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RELIGIOUS HISTORY  
AND  
ESCHATOLOGY

G. R. Beasley-Murray, M.Th.



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# RELIGIOUS HISTORY

AND

## ESCHATOLOGY

THE title requires definition. "Religious History" in the first instance is not thought of as the history of Christianity, nor simply as "Biblical history," but rather what the Germans call *Heilsgeschichte*, "the story of salvation," or "sacred history." There is set forth in the Bible, over against all other history, an historic process in which God was the prime Actor, a process wherein He revealed Himself in concrete fashion by interventions in specific situations in the experience of a chosen people, a process which culminated in the redeeming acts of His Son. This so-called "sacred history" did not take place in a vacuum, in isolation from the general historic process, but was intimately bound up with it. Israel was moulded by its contacts with Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome, the dominating powers of ancient history. But whereas secular historians would presumably regard these great empires as the significant forces of history, and Israel's life as a mere ripple on the surface of the stream, Israel's prophets regarded these powers as under the directing hand of God, Who moved them for Israel's sake and for the accomplishment of His purpose among all nations. In the Bible view, therefore, "secular history" is subordinate to "sacred history," and gains its meaning through the latter. From such a position it is not a great step to regard "religious history" as "history from the religious viewpoint," and a shorter step still to go on from that to define it as "history from the Biblical viewpoint."

It takes but a little consideration of the problem to realise that the Biblical interpretation of history is an eschatological one, for Revelation, in its more developed stages at least, consistently views the present in the light of the End. It is significant that the only parts of the Bible that attempt a philosophy of universal history are the apocalyptic writings, Daniel and the Book of the Revelation. To their authors, the whole point of history is the consummation to which it leads. That does not cause them to ignore the process preparatory to the End, rather it inspires them to show that the God Who ordains the End also determines the pattern of the entire process. To be vitally interested in the end of history naturally leads one to take note of history itself. Such an interest characterises even the most pessimistic of the apocalyptic writers, for their favourite occupation is to reveal how thoroughly God foreknew the course of history by dividing it up, with varying degrees of intricacy,

and putting the prophecy of the whole into the mouth of one of the ancient saints. When all account is taken of the artificiality of the apocalyptic writers, and acknowledgment made to Zoroastrianism for their idea of the successive aeons, it has to be recognised that the very idea of predictive prophecy, and the belief in God's final redemptive intervention for His people, presupposes their fundamental notion that God is the Lord of History and that He is guiding it steadily on to its victorious issue. That is a conviction central to Israel's faith, however many other nations and religions of ancient times may have shared it. It is central to our Lord's teaching also. Despite Schweitzer's exaggerations, there is something to be said for his declaration that eschatology is "dogmatic history." He believed that Jesus acted with deliberate intent to bring into history the eschatological process; when the End did not come after the preaching tour of the Twelve, Jesus went to Jerusalem to force the coming of the Kingdom by fulfilling the necessary historic conditions and receiving in Himself the Messianic woes. The failure of His plan gives the death blow to eschatology, simply by reason of its non-fulfilment. This fantasy of Schweitzer's is less the antithesis of truth than its distortion. For the Lord undoubtedly worked on the assumption that certain events must occur in history before the Kingdom of God should come. Supreme among such conditions were His own redemptive death and resurrection, with the outpouring of the Spirit; the fall of Jerusalem and spread of the Gospel through the world by His Church; and His coming in power by which He would Himself bring about the consummation of the Kingdom He had introduced. This is "dogmatic history" in the sense that the steps by which the End is achieved are already seen and are consciously taken; those steps are what we mean by the term "redemption," taken in its widest and positive sense.

With this preamble in mind, we shall turn to what I conceive to be the fundamental postulates of the eschatological view of history. We shall not venture on a general exposition of Biblical eschatology but restrict ourselves to considering it from the angle of the prophetic view of history. By so doing we shall find certain principles which may enable us to approach the general task more adequately.

