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Eschatology in the Teachings of Jesus

KENNETH HEINITZ

*Sic et Non: Are We So Sure of Matthean
Dependence on Mark?*

H. P. HAMANN

Some Ancient Documents and Some
Current Thoughts

THOMAS C. HARTMAN

Fresh Perspectives on Matthean Theology

FREDERICK W. DANKER

A Look at the NEB—OT

Homiletics

Eschatology in the Teachings of Jesus

KENNETH HEINITZ

The author is associate professor of religion at Concordia Teachers College, River Forest, Ill.

A STUDY OF BIBLICAL LANGUAGE ABOUT KINGDOM AND LIFE REVEALS THAT BOTH terms are eschatological and that both emphasize the quality of Christian living rather than presenting a timetable for the advent of the Parousia. Jesus brings both and calls men to decision. Kingdom and life are present possessions of believers, and the day of judgment will bring their culmination. When Jesus spoke of the signs of His Parousia, He was speaking of the signs that point to the coming of the Son of Man rather than to the actual coming itself. Eschatological hope characterizes all that the Christian does.

The term "eschatology" deals with life, death, resurrection, and judgment. The etymology of the term provides its narrow meaning; eschatology is the study of last things—death, judgment, the end. The broader meaning of the word includes all concerns that one might have in view of the end, death, and judgment. Consequently, all that deals with the meaning of life and its criteria for establishing values is eschatological.

Because eschatology deals with ultimate concerns as well as last things, much of Scripture is at least implicitly eschatological. The account of Jesus' healing the paralytic is an example (Mark 2:1-12). The statement "Your sins are forgiven" is eschatological in that forgiveness is an ultimate concern in terms of redemption now as well as on the day of judgment.¹ The paralytic's decision was made or reaffirmed in the present. His decision to believe in

Jesus, who by the testimony of the people present was doing what only God could do, was at the same time a decision that was valid for the *eschaton*.

In view of the emphasis that some have placed on the importance of apocalyptic literature for understanding the background of New Testament eschatology,² we might raise the question to what extent Jesus was an apocalypticist. Unquestionably, Jesus was acquainted with apocalyptic literature, for He used its concepts (for example, the title "Son of Man" in Daniel 7 and Enoch 62) in connection with the Parousia. The question whether Jesus was or was not an apocalypticist presents a false alternative. It seems to the present writer that while He was not an apocalypticist like the writer of Daniel or like John, the writer of Revelation, at the same time He did speak apocalyptically when He spoke about the signs of the last times and about the day of judgment

¹ In terms of critical methodology, this paper follows in a general way Joachim Jeremias, who said in regard to the parables that before they assumed written form "they 'lived' in the primitive Church, of whose proclamation, preaching, and teaching, the words of Jesus were the content. . . ." See *The Parables of Jesus*, rev. ed., trans. S. H. Hooke (New York: Scribner's, 1963), p. 23. For a further analysis of the critical problems involved and for disagreement

about the origin and tradition of some of the sayings of Jesus, see Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), pp. 32—47.

² See, for example, Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus—God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1968), pp. 82—83.

(Mark 13, Matthew 25, Luke 21). In the process Jesus spoke in the tradition of apocalyptic literature. He spoke prophetically, and He spoke figuratively.

To sort out the apocalyptic elements in Jesus' teaching may be as difficult as attempting to distinguish categorically the transcendental from the nontranscendental in His sayings or to separate His "man-language" from His "God-language." Such categories are not always exclusive. The point is that one should recognize and understand each in its own terms in order to utilize such categorical distinctions in his overall analysis.

THE CONCEPT OF KINGDOM

We shall first consider the term "kingdom" to assess Jesus' concept of eschatology. It is important to keep in mind that for the Jew the term "kingdom" was initially eschatological in the wider sense. The term developed more intensely in the narrow sense, as described in Isaiah, when the prophets no longer looked only for a fulfillment in terms of the categories of the past (for example, a reestablishment of political independence), but also looked ahead to an altogether new act, an altogether new kind of historical event.³ In the context of this mode of expectation the new event, or kingdom, would carry with it, because of its greatness and completeness, the sense of finality or of the last time. Yet, paradoxically perhaps, there would be an open-endedness about this consummation. The Gentiles would also come to see what was happening (Is. 60:3), and

they too would share in the redemptive character of this final time.

