

Concordia Theological Monthly



S E P T E M B E R



1 9 5 8

The Eschatology of Acts and Contemporary Exegesis

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FOR half a century New Testament exegesis has stood at the center of a storm over eschatology, and the eye of this storm is not all calmness. Two different exegetes skillfully and deliberately lay open the same passage of Scripture and arrive at conclusions that collide head on. Scholars disagree not only concerning what the New Testament says but especially about what the New Testament means in its eschatological statements.

Assumptions and presuppositions naturally color conclusions. Every exegete has his hermeneutics. Fortunately there are not as many assumptions, methods, and hermeneutics as there are exegetes. So the controversy raging about New Testament eschatology is neither chaotic nor kaleidoscopic. Interpreters generally cluster about two poles of the eschatological axis. The basic lines are drawn as soon as answer is made to the question, "In what way are history and eschatology related?" To one camp, history and eschatology are diametric opposites. The other camp confesses God's revelation precisely in and through history and views eschatology as inseparably bound up with history.

This essay focuses its attention primarily on contemporary efforts to unravel the fabric of Lucan eschatology and especially the fabric represented by the Book of Acts. Since an exegete's attitude toward Luke and Acts is a good barometer of his attitude toward the eschatology of the entire New Testament, this paper may do duty as an introduction to a fundamental issue involved in New Testament eschatology in general.

HISTORY VS. ESCHATOLOGY

It is significant that Karl Ludwig Schmidt, one of the founders and chief protagonists of form criticism, was consciously indebted to a conception of Christianity which denigrated history. Schmidt's estimate of Luke-Acts was extremely low, since he was convinced that Luke had failed miserably to capture the essence of the Christian religion. With approval and no little relish the late professor quotes from Franz Overbeck what he calls an Anti-Lukas *in nuce*:

Nichts ist bezeichnender für die Auffassung des Lukas von der evangelischen Geschichte, sofern er darin ein Objekt der Geschichtsschreibung sieht, als sein Gedanke, dem Evangelium eine Apostelgeschichte als Fortsetzung zu geben. Es ist das eine Taktlosigkeit von welthistorischen Dimensionen, der grösste Exzess der falschen Stellung, die sich Lukas zum Gegenstand gibt. . . . Dem dritten Evangelisten ist sein Unternehmen, den Stoff der evangelischen Geschichte historiographisch zu gestalten, völlig misslungen — der Gedanke an sich war dilettantisch, kein Wunder, dass sich der Dilettant auch sonst verrät. . . . Und doch wird Lukas oft als gewandter Schriftsteller gepriesen. Er ist es auch, nur übt sich diese Gewandtheit an einem widerstrebenden Stoffe aus, und an diesem wird sie zu Schanden. Lukas behandelt historiographisch, was keine Geschichte und auch so nicht überliefert war.¹

At least the more extreme proponents of form criticism agree with Schmidt's valuation of history and with his depreciation of Luke-Acts. The rise of form criticism spelled the fall of Acts. The form critics assume that "the material of the tradition has no biographical or chronological or geographical value," that is, no historical value.² Contexts and editorial additions are discounted immediately. "In the beginning was the kerygma, the sermon."³ The primitive

¹ "Die Stellung der Evangelien in der allgemeinen Literaturgeschichte," *Eucharisterion: Studien zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1923), II, 132 f.

² E. Basil Redlich, *Form Criticism: Its Value and Limitations* (London: Duckworth, 1939), p. 62.

³ This quotation appears without credit in A. M. Hunter, *The Message of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950), p. 26, and in Redlich, p. 26, but the credit seems to belong to Erich Fascher, *Die Formgeschichtliche Methode*, p. 54.

preachers did not "relate the life of Jesus but proclaimed the salvation which had come about in Jesus."⁴ The distinction between salvation in Jesus and the life of Jesus corresponds to the distinction between eschatology and history.

Rudolf Bultmann, working independently, first spoke out for the form-critical method and point of view about the same time that Karl Ludwig Schmidt first broke into print on the subject. If anything, Bultmann's work is even more radical than Schmidt's. Vincent Taylor has observed that Schmidt's attitude toward the material itself is "conservative," while his rejection of the outline is "radical."⁵ The same author comments on Bultmann's *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* thus: "It would not be unfair to describe the work as a study in the cult of the conceivable. . . . The real charge against him is that he is kinder to the possibilities than to the probabilities of things." (Ibid., p. 15)

The dichotomy, history and eschatology, raises its head in Bultmann's work in the old familiar form, the historical Jesus and the Christ of faith. The preaching of the primitive church as we know it from Paul's letters and from Acts proclaims not the Jesus of history but the Christ of faith and of the cult.⁶ This is the earliest stage in the development of the synoptic tradition according to the classical formula of form criticism. Bultmann believes that the early Jerusalem Church soon began to collect traditions about the life of Jesus to illustrate the preaching and to meet other needs in the community. But he insists that the literary genre now known as the Gospel is a creation of the Hellenistic community. The thought of composing a gospel, a continuous, connected account of the life of Jesus, never occurred to the earliest church. The primitive community was an eschatological community and thus had no use for an historical account of the life of Jesus.⁷

In his Gifford Lectures Bultmann spells out the claim that the

⁴ Redlich, p. 64.

⁵ *The Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: The Macmillan Co., 1938), p. 13.

⁶ Rudolf Bultmann, *Die Geschichte der synoptischen Tradition* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1931), p. 396. The new edition was not available when this article was written. Hereafter this work is cited as *Tradition*.

⁷ This entire paragraph is a summary of *Tradition*, pp. 393—396.