### 1. *History is moving to a God-ordained climax.*

This, the most important postulate we shall require to assert, has already been presupposed in our introduction. It has been claimed that the concept of the Kingdom of God is the most characteristic notion of the Old Testament faith; if that be true, then one of the most vivid elements of the religious faith of prophet and people alike must have been the idea of the Day of the Lord. How ancient the conception is we can hardly say. Some would assert that it is older than the nation Israel itself, being taken over by them from the peoples of its environment. If that be so, and it is difficult to decide either way, there need be no offence to faith: not everything that the ancient religions

attested was wrong! If this was one of the primary notions that God implanted in the consciousness of man, its heathen associations were quickly stripped off by the prophets. Amos and his successors reminded their contemporaries that the Day of the Lord was to be one of judgment as well as of redemption: in face of some trends of modern criticism we, on the contrary, need to remember that the Day was to be one of redemption as well as of judgment. It seems impossible to wipe out from the pre-exilic prophets every reference to the Kingdom of God that was to be inaugurated at the Day of the Lord\*. In times of apostasy, the nation needed to be reminded that the Day would be the ruin of the wicked; when that lesson was learned it needed also to realise that it would see the recompense of the righteous. The Day of the Lord was the focal point of God's judging and redeeming activity in the sphere of history. As such it was to be both feared and desired.

The same outlook pervades the New Testament. We are so accustomed to drawing attention to the ethical characteristics of Jesus' teaching on the Kingdom of God, we are apt to forget that He began by issuing a call to repentance in view of its imminent coming: that presupposes the element of judgment, and it comes as an echo of the prophetic declaration of the advent of the Day of the Lord. From our documents one gains the impression that in the latter part of His ministry the thought of Jesus concentrated increasingly on the crisis that was to inaugurate the victory of the Kingdom†. In the Epistles the impending denouement appears to have overshadowed considerations as to the nature of the Kingdom; in view of the Christocentric emphasis of the New Testament as a whole, it is but natural that stress should be laid on the Person of the Redeemer rather than on His redemption.

At this point we must pause and be sure that we are heading in the right direction: is it true that Jesus shared the view of the Old Testament prophets, and the Church that followed in His steps, that history is heading for a future climax? Or did He believe that the event towards which creation moved was being enacted in His person at that very time and that *there was to be no second*? The latter is the conclusion of C. H. Dodd and of an increasing body of scholars, both in Britain and on the Continent. Professor Dodd states: "It is necessary to observe that the tradition underlying the New Testament writings and embodied in the kerygma is not simply historical but historical-eschatological. The events to which it refers are not simply

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\* For a consistent attempt to do so, see von Gall, "Basileia tou Theou." The subsequent construction of fragments into our present books of the prophets seems to demand a miracle of editorship only one stage removed from the alleged origin of the Septuagint in the Letter of Aristeas.

† It is, however, doubtful to what extent one should lay stress on a comparison of the earlier and later teaching of our Lord, in view of the findings of Form Criticism. The links that bind the narrative are rather tenuous to bear the strain of a theory of progression in His attitude to the significance of His ministry.

historical events, but *events in which history reaches its divinely ordained conclusion*; and the Christ to Whom it refers, while He is a truly historical figure, is also an eschatological figure: the Messiah, in Whom the prophecies are fulfilled" ("History and the Gospel," pp. 59-60). If we ask how an event of the past can be regarded as the goal of all history, the answer is given that "the task of the Church is to bring all historical movements into the context of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, in order that they may be judged by the divine meaning revealed in that crucial event" (Ibid., p. 173). There is so much truth in these contentions it is sometimes difficult not to be persuaded by them. But it is a question of taking a serious view of *all* the evidence: the denial that Jesus looked forward to a final Day of Judgment and Redemption involves denying the authenticity of a great deal of evidence, chiefly on the ground that it conflicts with this somewhat restricted interpretation.

