

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Evangelical Quarterly* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_evangelical_quarterly.php

THE MODERN ESCHATOLOGICAL DEBATE

(Continued)

IV

THE great turning-point after Schweitzer came undoubtedly with the publication of Barth's *Romans*. Here the problem of Schweitzer was solved by a timeless eschatology, and it was pointed out that in Schweitzer's sense the New Testament is not eschatological in any thorough-going way, for the stress is as much upon the past and present as it is upon the future. The end of history is not to be interpreted as an end within time, for no end within time can be a real or complete end. The end is also the beginning, and so the nearness of the end is interpreted as the transcendental relation of the present to its origin in the eternal. Hence the notion of a near Parousia, far from being part of the mythological element that must be left behind, is an essential part of the content of faith itself. It depends on the infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity. Such a view of eschatology as timeless crisis appears to empty history of its worth and there was definite reaction against it even by those who, like Althaus, learned from it. Over against Schweitzer the significance of Barth's early view was this, that whereas for Schweitzer eschatology was only the time-conditioned mould in which the thought of the New Testament was expressed, for Barth eschatology has to do with the very roots of faith and belongs to the inner core of the Gospel. We cannot therefore slough it off either in Harnackian or in Schweitzerian fashion in favour of some essence which remains uncontaminated by it. In this respect Barth completes the revolution made by Schweitzer in Biblical studies, and indeed it is just because he takes it full circle that his thought does not run out into triviality.

The extraordinary thing is that Barth soon discovered that the position as he had formulated it in his *Romans* and other early writings, necessary as it was at that stage, was untenable both because it was not square with the New Testament emphasis upon time, and because it involved, contradictorily enough, a dialectic between time and eternity that cut across the essentially eschatological tension of faith. The result was that Barth gave up a timeless eschatology and set himself to

take seriously the New Testament teaching of an imminent advent of the Kingdom in time and yet to see that as belonging to the inner core of faith. This meant that the real eschatological tension was not interpreted in terms of an eternity/time dialectic, which always means in the end a refusal to take time seriously, but rather in terms of the new and the old, of a new time in reconciliation and union with the eternal and an old time which is the time of this fallen world which through sin exists in mysterious contradiction to God. Here the whole content of eschatology is thought through Christologically in terms of the Incarnation, the God-Manhood of Christ, and the events of the Crucifixion, Resurrection and Ascension. In this way eschatology is nothing but a thorough-going expression of the doctrine of grace as it concerns history, while the important word is not *eschaton* but *Eschatos*.

This is not the point in this essay to expound Barth's views, but to note the result of his early impact upon the history of thought on the subject. Perhaps more extraordinary than Barth's own development is the fact that so many writers have entered into the very elements which Barth has sloughed off and made them central to their eschatology. In other words, starting at the stage of Barth's *Römerbrief*, and often in reaction against important parts of it, writers like Bultmann, Hoskyns, Dodd and Niebuhr have continued to develop an eschatology which is concerned mainly with the dialectic between time and eternity, not always with the sharpness of Barth's early "infinite qualitative distinction between time and eternity", but nevertheless in a doctrine of timeless crisis, which is anti-evolutionary and non-teleological. In all this it is Niebuhr who takes time most seriously, and Bultmann and Dodd least seriously. But more significant than this distinction is another which cuts across it—the relation of these four to Barth's fundamental point, maintained throughout, that the eschatological relation has to do with the very meaning of Revelation and lies at the foundation of the Biblical teaching about faith and knowledge. Bultmann, and Dodd, and ultimately even Niebuhr deny this, and still operate with what might be called (for lack of a better expression) Hellenic epistemology (cf. especially Bultmann's *Glaube und Verstehen*, and *Offenbarung und Heilsgeschehen* and Dodd's *The Parables of the Kingdom* (particularly Ch. I). Hoskyns had learned too deeply from the Old Testament and from Barth to read so naïvely into the New Testament Platonic

categories and rationalist presuppositions, but it is a pity that he did not work out his views into a full and consistent account.