New Testament church is an eschatological rather than an historical entity. In his own clear words,

The New Covenant is not grounded on an event of the history of the people as was the Old Covenant. For the death of Christ, on which it is founded, is not a "historical event" to which one may look back as one may to the story of Moses. *The new people of God* has no real history, for it is the community of the end time, an eschatological phenomenon. . . . The consciousness of being the eschatological community is at the same time the consciousness of being taken out of the still-existing world. The world is the sphere of uncleanness and sin.⁸

Bultmann continues with the triumphant cry, "In early Christianity history is swallowed up in eschatology" (*ibid.*, p. 37). All this is important for understanding Bultmann's view of Luke-Acts. For him the Third Gospel represents the zenith (or the nadir) of the development to which the tradition was subjected from the first: the revision and combination of single, isolated elements into a continuous and connected narrative (*Tradition*, p. 396). And Franz Overbeck's opinion of Luke-Acts quoted above is certainly consonant with Bultmann's own judgments. Luke is the New Testament author who has carried farthest the historicizing of the tradition which amounted to a perversion of the Christian religion.

In a section on "The Transformation of the Church's Understanding of Itself," Bultmann traces the development or degeneration of the conception of the church from its origin in earliest times to its low point in the Book of Acts.

The earliest church was conscious of being the eschatological people of God, who are divorced from the world and live in hope of the fulfillment. The delay of the parousia results not in a loss of this primitive consciousness but in a peculiar transformation, which Bultmann describes as follows: "*The transcendent character of the church* gradually comes to be seen not so much in its reference to the future as *in its present possession of institutions* which are already mediating transcendent powers in the present: a sacramental cultus and finally a priestly office."⁹ Elsewhere he writes:

⁸ *History and Eschatology* (Edinburgh: The University Press, 1957), p. 36. Hereafter this work is cited as *History*.

⁹ Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1955), II, 112.

"By and large, the chief difference between Hellenistic Christianity and the original Palestinian version was that the former ceased to be dominated by the eschatological expectation and the philosophy of life which that implied. Instead there was developed a new pattern of piety centered in the cultus."¹⁰

Bultmann admits that the future reference is modified, not lost. The Christian life comes to be viewed "not as the demonstration of the new (eschatological) existence but as the condition for achieving future salvation." (*Theology of the N.T.*, p. 113)

The reference to the future is further modified by a relaxation of eschatological tension. Hope in eschatological fulfillment is not relinquished, but the fulfillment is pushed forward "into a time that lies in the indeterminate future" (*ibid.*, p. 114). When the church was sorely persecuted, the old consciousness of imminent fulfillment broke out again, as in Revelation and First Peter. But Bultmann asserts: "At the same time the Pastoral Epistles and Acts show that to a large extent Christians are preparing for a rather long duration of this world and that the Christian faith, losing its eschatological tension, is becoming a Christian bourgeois piety" (*ibid.*). In the Book of Acts eschatology and prophecy are used not to fortify hope in fulfillment but to make moral appeals. Impatient hope is rebuked and corrected (1:6) and is nowhere the viewpoint of the author. Neither in the Pastorals nor in Acts does Bultmann find a trace of the tension between the present and the future or of longing for the fulfillment.

Luke is guilty of representing the Christian Church as a new religion alongside of Judaism and the heathen religion. He conceives of Christianity as an entity of world history. So it happens that he alone of the evangelists attempts to write a life of Jesus in his Gospel. That Luke has written a history of the origin and early days of the church as a sequel to his Gospel shows that he does not believe that the church is the eschatological congregation and confirms the suspicion that he has surrendered the original kerygmatic sense of the Jesus tradition and has historicized it. Bultmann writes: "Whereas for the eschatological faith not only of the earliest church but also of Paul the history of the world had

¹⁰ *Primitive Christianity in Its Contemporary Setting*, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London and New York: Thames and Hudson, 1956), p. 176.

reached its end, because in Christ the history of salvation had found its fulfillment and hence its end, according to the viewpoint of Acts, the history of salvation now continues. While for Paul, Christ, being the 'end of the Law' (Rom. 10:4), is also the end of history, in the thought of Acts He becomes the beginning of a new history of salvation, the history of Christianity." (Ibid., p. 117)

The transformation from the original eschatological tension is complete. As far as Bultmann is concerned, Luke has committed the unpardonable sin. He has sacrificed the eschatological meaning of the life of Jesus and the history of the church (ibid., p. 123). The tradition about Jesus has a paradoxical character, speaking simultaneously of the eschatological occurrence and of an historical event. In Luke-Acts the "paradox was resolved in favor of a theology of history which knows only a history of salvation unrolling as world history" (ibid., p. 126). On the other hand Christian Gnosticism sacrificed the reference to the historical event. The latter point of view is peculiarly congenial to Bultmann, who remarks on the "relative appropriateness" of Gnostic teaching: "In opposition to a historicizing of the eschatological occurrence, it expresses a legitimate interest of faith." (Ibid., p. 127)

Erich Dinkler consciously follows Bultmann and strenuously objects to the view of history and eschatology represented by Oscar Cullmann.¹¹

He presupposes variety of theological conception in the New Testament corpus and deals with the writings in regulation form-critical manner. Examination of the proclamation of Jesus leads him to the conclusion that Jesus offers "no theology of history but a soteriology of the eschatological man. The idea of history consists paradoxically in this: The end of history proclaims the redemption of man from history." (Ibid., p. 180)

According to Dinkler, Paul, in asserting that Christ is the end of history and that the Christian is a new creature, understands the old aeon and the new aeon not mythologically but existentially.

¹¹ "Earliest Christianity" in *The Idea of History in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Robert C. Dentan (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), p. 173, fn. 4, where the author comments, "My paper is somehow a constant dialogue with Cullmann's book," *Christ and Time*.

But the apostle is not consistent. He holds also the mythological and apocalyptic conception which looks for a cosmic catastrophe to destroy all evil and bring rescue to the believers. This second view is characterized by the expectation of the parousia following the plan of God. The early church and medieval theology almost without exception took up and developed this latter view, which is called by Cullmann *the* Biblical understanding. The existential conception, however, is more characteristic of the eschatological faith of earliest Christianity. The two conceptions are characterized by the watchwords *οἰκονομία* (plan of salvation) and *καιρός* (the decisive, the existential moment).