It is impossible to examine adequately in the limits of this paper the teaching of our Lord on this subject, yet some attempt at justifying one's attitude must be made. Of all expositions of the relevant material at our hand, none has dealt with it more cogently and persuasively than W. G. Kümmel in his recent work, "Verheissung und Erfüllung." He begins by asserting that when our Lord stated that the Day was "near" (*ἐγγύς*) He did not mean that it was "present": "*ἐγγύς* and *ἐγγύτης* signify spacial nearness . . . that one comes nearer to a place than formerly, but does not yet reach it." When applied in a temporal sense, therefore, it signifies "a near, but not yet introduced event." The sayings are then treated under headings as follows:

(i) *The coming of the Eschaton*, e.g. "Thy Kingdom come" (Matt. vi, 10); "There be some here . . . which shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the Kingdom of God come with power" (Mark ix, 1); and Luke's version of the Passover, saying, "I will not drink henceforth of the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God shall come" (Luke xxii, 18).

(ii) *The eschatological Day*, "Watch therefore, for ye know not the Day nor the hour" (Matt. xxv, 13); "Of that day or hour knoweth no one, not even the angels in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark xiii, 32).

(iii) *The coming Judgment*, "Whosoever shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man also shall be ashamed of him when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels" (Mark viii, 38); cf. also Matt. xix, 28, Luke xxii, 30.

(iv) *The nearness of the End*, the parable of the Virgins (Matt. xxv, 1f.); the parable of the thief breaking in at an unlooked-for hour (Matt. xxiv, 42f.); the parable of the unjust judge (Luke xviii, 1-8); the confession before the High Priest, "Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of power,

and coming with the clouds of heaven" (Mark xiv, 62);\* and the enigmatic saying, "Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come" (Matt. x, 23), a logion far too embarrassing for everybody to be disposed of by putting it to the account of some supposed Jerusalemite anti-Pauline party.

Although these citations are by no means exhaustive, there is more evidence here than can be adduced for any other major element of our Lord's doctrinal teaching, such as the significance of His death, His assurance of resurrection, His estimate of His person, the formation of the Church, the ordination of the sacraments, the person and work of the Holy Spirit, sin and forgiveness, etc. Further, it should be noted that, in many exegetes' eyes, the teaching on these matters is in most cases critically suspect: there are not wanting scholars who deny that Jesus attached a sacrificial significance to His death, so they dispose of the texts that imply He did; far more believe we should strike out every anticipation of His resurrection placed in the mouth of our Lord; a considerable number will accept no text in which He claims to be divine, or in which He speaks of a spiritual community separate from Judaism, or any tradition implying a perpetuation of sacraments after His departure. True it is that few scholars will jettison the whole of this teaching but many are hesitant about certain of the items enumerated. In Britain there is something of a revolt against this mode of thinking, except in one matter, wherein our scepticism is in advance of that of the Continent, viz., in eschatology. On the whole, we say, the traditions are sound, but not in eschatology. But why stop at eschatology? It is one thing to admit a clarification of tradition on the part of the early Church, it is another to postulate a wholesale revolution in it. If the first disciples were capable of transforming the traditions so thoroughly in one respect, they could have done it in others. To insist on the presence of a large-scale corruption of our Lord's reported teaching on the Kingdom of God can be done only at the cost of questioning the reliability of the entire body of Gospel traditions. If, on the other hand, it be felt that the positions reached generally by modern Gospel criticism do not warrant such a sceptical attitude toward the Gospel material, if it appears reasonable to attach a large degree