To be sure, during the intertestamental period the political category continued to be of great importance. When the kingdom came, however, the people by and large missed the real signs of its presence. They looked for the externals, the visible elements, such as political independence or a Davidic king. They missed the point that their essential covenant—or kingdom—relationship with God was one of faith, obedience, self-sacrifice, and self-giving. They forgot that when the Lord picked David to be king He sought a man after His own heart (1 Sam. 13:14). The marks of the new kingdom would be the essential marks of the old kingdom, actually the covenants of Abraham, Moses, David. These essential marks, as expressed in Is. 61:1 ff., are that good tidings would be brought to the afflicted, the brokenhearted would be bound up, liberty would be proclaimed to the captives, and so forth. The cities, then, would be restored, the land would produce abundantly, and their descendants would be known among the nations.

The context from which Jesus spoke was that of the original covenant, rather than from a postmonarchic, political context. According to the Gospel of John, Jesus insisted that He had come in the name of the Father of the covenant (John 5:39-47), and that He had come to do the will and the work of the Father (John 6:38; 5:36). This will and work were in accord with the covenant itself, that is, to give life. (John 6:45-51)

In His use of kingdom language Jesus spoke of a kingdom that was God's kingdom (for example, Mark 1:15). He claimed no kingdom for Himself separate

³ Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. M. G. Stalker, II (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 115—18.

from the kingdom of God. But He spoke of the kingdom of God as having come in His coming. In preaching repentance, after the fashion of John the Baptist, He said that the kingdom of God was at hand (Mark 1:15). In responding to the jibe that He cast out devils by Beelzebub, He said that if He cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God had come. (Matt. 12:28)

In addition to such statements, Jesus took the characteristics of the new kingdom as described in Isaiah and associated them with Himself and with the kingdom that He spoke of as having come in Him. In His home synagog, after reading from Is. 61:1 ff., He said that that Scripture had been fulfilled in their hearing (Luke 4:21). Moreover, when the disciples of John the Baptist came to ask whether Jesus indeed was the One "who is to come," Jesus responded by referring to the blind, the lame, and the lepers whom He had healed (Matt. 11:5), and He used the language of Isaiah (29:18; 35:4-6; 61:1 ff.). When He sent out the Twelve as well as the Seventy, Jesus associated the coming and the presence of the kingdom with signs of healing (Matt. 10:7-8; Luke 10:9). This same relationship between the kingdom and the signs of its coming and presence appears in the longer ending of Mark's Gospel in Jesus' last instruction and promise to the disciples. He told them to preach the Gospel and said that signs such as casting out devils and healing the sick would follow those who believe. (Mark 16:15, 17-18)

The distinctively eschatological theme of the concept of "kingdom" in Jesus' teaching became overt when Jesus used the concept of the kingdom that had come, along

with its signs, to describe the day of judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). The people who fed and clothed the destitute would receive the kingdom of God. Jesus had spoken of the kingdom of God as having already come with His coming and as being characterized by certain works and signs (all four gospels report Jesus' sayings to this effect). He spoke either of two kingdoms that are related in some essential way or of one kingdom with two closely related manifestations. The two kingdoms, or the two manifestations of one essential kingdom, are related to each other because the signs of the one are given as the signs also of the other. In either case, Jesus' account of the day of judgment, as Matthew presents it, established in both the narrower and the wider sense the eschatological character of the concept "kingdom."

Viewing the scope of Jesus' concept of the kingdom and also the eschatological character that He gave to it, one can see that "the Kingdom of God has a central and controlling position in the teaching of Jesus."⁴ What intensifies that fact is that Jesus called attention to the coming and the presence of the kingdom in connection with His own ministry, for example, his comments in the synagog at Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21). Oscar Cullmann states that since the signs of the kingdom of God show indirectly that Jesus is the One to come (cf. the question of John the Baptist's disciples, Matt. 11:3), a person may say that because He that is to come is now on earth, the kingdom of God is here.⁵

In the Old Testament and in Jesus' own

⁴ C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, rev. ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1961), p. 81.