In both Mark and Matthew the delay of the parousia is felt to be a problem, and apologetic reflection has begun. The framework supplied by the Synoptists does not accord with the preaching of Jesus. "The sense of standing in the midst of the *καιρός* plainly is disappearing" (ibid., p. 194). Matthew has departed farther than Mark. Nevertheless Dinkler writes of Matthew, "His perspective on time, which he developed mythologically into a final drama, was rather naive, that is to say, non-reflective." (Ibid., p. 195)

Among the Synoptists Luke was the literary man, and with a grain of salt one may call him the historian of earliest Christianity. His avowed purpose was to record a portion of history. Such a literary endeavor was possible only in an age which reckoned with a temporal future.

The hidden motive of Luke-Acts is the idea that the Gospel must be preached in all the world before the parousia. Thus the present for Luke is a time for the unfolding of an economy of world history. The Christ event and the parousia bound this history. Luke also explains historical events by reference to cause and effect. "*The secularization of history in Christian theology begins with Luke*" (ibid., p. 197). Luke's universalism is but one more sign of his secularization. In conclusion Dinkler takes a parting shot at Luke: "The transition from a time of the eschatological expectation of the imminent event has passed over into a time when the end of history and of the world is projected indefinitely into the future, and all this has taken place in Luke without any observ-

able disillusionment" (ibid.). In Acts the parousia is not imminent and has lost all theological import. "The Gospel is on the march throughout the world in an apparently unthreatened continuity of time." (Ibid., p. 200)

For Dinkler as for Bultmann the Johannine writings, the Gospel and the letters (with some abbreviation, emendation, and relocation), are the heroes of the eschatological conflict which they find in the New Testament. Dinkler makes the significant assertion that historiography was foreign to the unknown author of these writings and that they are "the last great protest of the early Christian attitude *against incipient early Catholicism*" [italics mine]. (Ibid., p. 202)

Perhaps the most vitriolic of all recent assaults on the good name of Luke flows from the pen of Philip Vielhauer. He states his plan and purpose quite plainly in these words: "Wir beschränken uns auf die Elemente der lukanischen Paulus-Darstellung, die ihn als Theologen charakterisieren, also vor allem, wenn auch nicht ausschliesslich, auf seine Reden, und gruppieren die theologischen Aussagen des Acta-Paulus um vier Themen: natürliche Theologie, Gesetz, Christologie, und Eschatologie, und vergleichen sie mit den diesbezüglichen Aussagen der Paulusbriefe."¹² The interest of this chapter is confined to his estimate of Lucan eschatology.

Vielhauer's words are direct, and his meaning is plain. In the Lucan portrait of Paul *fällt die Eschatologie aus* (ibid., p. 12). Whereas eschatology in the theology of the genuine Paul holds central position, eschatology in the Paul of Acts has become a *locus de novissimis*. What for Paul was the ultimate is for Luke the chronologically last. What Paul viewed as a qualitative relationship Luke construes as quantitative. The author's existentialist interpretation of eschatology and essential agreement with Rudolf Bultmann are apparent in this judgment: "Bezeichnenderweise wird das paulinische 'Schon jetzt' und 'noch nicht' nicht quantitativ aufgefasst, und ihre Verbindung nicht als zeitlicher Prozess allmählicher Verwirklichung verstanden. Es handelt sich um die paradoxe Gleichzeitigkeit von Gegenwärtigkeit und Zukünftigkeit des Heils, nicht um einen zeitlichen, sondern um einen ontologischen

¹² "Zum 'Paulinismus' der Apostelgeschichte," *Evangelische Theologie*, X (July 1950), 2.

Dualismus" (ibid.). Therefore he rejects Luke's *heilsgeschichtlich* presentation of Christianity as anything but Pauline.¹³

The sense of expectancy has disappeared from Luke's writing. The parousia is not only not imminent; its delay has long since ceased even to be a problem. Thus, according to Vielhauer: "Lukas ersetzt die apokalyptische Erwartung der Urgemeinde und die christologische Eschatologie des Paulus durch das heilsgeschichtliche Schema von Verheissung und Erfüllung, in dem dann auch die Eschatologie den ihr zukommenden Platz erhält." (Ibid., p. 13)

Vielhauer's anti-Lucan blast ends on a paradoxical note: "Der Verfasser der AG. ist in seiner Christologie vorpaulinisch, in seiner natürlichen Theologie, Gesetzesauffassung, und Eschatologie nachpaulinisch." (Ibid., p. 15)

In general Ernst Haenchen shares the view and position of Bultmann, Dinkler, and Vielhauer, although he does not air his opinions quite so extensively but merely adverts to his position in a few introductory paragraphs. The earliest Christians did not think historically; they awaited the early advent of the kingdom of God in the firm conviction that they were the last generation before the end of the world. The months and years which unexpectedly followed the resurrection had no theological importance for them. Only a new generation could write an "Acts of the Apostles" as Luke did.¹⁴

The Gospel of Luke already betrays its author as a Christian of the second generation. Haenchen seems to disagree slightly with Dinkler concerning Matthew and Mark. These authors, says Haenchen, have no literary pretensions and do not attempt to write a biography of Jesus. Moreover, both testify to the nearness of the end, although Matthew seems somewhat distressed at the delay so far. Haenchen summarizes: "Die eschatologische Naherwartung durchdringt bei ihnen noch den ganzen Stoff, auch wenn ein sie bezeugendes Wort wie Matt. 10:23 vielleicht nicht mehr im Sinn der Naherwartung interpretiert wird." (Ibid., p. 88)

¹³ On p. 14 Vielhauer quotes with joyous approval the dictum of Franz Overbeck which Karl Ludwig Schmidt, writing in 1923, found so congenial. It is quoted above, p. 642.