In many ways the views of Bultmann are really parallel to those of Schweitzer, except that Bultmann holds that a profound eschatological element must remain in faith even after the mythological elements have been discarded (*Entmythologisierung*). Here it is form-criticism which has been used as the means by which scholars try to get into the essence of the New Testament faith and yet discard those elements which appear to be accretions to, or in contradiction to, the original message. But it is becoming increasingly apparent in those who use the form-critical knife, even in C. H. Dodd himself, that it is apt to cut away too much and is too easily made the tool of philosophical presuppositions. The major difference between Bultmann and Schweitzer in this respect is that whereas Schweitzer's presuppositions were largely Hegelian, Bultmann's are taken from the existential philosophy associated with the work of Martin Heidegger. There can be no doubt that Bultmann gets much more deeply into the issues and has done tremendous service in New Testament scholarship, but his philosophical assumptions actually do gross violence to his scholarship, for in the last resort they make him think of the eschatological tension as but a necessity of finite experience confronted with the eternal in time. In a deeper sense than the merely form-critical, eschatology has its roots in an essential time-conditioning of faith. It arises in our encounter with the Eternal in history, but because the historical element is involved we must always learn to distinguish between the form and the content of eschatology. This means that all eschatological expressions have a certain impropriety; they are ultimately symbolical and give time-conditioned expression for a reality that cannot be conveyed conceptually.

Undoubtedly there is a great truth here, particularly when we come to think of apocalyptic, but much of it goes back to idealist roots and even to the thought of Schleiermacher. Its great fault lies in its failure to do justice to the event-character of Revelation which is essential to the fundamental historicity of faith. It is here that Brunner has come to grapple with the problem. He shares the view, much more than Barth for example, that eschatological terms are ultimately symbolical, but refuses to work that out in any way that will lead to a

docetic view of history. There are times when his utterances have tended in that direction, but he is very aware of the difficulty, and it is never his intention to do anything but the fullest justice to history. Without it eschatology has no meaning whatsoever. Brunner links up here with the work of Martin Kähler (as also does Barth) and the scholars (sometimes called "Biblicist" by the descendants of Schweitzer) who lay great emphasis upon the *Heilsgeschichte*—that is to say, not *Heilsgeschichte* in the supra-temporal sense of the early dialectical theology but as the sacred story of the divine intervention in actual history which reaches its great climax in the Incarnation, and final fulfilment in the *Parousia*.

Side by side with this is the great work of Althaus who in four editions of his *Die Letzen Dinge* has struggled with a view of eschatology which tries to take seriously the eschatological tension as having to do here and now with an eternal experience within time, and yet with a real end which is both the judgment and goal of history. Although Althaus still operates within the philosophical presuppositions inherited from Ritschlianism, his is really a magnificent attempt to grapple with all the major problems, and in particular to bring eschatology and teleology together so as to give a positive content to on-going history, and yet to relate all history to a transcendent End in which history is fulfilled beyond itself. Throughout all he makes great efforts to keep eschatology thoroughly Christological, for it is only when the actuality of the end is placed fully in Christ Jesus that belief in the *Parousia*, and in the *Parousia* as a near-advent, becomes an essential motion of faith. His view of the eschatological tension might be described as a both/and paradox in distinction from the early dialectical either/or paradox. The significance and value of his work lie in that debate and in the fact that he tries to get at eschatology from its centre in the Christian faith. But in the last analysis his is a supra-temporal eschatology that does not escape from an idealist view of time.