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\* This statement, clearly an echo of Ps. cx and Dan. vii, 13, is increasingly being interpreted of the exaltation of Jesus consequent on His ascension, on two grounds: (i) the passage in Dan. vii, 13, refers to an ascent of the Son of Man to heaven, not a descent to earth; (ii) the saying of Jesus appears originally to have begun "*From now on ye shall see . . .*" (so Matt. xxvi, 64, Luke xxii, 69, and some MSS. of Mark's version). As to (i) this is a misunderstanding of Dan. vii; the judgment scene takes place on earth, where the "bestial" world-empires held their sway and where the "Kingdom of the saints of the Most High" will replace them; note that Dan. vii, 22, says that God came to judgment, which can only mean a coming to earth (so H. H. Rowley, "The Relevance of Apocalyptic," second edition, p. 30, n. 1). Regarding (ii) it is likely that Matthew's phrase ἀπ' ἄρτι "from now on," represents an original ἀπαρτί "surely," as the Chester Beatty Papyrus 47 reads in Rev. xiv, 13; see the illuminating treatment of this matter by Debrunner in his paper, "Über einige Lesarten der Chester Beatty Papyri des Neuen Testaments," reprinted from "Coniectanea Neotestamentica XI," Lund, 1947.

of authenticity to our Lord's reported teaching, then we have good reason for dealing respectfully with that part of it which treats of the Last things\*. We believe that the attempt to eradicate a futurist eschatology from our Lord's words has failed; unless we are mistaken, so agree the majority of the specialists in the subject, as distinct from the host of followers of the specialists†. In the absence of more convincing evidence, we shall continue to hold that Jesus taught, with the rest of the Bible, that history is moving at the bidding of its Lord, towards the divinely ordained goal, which is the Day of the Lord, the coming of the Kingdom in power.

## 2. *The climax of history is uniformly viewed as near.*

Here is a principle of Biblical eschatological teaching so plainly written on the pages of Scripture that it is difficult to understand how it can be missed by some expositors or denied by others. Every prophet of both Old and New Testaments looked for the end of the age as an event shortly to happen. Illustrations of this attitude abound and can be taken at random: Isaiah xiii, 6, "Howl ye, for the day of the Lord is at hand; as destruction from the Almighty shall it come." Zeph. i, 7, 14, "Hold thy peace at the presence of the Lord God; for the day of the Lord is at hand; for the Lord hath prepared a sacrifice, He hath sanctified His guests. . . . The great day of the Lord is near, it is near and hasteth greatly." The same thought is repeated in similar words in Joel i, 15; ii, 1. Ezekiel castigates those who show scepticism at the preaching of the near approach of the day and affirms, "The days are at hand and the effect of every vision" (xii, 23, cf. verses 21-28). In the New Testament the references are equally numerous. Paul states, "The night is far spent and the day is at hand" (Rom. xiii, 12); the writer to the Hebrews says, "Yet a very little while, He that cometh shall come, and shall not tarry" (x, 37); Peter writes, "The end

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\* It is consonant with current tendencies in popular Gospel criticism that although many writers are eager to point out instances of the insertion of eschatological elements into originally non-eschatological sayings, few writers since von Dobschutz appear to recognise the opposite phenomenon, viz., the "de-eschatologising" of originally eschatological sayings, a process apparent e.g. in Luke xxii, 69 (cf. Mark xiv, 62, Matt. xxvi, 64) and Luke xxi, 20 (cf. Mark xiii, 14, Matt. xxiv, 15). See von Dobschutz, "Eschatology of the Gospels," pp. 91-94, 102-105.

† If the reader is inclined to doubt this, let him compare the assured scepticism adopted in almost every popular introduction to the Gospels regarding the composition of the eschatological discourse in Mark xiii, with the reserve of such students of eschatology as F. C. Burkitt ("Jesus Christ," p. 49), C. J. Cadoux ("The Historic Mission of Jesus," pp. 11-12), H. H. Rowley ("The Relevance of Apocalyptic," p. 145f.), C. C. Torrey ("Documents of the Primitive Church," p. 17). G. Dalman uses Mark xiii as evidence for the teaching of Jesus without question, see e.g. "Words of Jesus," p. 315. Although Dr. Vincent Taylor does not accept the authenticity of the discourse, his article in the *Expository Times* (January, 1949) both reveals the change of opinion on the matter and the necessity of a more careful approach even by those who cannot accept its genuineness.

of all things is at hand" (1 Pet. iv, 7); James declares, "Be patient, stablish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is at hand" (v, 8); the entire Book of Revelation is written in the conviction, stated both in its prologue and epilogue, "The time is at hand" (i, 3), "Behold, I come quickly" (xxii, 7).