¹⁴ *Die Apostelgeschichte*, in *Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament*, begründet von Heinrich August Wilhelm Meyer (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1956), pp. 87—91.

Luke differs essentially from the other Synoptists. He writes literature. He will be an historian, using sources, examining evidence, editing his materials carefully and arranging the whole artfully and in order. Haenchen quotes with approval the judgment of Ernst Käsemann: "Sein Evangelium ist in Wahrheit das erste Leben Jesu, bei dem die Gesichtspunkte der Kausalität und Teleologie berücksichtigt und psychologische Einfühlung, Sammlertätigkeit des Historikers und die Tendenz des Erbauungsschriftstellers in gleicher Weise spürbar werden." (Ibid., p. 85, n. 5)

The older generation understood John the Baptist as Elijah, the herald of the new aeon which was then dawning. For Luke, the Baptizer belongs to the old order. A time of salvation came in Jesus, but it was not the beginning of the eschatological end-time. It was an independent epoch that ceased with the Ascension. Then a period *post Christum* began — and it can last for a long time — which will end only with the return of Christ, of which Haenchen writes with just a shade of sarcasm: "Diese ist freilich nicht auf den St. Nimmermehrstag verschoben — Lukas ist ein gläubiger Christ. Aber sie ist doch so weit in die Ferne gerückt, dass die Eschatologie das letzte Kapitel der Lehre zu werden beginnt, anstatt sie ganz zu durchdringen." (Ibid., p. 90)

In all this Haenchen appears dependent on the work of Hans Conzelmann, who has done the most ambitious recent study of Luke-Acts from the general point of view here under discussion.¹⁵ Conzelmann begins with the form-critical assumption that the *Rahmen der Geschichte Jesu* is secondary. The bits of traditions embedded in the framework first occupied the form critics, who only later began to study the framework as an entity *sui generis*.

The author accepts the basic "insight" of form criticism: The gospels are essentially not biographies of Jesus but proclamation of the salvation event. The kerygma (eschatology) is not narrative (history). These are two separate quantities. History plays a greater role in Luke than in the other writers. At first the kerygma alone was handed down. In Luke the kerygma becomes the bits of stone in a new mosaic. The process of historicizing has begun, and this means simultaneous de-eschatologizing.

¹⁵ *Die Mitte der Zeit: Studien zur Theologie des Lukas* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1954); what follows is a summary of pp. 1—9.

The delay of the parousia causes Luke to reflect on the peculiar significance of the period of the church. It differs essentially from the time of Jesus, who is regarded as a historical phenomenon to whom Luke looks back. The time of Jesus is the valid realization and concrete picture of timeless salvation from which the church is to gain an understanding of its present and future.

Luke's reflection leads him to a schematization of history into three periods: the time of Israel, the time of Jesus, the time of the *ecclesia pressa* (in which patience is the cardinal virtue). Creation and parousia are the two boundary lines of history.¹⁶ Thus Luke has historicized what was originally eschatological in character. He has replaced the eschatological scheme of the two aeons with a threefold division of history.

Conzelmann next takes up Luke's handling of John the Baptist (*ibid.*, pp. 10—18, 85 f.). In the tradition (primitive eschatological kerygma) John is the boundary between the old and the new aeon. He not only announces the nearness of the Kingdom; he himself is the sign of its dawning. Luke makes John the interlude between two epochs in redemptive history which continues without interruption. It is not the end which comes with John but only a new stage in history.

The time of Jesus is an interim *sui generis* between the time of Israel and the time of the church (*ibid.*, pp. 146—180). Whereas Paul understands his own day as the eschatological time, Luke looks back to salvation in the past. Conzelmann comments:

Mit Jesus ist nicht die Endzeit angebrochen. Vielmehr ist im Leben Jesu in der *Mitte* der Heilsgeschichte das Bild der künftigen Heilszeit vorabgebildet — ein Bild, das jetzt unsere Hoffnung begründet, mehr: ein Geschehen, das uns die Vergebung und den Geist und damit den Eingang ins künftige Heil beschafft. Das ändert aber nichts an der Tatsache, dass Jesuszeit wie Gegenwart noch nicht letzte Zeit sind. Nicht, dass Gottes Reich nahe herbeikam, ist die frohe Botschaft, sondern dass durch das Leben Jesu die Hoffnung auf das künftige Reich begründet ist. Die Nähe ist damit zu einem sekundären Faktor geworden. (*Ibid.*, p. 27)

The same transformation of primitive eschatology is seen by Conzelmann in the way Luke treats the Holy Spirit (*ibid.*, pp. 80 ff.).

¹⁶ *Ibid.* Conzelmann elaborates on this scheme of history on pp. 128—145.

The outpouring of the Spirit is no longer the dawn of the *eschaton* but rather marks the beginning of the long period of the church. Here Conzelmann restates, with just a little more finesse, the crude adage of Loisy: "Jesus promised the kingdom of God, but the church was all that came." In Conzelmann's own words: "Der Geist ist nicht mehr selber die eschatologische Gabe, sondern der vorläufige *Ersatz* für den Besitz des endgültigen Heils; er ermöglicht die Existenz der Gläubigen in der fortdauernden Welt, in der Verfolgung; er schenkt die Kraft zur Mission und zum Durchhalten" (ibid., p. 81). In other words, Luke has once again de-eschatologized and has taken originally eschatological material into the employ of his theology of history. The delay of the parousia forced Luke to develop, in contrast to the near expectation of the original hope, a secondary construction that reflects on the significance of the present time. The delay of the parousia is thus a constitutive factor in the transformation of the hope.

Also in his treatment of the kingdom of God and in his handling of Jerusalem, Luke shows that he has given up hope in an early parousia. In place of the primitive eschatology Luke offers an outline *von der gegliederten Kontinuität der Heilsgeschichte nach Gottes Plan* (ibid., p. 116).