Even more significant than the work of Althaus however has been the work of Karl Heim. On the one hand, his significance lies in the fact that he stands in a closer relation to the Biblical message working out an eschatology in terms of justification and forgiveness and bringing into history the acute tension manifest in the death of Christ in the contradiction between the powers of Evil and the Holy Love of God. On the other hand

Heim's significance lies in his efforts to break with the idealist conception of time that has for so long done violence to our understanding of the Biblical message. For help in his interpretation Heim turns partly to Bergson and partly to the changes in modern notions of time due to the new physics, and certainly he manages to introduce into his views something of a Herakleitian tension. Critics argue that this is only to understand primitive mythology in terms of modern mythology, but although it is not always easy to understand or agree with Heim's notions of time, particularly when they are influenced by transient scientific theories, such a criticism is too facile. There can be no doubt that Heim has done us great service both in thinking eschatology and soteriology into each other, and in overthrowing what he calls a static (*stabil*) view of time in favour of a dynamic (*labil*) view as the time-form of the Ego. The latter means that he works out a view of eschatology in close association with the life of the Church, for our Christian view of time must inevitably be bound up with God's action in history through the Church as the place where Eternity is, so to speak, within time. Eternity does not stand forth only at the end of time but is the frontier of time all along the line. It is the other side of time and beyond time, the final Reality that bears upon time. That Reality is supremely manifest in the Incarnation, and through the death of Christ and through the Church in her proclamation of the Gospel, it gets to grip with time in the matter of guilt. Thus history, particularly history in relation to the Church, is read in terms of the contradiction of sinners against the Man of Calvary, and the whole panorama of time has its meaning unfolded there in terms of a dynamic tension so acute that every time is seen to be the last time. Heim does not think in terms of alternatives such as realized eschatology or a future coming of the Kingdom at the end of time, but in terms of both. It is characteristic of Heim that he speaks of these difficult matters again and again through illustrations. Thus he likens the Church of the New Testament to a vast iron bridge which spans the torrent of time with a single arch supported by only two pillars, the Cross of Christ which stands on this side of time and the coming of Christ in power which stands on the other side of time. The Church of Christ in history is maintained from age to age by these two supports and its very being is bound up with the essential unity of these two events, the perfected event of the death and resurrection of Christ and

the future event of the *Parousia*. It is because the very being of the Church is proleptically conditioned by a new creation to be revealed at the *Parousia* that she lives in dynamic tension here and now at the very frontiers of eternity. This tension is throughout the tension that lies in the heart of justification, the relation between guilt and power, in which Heim sees behind the outward façade of world history the embattled array of Satanic forces against the redeeming purpose of God. It is because that struggle was supremely concentrated in the Cross, and because Jesus Christ emerged there as absolute Victor over all evil that God confronts time through Jesus Christ by whom at last the world will be judged and all history brought to its great consummation. But because it is through Jesus Christ that God confronts the world in its history, history will inevitably repeat on the full scale of humanity the conflict of the Cross, but it will be a conflict or cataclysm in which Jesus Christ will emerge triumphant with His new creation of heaven and earth. Because we are concerned throughout all this with a dynamic or fluid (*labil*) view of time we cannot think of the consummation by a lengthening out of the time-stretch, certainly not in an endless lengthening, but in terms only of God's moment, so that we cannot say in what day or hour the *Parousia* will take place. All we know is that we are confronted now through the Gospel with God's Will and with Eternity as though this were the last time.

V

These theological discussions as well as the discussions of the Biblical scholars have demanded a fresh and thorough investigation of the teaching of both Old and New Testaments on the Kingdom of God and the nature of the eschatological cast of all the doctrines of the faith. A vast amount has been done in commentaries and journals as well as in Kittel's *Theological Dictionary* that has yet to be gathered together and focused on eschatology proper. It is significant, however, that more and more recent writers have determined to ask such questions as these: What is the Biblical view of time? How do the Scriptures think of the relation between the Kingdom of God and History? How are we to think of the Kingdom as present in the Church? What do we really mean by "eschatological" if it does not simply refer to final judgment and death and resur-

rection? It is only now after two generations of intense discussion that the issues are beginning to emerge clearly into the open.