Deferring for a while the difficulties raised by this attitude of the Biblical writers, it is apparent that far-reaching consequences are involved for their view of history. If, for example, the historic process is regarded as shortly to be concluded, *the End of history must inevitably be portrayed in the historic context of a prophet's life*. We find accordingly that Isaiah sets the day of the Lord and the advent of the Messianic Kingdom in immediate connection with the downfall of Assyria (e.g. Isaiah, chs. vii-ix, x-xi); Habakkuk sets it in the context of the fall of Babylon (ii, 2-3); Jeremiah, Deutero-Isaiah and Ezekiel look for the kingdom to come when the Jews return to Palestine under the Persian regime, the Day of the Lord having in part spent itself on Israel and yet to be concluded in judgment on the heathen oppressors (see Jer., chs. xxix-xxxi, Isaiah xlix, li, Ezek. xxxvi). Haggai looks for the advent of the Messianic age as soon as the temple, then in course of rebuilding, is completed (Hag. ii). The Book of Revelation just as definitely places the Messianic woes and Second Advent in the setting of the author's own age, whether it be that of Nero or Domitian, and most of his symbolism can best be explained in relation to the conditions in which he lived.

In the light of this phenomenon, how utterly incongruous, not to say futile, appear those attempts to give literal fulfilment to the prophecies of Old and New Testaments by assuming that the ancient nations will be revived again at the End-time, so that Babylon is to be rebuilt, the Roman Empire will be re-formed, the Jews will be back in Palestine, together with the ancient tribes of Edom, Ammon, Moab, etc., waiting for the swarms of Gog and Magog to come upon them from the area of the Caspian Sea! Apart from the impossibility that Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome can all have their empires back again *simultaneously* (!), this procedure overlooks that the Day of the Lord has been made by every prophet to impinge on his own age, and because it must vitally affect history, he has declared how it would have to affect his own history. The example of the prophets should do the reverse of inspiring us to conjure up shades of the past empires; it ought rather urge us to declare what the judgment of God means to our generation and to prepare men to face it.

Again, as a prophet imbued with the conviction that the End is near can set the End only in the historic context of his own age, *so can he describe its religious issues only in terms of his own religious experience*, or, to look at it from the divine viewpoint, *in terms of that degree of revelation which has been given him to perceive*. This is of first importance in our reading of the Old Testament. It is undeniable that the Old Testament prophets looked for the priority of the Jew over all other nations in the

kingdom of God, so that Jerusalem would be the world's religious and political centre, the Jewish religion would be observed by all, the nations would come up to Jerusalem to observe the ancient feasts, and Israel would purely keep the ordinances of their fathers. Many devout Christians believe that this state of affairs is yet to come to pass and eagerly look for any sign of its approach. But the issue is similar to that we have just now considered. The prophets set the Kingdom in the context of their own age and looked for its realisation under mundane conditions: how else, then, could they set forth the triumph of revealed religion than declare it under the only terms in which revealed religion was known to them, viz., under Jewish forms? We need not deny their foundational proclamation of the triumph of the Kingdom of God, but the Lord of that Kingdom has come since their day: to imagine that God will set aside in His Kingdom the truth revealed in Christ, and replace it by the insights of men who lived in the shadows, is not only incredible but plainly contrary to the teaching of the New Testament, which abolishes the types now that the images of the true have appeared. It illustrates that established canon of exegesis that the Old Testament must be interpreted by the New Testament and that in no circumstances must the New Testament be forced into the narrower categories of the Old Testament.