⁵ *Salvation in History*, trans. Sidney Sowers et al. (New York: Harper & Row, 1967), p. 194.

sayings there are, however, two sets of signs. So far we have considered one set of signs, those that herald the kingdom and at the same time characterize the life of the people in the kingdom. The second set of signs points out when the kingdom would come. Joel, for example, described some of the "portents in the heavens and on the earth" before the "great and terrible day of the Lord" would come (2:30-32). Jesus Himself presented signs in much the same vein (see Mark 13). Both sets of signs are eschatological, for either they point to the coming of the judgment day or they characterize the quality of the believer's life in his anticipation of that day.

There is a great deal of difference as to which set of signs one uses when defining the concept and the time of the kingdom about which Jesus spoke. Both are Scriptural. In the perspective of the Old Testament covenant—including the promise to Abraham, the Torah, the kingdom of David, the temple of Solomon—the set of signs that speak of life and the quality of the new life have preeminence over the signs that indicate *when* the kingdom will come. The same may be said about the relative importance of each set of signs in the sayings attributed to Jesus. In general, "eschatological" language, that language which describes the quality of life in the covenant, or in Christ, takes precedence over "apocalyptic" language, that is, language that describes signs and catastrophes to come, even though the two kinds of language overlap. It would be incorrect to say, however, that the apocalyptic language is not or may not be qualitative. Furthermore, in the teachings of Jesus, and in the Old Testament as well, the chief emphasis of the signs regarding when such events

will occur is on the quality of life that one leads, on watchfulness, obedience, and good stewardship (Matt. 25:13; Mark 13:33-37; Luke 21:34-36). Consequently, the warnings and admonitions to be prepared confirm the distinctively eschatological, or qualitative, character (as opposed to chronological, or quantitative, character) of the signs that describe the nature of one's participation in the kingdom.

THE CONCEPT OF LIFE

Another key concept that will illuminate the concept of eschatology in Jesus and at the same time confirm what we have said about kingdom is the concept of "life." In the sayings of Jesus the concept of kingdom is closely related to the concept of life—as in His discussion with the young man who claimed that he had kept the Law, but yet he would not sell his possessions to give to the poor (Matt. 19:16-23). The young man asked what he must do to have eternal life. After Jesus referred him to the two statements of the Law and after the young man left because he was not able to sell his possessions, Jesus made two statements about the difficulty of entering the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God (19:23-24). In this account the terms "eternal life" and "kingdom of God" are used almost synonymously. One is the condition of the other.

Whereas the synoptic writers, particularly Matthew, emphasized the category of kingdom, John utilized the category of "life" as a focus for many of the sayings of Jesus. The concept of life or of eternal life presents an interesting parallel with the concept of kingdom. Life is a qualitative rather than a quantitative or chronological concept. In the teachings of Jesus

about life as recorded in John's Gospel, God's purpose is to give man life, "everlasting life" (3:16). The life that God gives is not essentially affected by physical death (5:24). This everlasting or eternal life is one that a person begins to live before his physical death and that is not affected by his physical death. The emphasis is on life rather than on eternal life. The life God gives is in and of itself eternal life. It is "God-life." It is not limited or qualified by time. Consequently, the paradoxical language of the climactic "I am" saying of Jesus in John's Gospel is rather definitive as it describes this life that God gives: ". . . he who believes in Me, though he die, yet shall he live, and whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die." (11:25)

Jesus makes the same point in response to the Sadducees, who asked which of the seven husbands the childless wife would have in heaven (Mark 12:18-27). In saying that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not a God of the dead but of the living, Jesus affirmed that the life God had given to these patriarchs and to the people in the Sadducees' question was not affected by the fact that they had died physically. The pronouncement of judgment on the day of judgment will only confirm the life that people either already have or do not have. (Here we can also see Jesus' emphasis on the fact that belief in Him, the Life-Bringer, enables men to pass through condemnation and judgment [John 3:18]. On the day of judgment the dimension of the "eternal" will come into its fullness.)

