiv, as we shall see. The theory sheds light, too, on the strange verse 37. This is usually interpreted of the disciples of Christ gathering to him at the last judgement. But the image of carcase and vultures is perhaps a little unsuitable in this connection. On the other hand the expression is a commonplace of prophetic and apocalyptic literature to indicate the destruction of wicked nations and cities; it reappears in John's Apocalypse where the word of God judges the beasts (Ap. xix, 17 ff).

*To be concluded.*

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