The final section of Conzelmann's *Habilitationsschrift* (ibid., pp. 181—206) brings forward new material.¹⁷ He discusses the church and the individual in Luke-Acts. The individual has no special place in Luke's historical scheme. He stands in the church, and that fact determines his position in a particular phase of history. Earlier he had stood in an immediate relationship with the salvation event. The problem of eschatology is solved for the individual by his being set into the church, which mediates to him through the message and the sacraments the Spirit, who is a substitute and compensation for salvation long delayed, making life in the interim tolerable.

Luke shows ethicizing and psychologizing tendencies in his treatment of man. He does not present the Christian life in "pneumatic" categories. Since he has relinquished hope in an end conceived

¹⁷ Erich Dinkler in his essay is more explicitly existentialist in his analysis of man and eschatology, but it is Conzelmann who shows that the existentialist interpretation of man involves a denigration of the view of man and the church found in Luke-Acts.

as imminent, Luke concentrates not on the coming of the Kingdom but on the way to the Kingdom, to salvation. The proclamation tells us what is necessary for life on the way. Sin is also ethicized in the process.

Salvation and eternal life are future, just like the *eschaton*. Now the Christian possesses only the Spirit and the church. The forgiveness of sins now is the presupposition for entering into life later. The Spirit is the proof of present forgiveness, on the basis of which one can stand in the future Judgment.

In discussing Luke's view of the Christian life, Conzelmann observes: "Die Verschiebung der Eschatologie ergibt eo ipso einen Strukturwandel im ethischen Denken. Aus der Existenz in der eschatologischen Gemeinde mit ihrer Naherwartung wird nun die *vita Christiana*. Das Gericht bleibt Motiv, aber nicht mehr wegen seiner Nähe, sondern wegen seiner Tatsächlichkeit." (Ibid., p. 204)

Before proceeding to the opposing camp and its interpretation of eschatology and its valuation of Acts, we shall do well to make a pencil sketch of the foregoing, indicating the chief assumptions and conclusions which justify characterizing this checkered group as a single school of thought.

To a man they operate with form criticism as one of their chief tools. One of the presuppositions underlying the development of form criticism was an answer to the question of the relationship between eschatology and history. And the critics mentioned so far wield the scholarly scalpel until they arrive at a primitive form of the kerygma which is satisfactorily unhistorical and eschatological in character, content, and claim. Their premise is that the preaching of Jesus in its original form, discoverable by form criticism, is the eschatological norm. It is this they call the kerygma.¹⁸ The original kerygma underwent gradual transformation by incorporation into semibiographical and quasi-historical documents. Luke-Acts represents the climax of a process of historicizing, secularizing, universalizing, and rationalizing. Bultmann says of

¹⁸ Ethelbert Stauffer asks the question whether the end product of form criticism as practiced by Bultmann is "κήρυγμα oder βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως." He does so in "Der Stand der neutestamentlichen Forschung" in *Theologie und Liturgie, Eine Gesamtschau der gegenwärtigen Forschung in Einzeldarstellungen*, herausgegeben von Liemar Hennig (Kassel: Johannes Stauda-Verlag, 1952), p. 101, thereby indicating the distance between schools.

the kerygma: "In early Christianity, history is swallowed up in eschatology" (*History*, p. 37). This school makes the charge that in Luke-Acts eschatology is swallowed up in history.

A constantly recurring note—which is supposed to explain completely the massive change wrought in the outlook of nascent Christianity in the space of a single generation—is the delay of the parousia. Jesus and the entire first generation of Christians waited with bated breath for the dawn of the kingdom of God. The pressing nearness of the parousia shaped all life and thought. Great expectation filled every Christian breast. As Christians of the first generation died and a new generation was born, the delay of the parousia posed a monumental problem which demanded explanation. Luke-Acts answered by substituting history for eschatology, by replacing the immediate confrontation of the event of salvation with the gift of the Spirit, mediated in the church and in the sacraments. For Luke-Acts and for his entire generation the parousia was no longer considered imminent. Nor was the parousia a matter of any real concern to them.

It is asserted repeatedly that only in an age when the parousia was conceived as far off could any kind of literary activity find a place in the church. And surely interest in the life and ministry (history) of Jesus could arise only when the end was no longer imminent. History is written for future generations (Haenchen, pp. 86 f.). The delay of the parousia "removed the inhibition upon writing which had operated while apocalyptic messianism was at fever pitch."¹⁹

The eschatology of this school tends also to be individualistic, personal, and noncorporeal. It is strictly anthropological in an existentialist way. Any thought that salvation and therefore eschatology might be events of cosmic significance is met with the rejoinder that such notions are apocalyptic, implying that they are Judaistic and distinctly sub-Christian. All this only confirms and justifies the opinion of T. W. Manson on the existentialist reinterpretation of the kerygma and Jesus: "It is easy to laugh at those who, a couple of generations ago, saw in Jesus a good nineteenth-century liberal humanist with a simple faith in a paternal deity.

¹⁹ Frederick C. Grant, *The Gospels: Their Origin and Their Growth* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1957), p. 33.

It is less easy to see the joke when the Jesus of history is a twentieth-century existentialist, a kind of pre-existent Heidegger."²⁰

HISTORY AND ESCHATOLOGY

The following pages summarize the general position and attitude of exegetes whose eschatology is integrated with what is usually called *Heilsgeschichte*. In the development of this section it is, of course, necessary to discuss their view of history.