Implicit in the preceding is the fact that Jesus Himself is basic to the concept of life in God. In our discussion of kingdom we noted that the kingdom came with Jesus'

coming. The same truth is established more pointedly about the relationship between Jesus and eternal life. In John's Gospel Jesus Himself claimed to be life (11:25). He claimed this life from God the Father. "As the Father has life in Himself, so He has granted the Son also to have life in Himself" (5:26). The life and the kingdom that Jesus offers are those of God the Father. Any decision, therefore, that a person makes about the kingdom or about life is a decision about Jesus, and, conversely, a person's decision about Jesus is a decision about life and the kingdom. Thus Jesus says that it is the will of the Father that whoever sees and believes the Son will have eternal life, "and I [note the first person] will raise him up at the last day" (John 6:40). On this point Rudolf Bultmann is quite right when he says that "Jesus understood his time as the time of decision, and . . . he thought that men's attitude to himself and his message was decisive for them."⁶ The reign of God that Jesus proclaimed was "the eschatological reign."⁷

THE SECOND COMING AND THE DAY OF JUDGMENT

In discussing the day of judgment to come and the general resurrection from the dead, we ask three questions: (1) What is the nature of the day of judgment? (2) Who will be the judge? and (3) What does one make of the signs of the last times and of the day of judgment?

We see in the sayings attributed to Jesus that the day of judgment will be just that—a day of judgment. In one sense men are already judged or are being

⁶ *History and Eschatology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1957), p. 32.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

judged according to whether they do or do not have life given through Jesus (John 5:22, 24-25). The final judgment to come on the last day will be based on their works (Matt. 25:34-36; John 5:29), which testify of their having life with God, and this in turn means to be in the kingdom of God. The life which the righteous will receive on the judgment day will be only a confirmation and expansion of the life that they have already received by believing in Jesus (John 3:15). The day of judgment will confirm that people either have had life or have not had it. They will be judged according to the Word of Jesus which prior to the day of judgment they either believed or did not believe. (John 12:47-48)

The same holds true in regard to the kingdom. The kingdom which believers will receive on judgment day is in essence the kingdom to which they have already belonged by virtue of their faith in Jesus Christ. The exact nature of the kingdom of God beyond the day of judgment is not defined (cf. John 14:2), except in terms of an everlasting relationship with God. When Jesus spoke of the kingdom to come, he described it as a culmination of the kingdom that came with His coming. It would come, but it was already present. Its fullness was yet to be revealed (Matt. 25:34, 46). "The future coming is the consummation and completion of what the first coming inaugurated."⁸

Turning to the second question, Who will be the judge? we see that Jesus associated Himself with the Son of Man, who will be the Judge on the last day (John

5:19-27; Mark 13:26; 14:62;⁹ Matt. 16:27; 25:31; Luke 12:40). He connects the two titles, "Son of God" and "Son of Man," to each other (John 5:25-29) and appropriates both to Himself. Thus He declared His authority from the Father to execute judgment. Moreover, by referring to Daniel's prophecy of desolation (Mark 13:14; Matt. 24:15), Jesus associated the "Son of Man" of Daniel's prophecy with Himself. By means of this Jesus further established Himself as the one who will return to carry out the judgment on the last day. Cullmann says that "by means of this title Jesus thus ascribes to Himself the highest imaginable role in the eschatological drama."¹⁰ By using the apocalyptic title "Son of Man" Jesus intensified His present role as Herald of the kingdom of God, giving entrance to it and giving life. If He who is to judge is the One who gives life, then the one being judged cannot play one

⁹ Perrin believes that these two passages from Mark are reflections of early Christian exegetical traditions (*Rediscovering the Teachings of Jesus*, p. 185).

¹⁰ *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley Guthrie and Charles Hall (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 156. In his article "Introducing the Apocalyptic Visions of Daniel 7," Norman Habel writes: "Daniel 7 . . . is one of the sources of the concept of the son of man which was at Jesus' disposal. The picture of the son of man as a heavenly figure appearing before God or His angels (as in Daniel 7) can be found in passages such as Luke 18:8; Matt. 25:31-32; 26:64; and Mark 13:26-27. Here the mysterious son-of-man figure of Daniel 7 is identified as none other than the exalted Christ whose angels gather His saints (elect) from the ends of the earth and the ends of heaven at the end-time. In the glorified Jesus Christ the visionary hope of Daniel 7 will come true according to the gospels." (CONCORDIA THEOLOGICAL MONTHLY, XLI [January 1970], 25)

⁸ Eric Ashby, "The Coming of the Son of Man," *Expository Times*, LXXII (September 1961), 363.

against the other. One and the same person will judge him.