The Christian view of the Kingdom of God and the last things undoubtedly goes back to roots in the Old Testament, and particularly to the double consciousness in the Hebrew mind of the Kingdom as bound up with creation, and yet as the pure act of God. In the world of history and trouble the reality of that Kingdom can be imaged forth only dimly, but the Old Testament prophets are mastered by the consciousness that it will be fully realized in the same sphere of reality in which men now live and suffer, for God is the Lord of all the earth, who will not forego His purpose in creation. At the same time they are equally conscious that though the Kingdom is imaged in the pattern that has been given to Israelite society and history, it is not something that will rise out of history but will supervene upon history from God. That was a consciousness which increased with the captivity until it broke out into apocalyptic vision. But the Old Testament apocalyptic eschatology is rooted and grounded in history, and speaks proleptically of the Kingdom as a state in time. No doubt it is bound up with a transcendent community, but it is one that will be realized only in cosmic circumstances perfected by the Word of God when Creation and Kingdom come together. That dualism which holds together in unshakeable unity the redeemed community and a redeemed earth, carrying with it the seeds of the Christian doctrine of the resurrection of the body, lies at the heart of the New Testament eschatology, where its most decisive expression is found.

In the Old Testament the Kingdom of God was revealed at certain decisive points in the history of Israel, but because its domain stretched necessarily over the whole creation it reached beyond Israel, and because the world was a world in estrangement from God, it could only be manifest as a mystery behind and yet impinging upon history. In the New Testament the Kingdom has broken into time and has overtaken men in Jesus Christ, but because it comes into the particularity of history its universal domain is as yet hidden from the eyes of men. It confronts men not first extensively in its universality but intensively in decisive encounter. This means that though the Kingdom of God is present among men it is nevertheless known only in a continuation of the double consciousness of the Old

Testament. The whole emphasis has been shifted. In the Old Testament the main accent lay upon the future; in the New Testament the main accent lies upon the present, but here the accent on the present has no meaning apart from the future when the Kingdom of God now realized intensively in temporal and historical encounter will be realized extensively in a new heaven and a new earth.

It is precisely the tension between those two stresses which is at the root of what we call to-day the eschatological element in the New Testament. The Kingdom is both future and present. The Christian's relation to salvation is both a having and a hoping. "The hour cometh," said Jesus, "and now is." It is that double significance which makes *Parousia* such a difficult thought, for the New Testament teaching about the *Parousia* alternates between a future advent and a realized presence here and now. Thus in the fourteenth chapter of the Fourth Gospel, particularly as seen in the light of the First Epistle of John, the advent presence of Christ undoubtedly refers both to His Presence through the Spirit and to His Presence on the last day. That doubleness is very apparent in the Johannine teaching about judgment. On the lips of Jesus Himself, as we see in the Synoptics, the emphasis is upon the presence of the Kingdom in His own person, and as He Himself was then present in the flesh the accent fell largely upon the present, though there are undoubted references, as several recent scholars have demonstrated (notably, Stauffer, Kümmel, Michaelis and Cullmann) to a future coming not to be wholly identified with Resurrection, Ascension and Pentecost. After the Ascension, however, from the angle of the redeemed sinner to whom Jesus is no longer present according to the flesh, the emphasis necessarily falls as much upon the advent hope as upon communion in the real presence here and now, while the intense personal nearness of the risen Christ impresses itself inevitably upon faith as always imminent. That means that the redeemed sinner can only think of his reconciliation with Christ eschatologically, but also that he cannot think of the Advent in purely futurist terms. That is why the New Testament constantly thinks of the *Parousia* in terms of Epiphany, for the relation between the *to-day* and the *eschaton* is much more a tension between the hidden and the manifest, the veiled and the unveiled, than between dates in calendar time. What is still in the future is the full unveiling of a reality, but the reality itself is fully present here and now.