The central message of the New Testament is an eschatological act of God in time, in history. Christianity, in contrast to paganism, is emphatically a historical religion. Some Christians bend the knee or bow the head at the words of the creed "And was incarnate," thus marking with fitting solemnity their recognition that Christianity does not have its roots either in general religious experience, or in some peculiar mysticism, or in an abstract teaching, but in a particular unique, unrepeatable event in history.²¹ "But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law, to redeem those who were under the Law." (Gal. 4:4)

The pagan man of the ancient world had no such concern for history. He felt himself to be bound up in the bundle of life with nature, carried along on the cycle of the seasons, and so focused his eye on the drama of the natural order in which life is recreated each spring.²²

The ancient Greeks were genuinely concerned with history. The idea of history as a science, a form of research, came into being in the Greece of the fifth century B. C.²³ But the Greeks saw history as an impervious, impersonal system with no room for the personal and purposive providence of the God of the Bible.²⁴

²⁰ "Present-Day Research in the Life of Jesus," *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, ed. D. Daube and W. D. Davies (Cambridge: the University Press, 1956), p. 220.

²¹ Sir Edwyn Hoskyns and Francis Noel Davey, *The Riddle of the New Testament* (London: Faber and Faber, 1947), p. 9.

²² G. E. Wright, *God Who Acts: Biblical Theology as Recital* (London: SCM Press, 1952), p. 24.

²³ R. G. Collingwood, *The Idea of History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 46.

²⁴ J. V. Langmead Casserley, *The Christian in Philosophy* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), p. 22.

Biblical man focused his attention neither on the cycle of nature nor on the closed harmony of the cosmos, but on what God had done, was doing, and was about to do according to his proclaimed purpose (Wright, p. 25). "The Greeks heard the eternal harmony of the spheres. The New Testament writers heard the march of universal history."²⁵

The historians of the Old Testament and the New Testament saw in the course of history no causal chain of an empirical or mechanical character. Rather history is the workshop of the heavenly Craftsman, and time is the means by which He achieves His saving purpose.²⁶ The whole Bible takes it for granted that the revelation of the Lord of history is given in and through history. God makes Himself known, says Casserley, "neither in the speculative flight of philosophers—for God is not a concept—nor in the secret illuminations of mystics—for God is much more than warm consolation for the devout—but in the rough-and-tumble of events—for God is the living God and by no means squeamish." (P. 230)

Common to both Testaments is the faith that God speaks and acts in history, that history is an "utterance of God" (*Theology*, p. 173). The New Testament, however, makes the unparalleled claim that the eternal God Himself is active in history as a historical figure, Jesus of Nazareth.²⁷ History possesses eschatological significance because God has revealed Himself in it as its Lord and Creator and Redeemer. Time is no enemy of God but the very means by which God works out man's salvation.²⁸ It has been said that the dominant theology today thinks of time as a form of

²⁵ Ethelbert Stauffer, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Macmillan, 1956), p. 76. Hereafter this work is cited as *Theology*.

²⁶ T. A. Kantonen, *The Christian Hope* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, c. 1954), p. 54.

²⁷ John Marsh, *The Fulness of Time* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1952), p. 139. Inclusion of a reference to Marsh does not mean that he is to be reckoned as a member of the school under discussion. His position is really ambiguous. He does not appear to be really sure himself where he stands on the relationship between history and eschatology.

²⁸ See Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church: Studies in Early Christian History and Theology*, ed. A. J. B. Higgins (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1956), p. 144; Wright, pp. 42 f.

human sensibility, while the New Testament conceives of time as the form of divine activity. (*Theology*, p. 75)

The issue of the relationship of eschatology and history is basically the question of the relationship between God and history. Julius Schniewind writes: "That the Eternal, the Infinite, the Incomprehensible should make decisions, that He should be confronted by an either/or, that He should grant or withhold His presence, that He should show grace or wrath, that in other words God has a history, that there is a story of personal encounter between Him and man: these are things a philosopher could never admit."²⁹ That "God has a history" is the daring claim and firm pronouncement of this school of interpreters.

All serious efforts to interpret history begin with periodization. The philosopher Henry N. Wieman has declared: "The bomb that fell on Hiroshima cut history in two like a knife. Before and after are two different worlds. That cut is more abrupt, decisive, and revolutionary than the cut made by the star over Bethlehem."³⁰ However, Christian faith calls Christ the midpoint of history. A really profound theological insight is contained in the ordinary reckoning of time as B. C. and A. D.³¹

The life and death and resurrection of Christ marks the victorious fulfillment of Old Testament hope and the inauguration of the last things. All the time from the Fall to the empty tomb was a time of preparation and promise. From Easter and Pentecost onward the church lives in the new aeon. If anything transformed and shaped anew the life and thought of the primitive church, it was not the "delay of the parousia" but the eschatological acts of God in history, the resurrection of Christ and the outpouring of the Spirit on Pentecost. As Helmut Thielicke has written:

So könnte es also sehr wohl sein, dass der Terminirrtum der Urgemeinde und der vielen andern, die ihr bis zu Joh. Albr. Bengel in diesem "Irrtum" folgten, nur ein Schatten wäre, der vom echten

²⁹ "A Reply to Bultmann," *Kerygma and Myth: A Theological Debate*, ed. Hans Werner Bartsch, trans. Reginald H. Fuller (London: SPCK, 1953), p. 52.

³⁰ Roger L. Shinn, *Christianity and the Problem of History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1953), p. 13, has this quote from Wieman.

³¹ See Cullmann, *Christ and Time* (London: SCM Press, 1952), pp. 17 ff., and Marsh, pp. 155 f.