This fact gives a perspective to the question about the presence of the kingdom of God and the nearness of the day of judgment which makes clear that the difference between the two, especially in terms of the time element, is not the main question. Talking about "realized" and "unrealized" eschatology, R. F. Berkey says that "nearness" should not be emphasized at the expense of "arrival" and vice versa, for "eschatological realization was never confined to past, present, or future."¹¹ The main question is about the possession of that which gives and determines eschatological value, that is, the kingdom of God and the life given by Jesus. The time is now and is not to be postponed until later. From this perspective, eschatological reckoning has begun at the time of Jesus' incarnation. Consequently, one can accept the emphasis of both Dodd and Bultmann that the arrival and the ministry of Jesus compose the *eschaton*. The qualitative rather than the chronological-quantitative emphasis again comes to the forefront. Talking about concepts such as "kingdom," "salvation," and "life," B. H. Throckmorton writes that such words point to "the realization of the relationship that God intended men to have with him and with one another, which becomes a possibility through Christ," and that "where this relationship is realized, there is the Kingdom, salvation, reconciliation, glorification, life."¹²

There will be a final day, however, and a resurrection from the dead. As Cull-

mann says, the "dependence of our resurrection upon that of Christ is not only in point of fact, but also in the order of time. Christ is the 'first born' of those who have fallen asleep, and only at the end will *our* resurrection occur (1 Cor. 15:23: ἐπειτα . . . ἐν τῇ παρουσίᾳ αὐτοῦ)."¹³

When this day of resurrection will come is a mystery (Mark 13:32), and this brings us to the third question, What do we make of the signs of the last times?

Of the signs that are chronological, or quantitative, rather than qualitative, there are different groups. There are the signs about the destruction of Jerusalem (see, for example, Mark 13:14 ff.), those about persecution (Mark 13:11), those that probably refer to the appearance of the resurrected Christ (Mark 14:25; Matt. 16:28), and those that may well refer to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Mark 9:1; see also Acts 2:16-21). Some of these references may include more than just one aspect. Many of these signs are substantially alike in that they refer to destruction, desolation, persecution, and unusual occurrences of nature. These unusual occurrences in some instances double as signs of the coming of the day of judgment.

The signs that refer specifically to the day of judgment speak about the Parousia of the Son of Man, coming with His angels in the clouds to execute judgment (compare Mark 13:26-27; Matt. 24:30; and Luke 21:27). The difficulty of understanding the nature and the meaning of these signs arises when one attempts to identify the antecedents of ταῦτα and ταῦτα πάντα (Mark 13:29-30), πάντα ταῦτα (Matt. 24:33-34), and τοῦτο and πάντα (Luke 21:31-32) that will come to pass before "this

¹¹ "Eggízein, phthánein and Realized Eschatology," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXXXII (June 1963), 187.

¹² *The New Testament and Mythology* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1959), p. 164.

¹³ *Salvation in History*, p. 178.

generation" will pass away. Is the antecedent in each case the coming of the Son of Man, which would imply that the Son of Man will come during the lifetime of "this generation"? Or are the respective antecedents the signs in general which signal the nearness of the coming of the Son of Man?

If the phrase *ταῦτα πάντα* and its synoptic parallels includes the Parousia of the Son of Man as well as the signs of His coming, then Jesus anticipated the Parousia before "this generation" would pass away. Other statements make clear that He claimed this would be His own Parousia (Mark 8:38). Because Jesus was in fact a man and chose to operate under human limitations, it is a real possibility that He had this immediate anticipation. By His own testimony (Mark 13:32; Matt. 24:36), He did not know the day and the hour of the last day.