The attempt of some scholars to read the eschatology of the Apostles as contradicting the eschatology of the Synoptics shows an astonishing blindness to the interior logic of this eschatological relation, besides forgetting, as the late H. R. Mackintosh used to say, that Jesus was not a Christian: that is to say, that His *ipsissima verba* were not given from the perspective of the sinner redeemed by Christ. If the *eschaton* in Jesus Christ has really come into the present, then it must invade and shape the thought of the redeemed, so that the Synoptic revelation of the Kingdom attains its full fruition only through the Apostolic Witness. And that is precisely the significance of the eschatological teaching in the closing chapters of the Fourth Gospel, and the constant teaching of the Acts of the Apostles. What Jesus began to do and to teach in the flesh is continued and completed by Himself through the Spirit in the witness and work of the Apostolate. It is upon this rock that the Church is built, and to this Apostolic Witness that the Keys of the Kingdom are given. Any *Gleichschaltung* of the New Testament in terms of a purely futurist eschatology or in terms of a realized eschatology based one-sidedly upon one emphasis in the Synoptics is both to do violence to the Synoptics and to mutilate the completeness of the New Testament witness.

Another way of expressing the eschatological relation is in terms of end, described in the New Testament both as *telos* and as *eschaton*. (For *telos* see particularly Luke xxii. 37; John xiii. 1; Rom. x. 4; 1 Cor. x. 11; 2 Cor. iii. 13. Cf. Stauffer, *Die Theologie des N.T.*, p. 187.) The roots of the teleological end go back to the prophetic view of the Kingdom, and the roots of the eschatological end go back to the apocalyptic view of the Kingdom. In using both terms the New Testament clearly refuses to teach an eschatology of judgment and new creation that is divorced from a teleological conception of creation and history, or is not controlled by God's creative purpose in time. Therefore, while the Kingdom of God means that the fashion of this world will pass away before the eschatological rule coming from above and beyond, yet that rule actually enters into the course of history and its saving purpose cannot be divorced from God's original and eternal purpose in creation. This double view of the end is magnificently combined, as Professor Farmer has pointed out (*The World and God*, p. 223), in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans.

VI

The view which demands special consideration in this country, and which must be fully discussed before we can see our way ahead either in Biblical studies or in theology, is the so-called "fulfilled eschatology" championed by the late Sir Edwyn Hoskyns, or, as it is more popularly known, the "realized eschatology" championed by Professor C. H. Dodd. This is an eschatology which has arisen directly out of the débâcle of Liberal thought occasioned by Schweitzer and is to be understood largely in that setting. It is a thorough-going eschatology which wholly repudiates the principle of evolutionism, but as we have already noted still operates with an epistemology that does not appear to be too Biblical.

In its earliest forms (as in Von Dobschütz, *The Eschatology of the Gospels*) the Kingdom of God tends to be interpreted in terms of the divine idea, but in Hoskyns and Dodd the emphasis is upon the breaking in of the Kingdom of God as *event*, so that the *eschaton* is now a matter of actual experience. The Kingdom of God has already come. It is fulfilled or realized eschatology. The crisis of personal decision and the final judgment of the world are telescoped into each other—they are one and the same thing. All horizontal relations are transmuted into a vertical relation in which the Kingdom is perfectly fulfilled, so that every moment in time is heavy with present significance and meaning not because of a future reference but because it points to eternity and is fulfilled in it. But if this were true, one would be at a loss to see what the real distinction is between the Old Testament view of the Kingdom and that of the Gospels. In this sense the Kingdom was just as present then as it is now, and so the real significance of "realized" as something distinctive is lost. It does not take much to see that some such view in the hands of a consistent form-critic really dissolves the historical element into mist.

There is no doubt however that "realized eschatology" has thrown a flood of light upon the New Testament, particularly upon some of the parables, while the emphasis upon the *eschaton* here and now has done New Testament scholarship invaluable service in helping it to free itself from evolutionism. It is a view however that can be maintained only by rigorous application of form-critical methods to the Gospels, particularly to

those passages which do not fit the theory, not to speak of the Epistles and the Apocalypse. The over-all impression given by the works of C. H. Dodd is that "realized eschatology" is as much a ready-made formula for the solving of New Testament problems as an interpretation arising out of the New Testament itself. It is indeed so much a *tour de force* that the whole New Testament teaching about the Second Advent of Christ is set aside as a mistake, that parables and *logia* which appear to speak of a lapse of time between two eschatological moments are declared to have been adapted by the tradition to strengthen the illusory hope of the early Church, or if genuine they are only an accommodation of language, while apocalyptic elements are set aside as misunderstandings. Such a drastic excision of *Maranatha* out of the New Testament witness and the earliest Christian confession of faith betrays a handling of the New Testament that leaves much to be desired, for it denies that the keys of the Kingdom (the knowledge of the mystery) lie with the Apostolic Witness to Christ.