Lichte der Wahrheit geworfen sein würde: vom Lichte der Wahrheit nämlich, dass in der Auferstehung und Himmelfahrt Jesu Christi der entscheidende Sieg über Sünde und Tod bereits errungen *ist*, dass der Teufel wirklich schon wie ein Blitz vom Himmel herabgestürzt *ist* (Lk. 10, 18) und dass wir nun in dem epilogischen Zwischenstadium zwischen der vorläufigen und der endgültigen Machtergreifung leben.³²

Floyd V. Filson's book, *Jesus Christ the Risen Lord*, is but one in a chorus of voices which stress the centrality of the resurrection for the entire theology and life of the church. He writes: "The Christian faith is essentially a resurrection faith. Christian theology is essentially resurrection theology. . . . Certainly to the first disciples the resurrection was indubitable fact. It was the answer to all slander of Jesus and to all those who would reject him. It was the basis for all future faith, worship, thought, and witness."³³ For the earliest disciples "the Gospel without the resurrection was not merely a Gospel without its final chapter; it was not a Gospel at all."³⁴

Yet the old aeon continues apparently undisturbed and Christians still look forward to the parousia and the kingdom of God. To quote Thielicke again: "Andererseits bleibe ich aber kraft eines geheimnisvollen 'simul' auch Glied des alten Aeons. Denn Christus bittet den Vater nicht, dass er die Seinen aus der Welt wegnehme, sondern er bittet ihn, dass er sie aus der Verbindung mit dem Argen heraushalte (ἵνα τηρήσῃς αὐτοὺς ἐκ τοῦ πονηροῦ, John 17:15), sind sie doch ebensowenig 'von' der Welt 'her' (im Sinne ihres Ursprungs, ihrer Bestimmung), wie er selber von der Welt ist, obwohl er in ihr wandelt (17:16)." (P. 68)

Thus the Christian lives in two ages simultaneously. In the period of the church the old and new aeons overlap. On the two ages Schniewind writes:

The distinction between the two ages differs radically from our popular distinction between time and eternity (= timelessness). It is a distinction between two different but overlapping periods

³² *Theologische Ethik* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1951), I, 559 f.

³³ (New York: Abingdon, 1956), p. 49.

³⁴ A. Michael Ramsey, *The Resurrection of Christ* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1946), p. 7.

of time. The difference is a qualitative one, a difference between this *evil* age and the age to come. Such a notion takes very seriously the reality of sin and judgment. In this age of tribulation and death, of warfare with Satan, to live in the flesh means to wait, to hope, to believe, to groan. When Christ appears at the Last Day this age with all its sorrows will come to an end. (Schniewind, p. 79)

Christ is coming again to resolve the duality and the ambiguity of the present situation. This evil aeon will come to an end, and the new aeon will be revealed in all its power and glory at His parousia. Christ is not only the Redeemer and Lord but also the Consummator. He is the Consummator of the world because His resurrection marked the inauguration of the last things and because He will come to reveal what He has done and to pronounce judgment on the living and the dead.³⁵ "In Jesus the Kingdom of God came into being, and in Him it will be consummated."³⁶ Christ testifies of Himself, "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing My recompense, to repay every one for what he has done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end" (Rev. 22:12, 13; cf. 1:17 f.).

In its eschatological teaching the New Testament, according to the view of *Heilsgeschichte*, contemplates no future that is timeless. God will not repudiate and obliterate time any more than He will reject and destroy the material earth and our bodies. Time is not the equivalent of fallenness or sinfulness, as some would claim. Before the fall God had already established night and day; that is, there was temporal succession in Paradise. Matthias Rissi has well summarized this point of view as follows:

The Creator is true to His creation, which has a bodily-temporal existence by His will. All spiritualizing of the eschatological hope, therefore, means disdaining the creation and the Creator's will. To be sure, sin has corrupted the form of the world and of man,

³⁵ Joachim Jeremias, *Jesus als Weltvollender* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1930), stresses the completed aspects of the consummation, while not overlooking the future elements; Willam Manson, "Eschatology in the New Testament" in *Eschatology* (London and Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1953), strikes a fine balance between the realized and the future aspect.

³⁶ Werner Georg Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment: The Eschatological Message of Jesus*, trans. Dorothea M. Barton (London: SCM Press, 1957), p. 155.

and therefore St. Paul says that "the form of this world passes away." But it will be created anew by the Holy Spirit. New creation means essentially a new body and a new time. . . . Faith in God as Creator presupposes the resurrection of the body in time.³⁷

The coming age, the new heaven and the new earth, will be no strangers to time any more than they will be enemies of the body. Walter Künneth writes concerning the cosmic dimensions of the Christian hope implicit in faith in the resurrection of Christ from the dead. He says:

Die Auferstehung Jesu wurde als ein Ereignis von kosmischer Weite und Tiefe erkannt. Ist sie von weltumfassender Bedeutung, wie die Beziehung zur Schöpfung, Natur, Geschichte zeigt, so schliesst die *Vollendung* der Auferstehungswirklichkeit notwendig die Auferstehung des *ganzen Kosmos* in sich. Die neue Welt umfasst gleichzeitig die neue Leiblichkeit des Einzelnen, und das Neuwerden des Kosmos. Eine neue Leiblichkeit gibt es auch nur im Zusammenhang mit neuer Zeit, neuem Raum und erneuerter Natur. Die Auferstehung des Kosmos ist die Vollendung der ursprünglichen Schöpfung Gottes zu einer neuen Schöpfungswirklichkeit, die der Erhaltungsordnungen nicht mehr bedarf.³⁸

In his essay "The Vision of History in the New Testament," in the collection entitled *Life in Christ*, Théo Preiss has put this same conception in striking language: "God is more materialistic than Marx."³⁹ He also writes: "Then will come a time which according to the profound word of the Apocalypse of Baruch will have no end. It will indeed be time and also space that are real, and there will be spiritual bodies more real than our poor reality of the present life. Let us not abandon to the Marxists the realistic pages of the Bible to delight ourselves only in the salvation of the soul." Far from opposing history and eschatology, the New Testament affirms that "eschatology is ultimate history. . . . And there really is another aeon, a new time-process and a new spatial order." (Schniewind, p. 89)

³⁷ *Zeit und Geschichte in der Offenbarung des Johannes* (Zürich: Zwingli-Verlag, 1952), p. 151.

³⁸ *Theologie der Auferstehung* (München: Claudius Verlag, 1951), p. 250.

³⁹ (London: SCM Press, 1954), p. 70, from which the next quotation also comes.