A third related feature of this principle we have been discussing appears in the realisation of the prophets that *their predictions of the effects of the Day of the Lord may be falsified by the event, should God give time and the attitude of the subjects of prophecy change.* This thought is given explicit expression in Jer. xviii, that if a nation repent of the evil it has done, it may avert the threatened judgment of God, and, conversely, that if a nation turn to evil, it may miss the blessing God has promised. The application of the principle is often illustrated by the Book of Jonah, in that the judgment pronounced upon the Ninevites was averted by their repentance, to the intense annoyance of the prophet. It is related in the New Testament to the Second Coming of Christ as a reason for its delay, "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise . . . but is longsuffering . . . not wishing that any should perish" (2 Pet. iii, 9). We may therefore say that in general, prophecies of doom were issued in order that they might not be fulfilled, though the prophets were often tragically conscious that they would come to pass. The reverse side of the picture is most clearly seen in the history of Israel itself: the whole Old Testament is written in the plea that the nation might make itself worthy of fulfilment of God's purposes of grace in them, or, if we care to put it so, that the prophecies of bliss concerning them might be fulfilled. The persistent failure of Israel to respond to this call is a constant theme of the prophets and it comes to its head in their rejection of the promised Messiah. Israel therefore itself made impossible of fulfilment its prophesied role of heir and servant in the Kingdom of God, and its judgment was pronounced by the Lord Himself: "The Kingdom of God shall be taken from you and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matt. xxi, 43).

The New Testament is written in the conviction that the "other nation" is none other than the Church, which took its foundation in that believing remnant of Israel that was prepared to be not only heir but servant with its Lord. If Paul looks for the day when the whole chosen people of Israel shall be brought into the Kingdom of God, he does so solely on the ground that through the mercy of God they shall find repentance and faith and so be grafted into that one Body which is the Church. There is only one Way into the Kingdom and Israel must tread the Way with the nations or lose the Kingdom.

3. *The climax of the ages has already entered upon the sphere of history; it has made a decisive impact on all historic relations and will continue to do so until the process it has inaugurated exhausts all contrary influences.*

The reasonableness of this position becomes clearer if we substitute for the term *climax*, which connotes a ladder and so the end of a temporal process, the more familiar New Testament term *crisis*, which stresses the finality of an act. We recall that our Lord claimed, with special reference to His approaching redemptive act, "Now is the judgment (*crisis*) of this world" (John xii, 31). His entire ministry constituted an inbreaking of the powers of the age to come, those powers being at work in Him. Chief among the evidences for this view are His answer to the query of John in prison, pointing to the deeds He accomplished as characteristic of the expected Kingdom and so reflecting His own identity (Matt. xi, 2f.); His claim, "If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you" (Matt. xii, 28); His saying about the violent men who take the Kingdom of God by force (Matt. xi, 12, Luke xvi, 16); and His assertion to the Pharisees, "The Kingdom of God is in your midst" (Luke xvii, 21). In the Fourth Gospel the full liberation of the Kingdom for all men is closely connected with the redemptive death and resurrection of the Lord and the subsequent sending of the Spirit (see e.g. iv, 21-23, cp. with xvii, 1; vii, 37-39; xii, 31-33).

It is important to be clear that this introduction of the Kingdom of God through the work of Christ is not to be minimised by representing it to be a "spiritual" coming (as though the Kingdom of God could ever be unspiritual!), or that it came "in a sense" (i.e. not really!). The Kingdom brought by Jesus was that which the Old Testament prophets looked for, so that Peter could claim that the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost was that predicted by Joel as the immediate precursor of the Day of the Lord (Acts ii, 16). The primitive Church therefore freely used the categories of eschatology when speaking of its own religious experience, so that the Christian experiences a parousia of Christ to himself (John xiv, 3; Rev. iii, 20), he has been raised from the dead (Eph. ii, 5-6), he overcomes the spirit of Antichrist in the world (1 John iv, 14), he has been acquitted at the judgment seat of Christ (John v, 24) and is a full member of the Kingdom

of God (Col. i, 13). To them there was neither contradiction nor confusion in their belief that every element of this complex Christian experience is to have its consummation; the hope of future glory in no wise diminished their present fellowship with Christ, while their possession of the "first-fruits" of the Spirit only intensified their desire to witness the harvest (Rom. viii, 23).