It might be helpful at this point to throw Dodd's views into comparison with Schweitzer's, for that is the setting they seem to have, though Schweitzer is rarely ever mentioned by Dodd. Dodd takes for granted that *the* problem is the so-called *Parusieverzögerung* but he wants to solve it by setting out an eschatology that does not give up the high Christology of the Church. Schweitzer's Christology was frankly Ebionite—Jesus was terribly mistaken. Dodd shrinks from that conclusion and prefers to lay the misapprehension at the door of the early Church, who are made answerable for the false reconstruction of the sayings of Jesus in terms of a futurist eschatology. But by eliminating the time-element inherent in the Gospel message as we have it Dodd tends toward docetism in spite of himself. Again both Dodd and Schweitzer take up a similar attitude to the Second Advent in the sense of a futurist eschatology, but in Schweitzer and more so in his descendants that tends to be transmuted into an idealist Utopia after all, in which a *Parousia* is an impossibility. For Dodd, who occasionally allows himself references to a future advent or judgment, in almost the next breath to deny them, the *Parousia* would appear to be quite unnecessary, for strictly speaking it has already come, and is fully realized. In other words the *Parousia* is made out to be an event of the transcendental or supernal world, so that the

notion of a Second Advent is purely symbolical. In Schweitzer's view there is no final judgment at all; in Dodd's view history itself is the judgment of mankind. Undoubtedly there is much in the "realized eschatology" that is a decided advance over the "consistent eschatology" (as it is called), for it completely refutes the notion that Jesus is simply an exponent of late-Jewish apocalyptic ideas; but "consistent eschatology" has the great advantage of offering an interpretation of the New Testament with a minimum of mutilation and reconstruction, whereas "realized eschatology" can only be established by radical reconstruction, and at times dubious interpretations (cf. Matt. xii. 28; Mark i. 15, etc.).

Theologically, there are insuperable difficulties to such a view. The teaching that the Kingdom of God refers to a transcendent order beyond history, to a supernal world which enters history purely as the *eschaton*, carries with it the idea that "the time-scale is irrelevant to the ultimate significance of history" (*Parables of the Kingdom*, p. 71). That is such a reaction from the teleological view of the Kingdom as to become an equally one-sided eschatological view. Indeed such a consistent eschatology really means the denial of eschatology altogether, for there is no eschatological expectation left. Everything has happened already. When the time-element is eliminated like that, the eschatological tension is transmuted into a dialectic between the supernal world and this world, and the Kingdom of God becomes ultimately docetic, almost a Platonic magnitude, and the word *eschaton* loses its original meaning. This inflation of the eschatological element of the New Testament (particularly in the hands of Bultmann) is so serious that (to borrow an expression from Harnack) "eschatological" is rapidly becoming a *Zauberbegriff*.

The great merit of "realized eschatology" is its insistence that the decisively new factor must be located wholly in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, but its great demerit is that it entails a divorce of redemption from creation, of teleological end from eschatological end—except perhaps in retrospect, for the parables of growth are made to refer only to what led up to the coming of the Kingdom, not to the action of the Kingdom in time. The Old Testament prophets pointed to the coming of the Kingdom as a state in time, for they taught that the Kingdom could only be realized among men in a perfect en-

vironment, that is to say, in harmony with God's purpose of creation. It is a Kingdom therefore with cosmic and historical significance, and to be realized in the same sphere of reality as that to which we belong. It is difficult to understand how the Kingdom, as C. H. Dodd envisages it, is actually realized at all, if it only discounts history and does not gather it up into fulfilment.

(To be continued)

T. F. TORRANCE.

University of Edinburgh.