The New Testament is profoundly silent about the details of the new creation. Yet it is convinced of its continuity with the old world that passes away. The combination of reticence and conviction arises from the fact that this world of time and space is headed for the purifying and transforming fire of God's judgment (2 Peter 3:10-13). Yet this world is related to the next as a seed to a mature flower (1 Cor. 15:37 ff.). Stauffer says that the "Last Things are of necessity ineffable,"⁴⁰ and he refers to the practice of the early church of referring to the future in negatives. "The meaning that runs through all these negations is that the Creator says an eschatological 'no' to this world in all its sin and suffering and death." But God's last word is not destruction but new creation. "The new creation is God's 'no' to the troubles of this world, but it is also His 'yes' to His original purpose in creation."

Stauffer, whose New Testament theology is written in the key signature of doxology, is the fitting voice to close this section on the interpretation of history and eschatology. He hymns this prose poem: "Self-glorification comes to an end when every creature praises God's glory with united voice. . . . Then the whole cosmos is a temple of God and the new age one continual Sabbath. . . . The people of God will be a people of priests, and clouds of incense will ascend continually to heaven. . . . The people will fall down and offer sacrifice before His face. . . . *The antiphony of universal history leads into a symphonic doxology.* At last God has attained the *telos* of His ways: the revelation of the *gloria dei* achieves its end in the hallowing of His name." (Ibid., p. 231)

Very little has been said concerning the attitude of the *heils-geschichtliche* school toward Acts and its eschatology. This is readily understandable, however, since this school finds unity of eschatological outlook where the other school presupposes variety, diversity, and contradictions among the New Testament writers. Therefore Acts does not receive separate treatment. Differences of purpose and situation are taken seriously, but they see unanimity of theological conviction and viewpoint undergirding the entire New Testament. Thus Floyd Filson in the opening chapter of his extended essay argues the possibility and validity of a New Testa-

⁴⁰ *Theology*, p. 226; the other quotations in this paragraph are on pp. 226 f.

ment theology.⁴¹ In the second chapter, following the lead of his colleague G. Ernest Wright and taking a cue from Dodd's studies in the primitive preaching, Filson summarizes the entire theology of the New Testament on the basis of the sermons in Acts.⁴² Filson summarizes his second chapter with the words: "Thus, in the common core of the early Christian preaching, we have laid hold of the unity which marks the New Testament. The points of this outline underlie the whole New Testament and continually bind the New Testament together into a common witness to God's past, present, and future work in Jesus Christ." (Op. cit., p. 57)

Henry J. Cadbury has published an essay which is particularly interesting, since he cannot be said to belong to either of the two schools which have been discussed in this article.⁴³ Cadbury is a careful, very critical and independent historian.

Cadbury discovers in Acts three convictions of a primitive and even primary character: the resurrection, the parousia, and the Spirit. The accounts of the Ascension and of Pentecost constitute an elaborate frontispiece to the book. Much of the essay is an attempt to relate these events and themes.

Luke has an orderly mind and a strong belief in objective reality, habitually giving precision of time and place. Thus while a certain vagueness inevitably attaches to future eschatological events, the parousia would be conceived by Luke as geographically and chronologically definite. "There would be no vague or partial return." (Ibid., p. 310; cf. p. 316)

Concerning the amount of future eschatological reference in Acts, Cadbury writes:

The eschatological element in the Book of Acts taken by itself is often thought to be slight. That is of course partly because the book is mainly narrative. . . . What eschatology there is is tersely given — much of it merely in rubrics. This means that it is taken

⁴¹ Op. cit.; in fact, he speaks out for a *Biblical* theology and not only for a theology of the New Testament.

⁴² Besides Wright, op. cit., and Dodd, *The Apostolic Preaching and Its Development* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1944), Filson refers to an essay of Bo Reicke and to the *New Testament Theology* of Ethelbert Stauffer as fundamental for this section of his work.

⁴³ "Acts and Eschatology" in *The Background of the New Testament and Its Eschatology* (N. 20 above), pp. 300—321.

for granted rather than that it is slighted. . . . The writer had perhaps no reason to answer such questions as were the occasion for the extended treatment of 2 Thess. 2, 1 Cor. 15, or even of Mark 13 and parallels. What he does say on the subject is therefore all the more revealing than if it were specially motivated. (Ibid.)

Luke's treatment of the kingdom of God, the resurrection, and the Day of Judgment shows that he is not ignorant of eschatology as a welcome part of early Christian belief. Sparring with C. H. Dodd's reconstruction of early eschatology and the eschatology of Acts, Cadbury states quite firmly and frankly: "The Book of Acts does not spiritualize away the concrete eschatological hopes of Christianity nor on the other hand does it emphasize their imminence and urgency with the vivid details of apocalyptic. It retains, I am persuaded, the old and literal expectation but is satisfied to leave the time to God's ordering. It is true to the fundamental Jewish-Christian conception of religion as events in time sequence."⁴⁴

The New Testament writers are not unanimous in their view of the nearness of the parousia. The practical situation of the preachers rather than the delay itself is responsible for changing perspectives in early eschatology. The parousia was used as a motivating force. The writers emphasized variously the imminence or the preliminary events, depending on the particular situation. Luke is required by practical considerations to correct the over-expectant attitude by emphasizing the delay. But Cadbury continues: "The assurance of the final events of history is strengthened rather than weakened by Luke's acceptance of this delay. Not only the career of Jesus but the history of the early Church with which he supplements his Gospel are legitimate parts of the kind of assurance that is implied in the other gospels. But the present and past do not reduce the importance of the future, or much alter the nature of its expected fulfillment. The *eschaton* remains intact in the future." (Ibid., p. 321)

St. Louis, Mo.

⁴⁴ Ibid., pp. 315 f.; Cadbury continues significantly, "To remind us of this characteristic is the great service of Oscar Cullmann's *Christ and Time*, whatever one may think of some other features of his book."