There is, however, something involved here of far-reaching significance for our theme. If the eschatological process has already decisively and truly entered history, then history is not negated by that process, nor does it stand alongside it as an unworthy shadow of an eternal reality, but it is the proper sphere of its activity. Before Jesus came the eschatological process was but a promise, it had not yet begun. It would therefore fully accord with the language of our Lord to say that there was no Kingdom of God before He brought it. For that Kingdom is not, as we are in the habit of saying, simply the sphere or set of relations in which the sovereignty of God is recognised, but the sphere of redemption wherein the sovereignty of God becomes effective\*. The Kingdom is the realm of redeeming grace, or if one prefers dynamic terms, the reign of God is the activity of God in Christ. The Kingdom is something concerned with humanity, and that not the glorified humanity of the supraterritorial order but humanity of the here and now, humanity on earth. First and foremost, therefore, it is a supernatural entity that fulfils itself in earthly relations, both in this age and, according to the prayer taught by the Saviour, in that which is to come. Distasteful though that conclusion may appear to some, it is this that Jesus achieved by His earthly ministry, it is this that He taught us to anticipate at His coming and it is this for which the Church has prayed ever since His departure. The consummation of the Kingdom is bound up inextricably with the coming of Christ to earth: however that coming is envisaged by us, surely it at least implies that God will not have done with history at that crisis but intends to fulfil His purpose within its limits.

If there be any truth in these contentions, it follows that the constantly repeated idea that the Second Coming of Christ is not an historical event but a suprahistorical act that winds up history is not true to the New Testament, however much it may agree with the more despairing of the Jewish apocalyptists. Nor will we concede that the Second Coming is simply a

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\* In so speaking of the Kingdom we have in mind the eschatological Kingdom, the Kingdom of promise. If this view of the nature of the Kingdom be correct, it is scarcely relevant to adduce for comparison such anticipations of our Lord's teaching as we find, e.g., in the "Enthronement Psalms" (see Ps. xciii, 1, xciv, 3, xcix, 1). Nor are the examples, quoted by T. W. Manson ("Teaching of Jesus," p. 130f.), of the Rabbinic conception of the coming of the Kingdom consequent on faith and obedience strictly parallel; in these instances the stress is on human responsiveness as the means of bringing in the Kingdom, while in the New Testament it is on the redemptive activity of Christ. Further, the eschatological Kingdom is not in mind in the former passages; the New Testament looks for the *consummation* of a Kingdom now present, not the coming of another Kingdom; the Church already lives in the eschatological era.

mythological representation of the theological truth that God will cause the issues of history to find their fulfilment in a timeless eternity. The Bible, so far as I am aware, never refers to God as a timeless Being, but it frequently represents Him as the Lord of the Ages. God is vitally interested in the historic process: He sent His Son into it, He is moulding it according to His purpose, and He will yet have His will achieved in it. That completion of His purpose is bound up with the conception of the Second Coming of Christ: to regard that conception as an unnecessary adjunct of revelation, or even a sub-Christian intrusion within it, is utterly to misunderstand its significance.