A look at the contexts of these three statements about the signs of the final day of judgment shows that it is grammatically quite possible for the word *ταῦτα* (Mark 13:29) to refer to the *signs* that point to the coming of the Son of Man rather than to the actual coming itself. In all three of the synoptic gospels the signs of the Parousia are given after the signs of persecution and the fall of Jerusalem (Mark 13:24-25; Matt. 24:29; Luke 21:25-26). After that come the specific statements about the *coming* of the Son of Man (Mark 13:26; Matt. 24:30; Luke 21:27). Following these Parousia statements, each gospel writer includes Jesus' presentation of the parable of the fig tree. In each account of the parable the signs of the summer, that is, the leafing of the fig tree, herald the coming of summer itself. This

relationship of the signs of summer and of the coming of summer is parallel to the signs of the Parousia and the actual coming of the Parousia. The *οὗτος καὶ* (Mark 13:29; Matt. 24:33; Luke 21:31) further establishes that parallelism. On the basis of this parallelism, *ταῦτα* (Mark 13:29), *πάντα ταῦτα* (Matt. 24:33), and *ταῦτα* (Luke 21:31) refer to the signs that precede the Parousia and not to the Parousia itself.

In terms of this parallelism between the signs of the summer and the signs of the Parousia, it is grammatically quite likely that the phrase "these things" in the application section of the *οὗτος καὶ* passages anticipates and therefore becomes parallel to the "these things" phrase in the "this generation" statement. In view of this second parallelism, the antecedent of *ταῦτα πάντα* in Mark 13:30 is the same as the antecedent of *ταῦτα* in the preceding verse; the antecedent of *πάντα ταῦτα* in Matt. 24:34 is the same as the antecedent of *πάντα ταῦτα* of Matt. 24:33; and the antecedent of *πάντα* in Luke 21:32 is the same as that of *ταῦτα* in Luke 21:31. Since that is the case, then the antecedent of the phrase *ταῦτα πάντα* (Mark 13:30) and its parallels in Matthew and Luke are the signs that herald the Parousia, but not the actual Parousia itself. Consequently, when Jesus said that this generation will witness these things, He referred to the persecution, to the fall of Jerusalem, to the unusual if not unnatural occurrences in nature, all of which are signs of the Parousia. It is not begging the question, then, to say that these latter signs occur in one way or another in every generation.

Two more points substantiate the parallels and grammatical relationships just

discussed. In making the application of the parable of the fig tree to the signs of the coming of the Parousia, Mark and Matthew say that when these things take place, then γινώσκετε ὅτι 'εγγύς ἐστιν ἐπὶ θύραις (Mark 13:29; Matt. 24:33). In this statement Mark and Matthew make a distinction between the signs of the Parousia and the actual coming of the Parousia. The position of the γινώσκετε clause in the context supports this distinction and strengthens the suggestion that the antecedents of "these things" in the "this generation" statements are the same antecedents as those of the "these things" in the "so also" statements. The point of this distinction is that these things that will occur before this generation passes away signal the fact that the Son of Man is "at the doors." In view of Hans Conzelmann's contention that Luke rewrote the tradition in order to make the necessary adjustments because the Parousia had not arrived,¹⁴ it is interesting to note that Luke does not attribute to Jesus the phrase "at the door." Luke records that Jesus said that when these things occur, you know that the kingdom of God "is near" (21:31). If Conzelmann were correct, one would expect Luke to emphasize the phrase 'ἐπὶ θύραις, assuming that textually it is authentic.

The second point that contributes to understanding these passages in terms of their parallel and grammatical structure is the contrast marked by the particle δέ at the beginning of Mark 13:32, Matt. 24:36, and Luke 21:34. Following the "this generation" statement, Mark and Matthew both state: "But (δέ) of that day or that

hour no one knows. . . ." This indicates that in contrast to the signs that herald the coming, and which "this generation" will see, the actual day and hour of the coming itself are known only by the Father. This contrast supports the grammatical suggestion that the antecedents of "these things" in the "this generation" statements are the signs that point to the Parousia and that these signs do not include the actual Parousia itself. The contrast and therefore the distinction suggested by δέ reinforce the same distinction made by the phrases "at the doors" (Mark 13:29; Matt. 24:33) and "is near." (Luke 21:31)

On the basis of these suggestions, the signs which "this generation" will witness include the signs that point to the coming of the Parousia but not to the Parousia itself. In this case Jesus used quantitative and chronological signs, that is, imminent historical occurrences, to emphasize the imminence of the Parousia in both a qualitative and a quantitative sense—or perhaps one could say in a qualitative-quantitative sense without chronologically limiting the Parousia to "this generation." It is not necessary, therefore, to conclude as Werner Kümmel does that "the imminent expectation is," among other things, "a necessary contemporary form in which to express the certainty that the Kingdom of God is beginning even now." At the same time one can agree with him that "Jesus uses the imagery of his time to describe the nearness of the Kingdom of God in order to clothe *in living words* the certainty of God's redemptive action directed towards the consummation."¹⁵

It is important, of course, that a person

¹⁴ *The Theology of St. Luke*, trans. Geoffrey Buswell (London: Faber and Faber, 1960), p. 132.