4. *The assurance of the consummation of the Kingdom at the Second Coming of Christ is based on the fact and method of its coming already into history.*

Redemption and revelation have long been recognised as related activities of God. For our purposes it is of importance to note that the eschatological redemption, though itself the greatest revelation, is itself preceded by revelation. In this sphere, God does nothing without revealing His secret to His servants the prophets (Amos iii, 7). Supremely is this true of the redemption wrought by Christ in the events of Easter and Pentecost: so impressively did those events correspond to the Old Testament hope, it is likely that our earliest passion narratives were formed on the basis of Old Testament "testimonies" to Christ set alongside their fulfilment in Him. If we share that conviction with the primitive Church, it is no great step of faith to believe that the Lord Who fulfilled the essentials of that hope in God's way will yet fulfil the completion of it, as announced by Himself, also in God's way. We have a confirmation of that in the fact that Jesus predicted His own resurrection, which is the closest parallel we could have to His second coming: the former inaugurated the Kingdom in the world, the latter is to consummate it. If the resurrection came true according to the word of Christ, why should not His second coming do likewise?

Here we may take note of the embarrassing question of the time element in prophecy. We saw earlier that every prophet expected the Kingdom to come soon. History has demonstrated that in this respect they were mistaken. Furthermore, the primitive Church expected Jesus to return in a short time, and He has not done so yet. To many, that is sufficient warrant to discard Christian eschatology, root and branch, as being refuted by the mere passage of time. But it is not so simple as that: for if the time factor in the predictions concerning the second coming of Christ is wrong, so also were those anticipations of His redemptive ministry wrong in precisely the same respect, even in the case of the greatest of the Old Testament prophecies. Critical opinion is steadily inclining to the view that the Suffering Servant of Isaiah liii is not a corporate body but an individual: in any case, there is no question that the prophet envisaged the expiatory sufferings of the Servant to be completed *shortly*, for his visions of the Kingdom of God take it for granted that the

Kingdom is at the doors. The vision is wonderfully true of Jesus, but not the time factor. Similar remarks may be justly made of the prophecy of the Wonder-Child of Isaiah vii and ix, and of the King riding into Jerusalem of Zech. ix. God, it would seem, has shown to His servants the issues of history but not the time of their accomplishment. If we may believe this of the revelations given through the Old Testament prophets, much more may we believe that the revelation of the End, given through the Redeemer Himself, is according to the truth of God, even though it shares in this disability of the rest of the revelations of God in the Bible.

The main consideration is that God brings in His Kingdom through the agency of His Son. The Church is able to claim that history vindicates its belief that Christ brought the Kingdom into the world, for by Him and through His Body the powers of God have been and still are being displayed. The life and ministry of Jesus, culminating in His death and resurrection, stand solitary in the world's history. The only adequate explanation of Him is that which He gave, that He was the bearer of God's Kingdom. Particularly note that the inauguration of that Kingdom as a world-wide force took place through the resurrection of Christ and the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost. They are purely eschatological and apocalyptic events. They were the activity of God in Christ, supernatural yet within the historic process. In our view, to regard them as not historical but suprahistorical is meaningless, for they took place within the sphere of human relations, however much they transformed them. Thus was the Kingdom established on earth. Christ and His apostles declared that in a similar manner will His Kingdom be brought to victory, within the sphere of human relations but transforming them. Do some object that the Second Coming is a mythological conception? So be it: so is the resurrection a mythological conception, if by that we mean that it is predicated of heathen gods and heroes. History is the answer to those who try to explain away Christ's resurrection on the third day by the myths of Oriental nature gods\*. Similarly history is the answer to those who look on the idea of the Kingdom of God as a mere projection of the myth of the Golden Age into the future, for Christ did as a matter of fact inaugurate a new historic era by the events of Easter and Pentecost. In the same way we are assured that history shall yet vindicate the faith of those who believe that the word of God and the yearning hopes of mankind shall find their fulfilment at the glorious revelation of the Saviour of the world.

Christ is God's answer to the world's need, now and in the ages to come. Eschatology in the last resort is the affirmation that the Lord Who had the first word in history shall have the last word in history. The Last Day is His Day. So long as the Church looks for that Day, so long must it cry,

*Marana-tha ! Come, Lord Jesus !*

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\* For a cautious statement of this point, see H. Gunkel, "Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments," pp. 76f.