¹⁵ *Promise and Fulfillment*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (Naperville: Allenson, 1957), p. 152.

find the proper perspective in the teachings of Jesus, that is, the qualitative concept of "kingdom" and "life" so that he is not misled in regard to what is central in the Gospel. As Kümmel writes, for "the believer the question is not whether he will accept the correctness of an apocalyptic prediction or of an interpretation referring to the present of that which relates to the beyond, but whether he will respond to the divine mission of *that* Jesus who could promise us the reign of God, because it was already being fulfilled in him."¹⁶

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PRESENT

The imminence of the Parousia may be said to be intensified rather than minimized by the fact that Jesus' generation did not witness the Parousia. The point is that Jesus' first coming introduced the last time, since Jesus Himself confronted man with the necessity of an eschatological decision. An individual's decision about Jesus will manifest itself in his life and works. On the last day those works will testify of his faith in Jesus (cf. Matt. 25:31 ff.). On that day the Son of Man will confirm the life and works of the righteous and also the lack of life and works of the unrighteous. The presence of the kingdom of God in the first coming of Jesus and the imminence of the Parousia — for its signs have been fulfilled — prompt a man to watch (Mark 13:33-37) and as a good steward to make use of his opportunities. (Matt. 25:14-30)¹⁷

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁷ Brian Nolan states that "the Parousia passages of the New Testament . . . shape rather than describe that future" ("Some Observations on the Parousia and New Testament Eschatology," *The Irish Theological Quarterly*, XXXVI [October 1969], 314).

The eschatological perspective of Jesus includes the stewardship of the believer, especially in view of His promise of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8) and His saying that the Gospel will be preached to all nations before the end comes (Mark 13:10; Matt. 24:14). The eschatological decisiveness of believing in Christ necessitates active participation in the kingdom of God. One can say that life with God is, after all, "living." This emphasis persists without regard to the chronological imminence of the Parousia. On the one hand, the qualitative and quantitative imminence, and within the quantitative perspective even the chronological imminence, simply provides the contextual perspective of the believer on earth. On the other hand, it intensifies the importance of the ministry and mission of Jesus and of believers — in other words, of the kingdom on earth.

This dual eschatological perspective provides the context and motif of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. According to Jesus' promises, the Holy Spirit would be a witness to Jesus Himself (John 15:26). He would enable the disciples to remember and to understand what they had seen and heard (John 14:26), and He would declare things to come (John 16:13). Moreover, in the coming of the Holy Spirit the disciples would receive power, and they would be witnesses from Jerusalem outward to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8)

Their witnessing to Jesus to the ends of the earth is in line with Jesus' own statement that the Gospel would be preached to all nations (Mark 13:10), and this brings us back to the nature of the kingdom of God. We can see how centrally

eschatological and how "natural" the coming of the Holy Spirit and the disciples' proclamation of the Gospel really are. As Arthur Moore has pointed out, missionary preaching was in no way a substitution or compensation for the early expectation of the Parousia.¹⁸ In fact one might say that because of the eschatological hope based in the resurrected Christ, missionary preaching became a necessity.

In this regard the qualitative imminence of the Parousia leaves no choice. Christ's

life produces life in all its dimensions, including the political, economic, and social ones. The essential characteristic and quality of this life with God through Christ is its sharing, redemptive, reconciling quality among men. The believer anticipates the Parousia in that he anticipates the culmination of his being one with God. Living the new life in the resurrected Christ with and among his fellowmen, the believer experiences the excitement of the unfolding fullness of life as it evolves toward the Parousia.

River Forest, Ill.

¹⁸ *The Parousia in the New Testament* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1966), p. 206.