

## THE MODERN ESCHATOLOGICAL DEBATE

(Continued)

THE prophets taught also, as we have had occasion to see, that the presence of the Kingdom in a fallen world must mean that it comes as a hidden Kingdom, at least until the apocalyptic moment when it is fully revealed in a new heaven and a new earth. That is surely the thought of the New Testament which it holds all the more decidedly just because the *eschaton* has entered time. No doubt it cannot be discerned by observation in the passing fashion of this fallen world, but it necessarily entails within the world the creation of a new community through which the Kingdom is actual in conditions of time. That is indeed the mystery of the Kingdom, but unlike the Messianic remnant of the Old Testament which had not yet received the promise, this community is actual in the fullness of time, rooted and grounded in the Incarnation, a community that has foundations. But while its builder and maker is God, just because it is actual in time it partakes also of the contradictions and conflicts of history with another law in its members warring against the law of God. In spite of being in the likeness of sinful flesh the new community is indeed the Body of Christ, the mystery through which the unveiling of the righteousness of God takes place in the world in the preaching of the Gospel, but therefore also the unveiling of the wrath of God as the redeeming purpose of divine love in effective conflict with the forces of evil. In the earthly ministry of Jesus, when the Word was broadcast to all and sundry, the *eschaton* confronted men in the person of Christ standing in their very midst as the mystery of the Kingdom, the *Eschatos*, invading the realm of their choices and decisions, throwing them in to ferment and crisis, and (as C. H. Dodd has described so well) acting selectively upon them so that their reaction to it is itself the divine judgment. That inevitably happens when the Kingdom of God comes into the midst, for the King takes charge of the situation and His Word acts upon men whether they will or no giving their own choices and decisions an essential form *vis-à-vis* the Kingdom. Nevertheless this breaking in of the last Judgment is veiled in the form of the parable and presented as it were obliquely in order both to bring men face to face with the last things in crucial decision and yet to leave

them room for decision, which could not be if the *eschaton* were wholly realized, as C. H. Dodd would have it, and the time-element were eliminated. And so the Fourth Gospel puts very clearly the whole synoptic teaching of the parables when Jesus says: "I judge you not, but the Word that I speak unto you, that shall judge you at the last day." That final judgment confronts men here and now, but its full action is delayed until the last day. Had the *eschaton* encountered men in its unveiled openness, men would have been damned on the spot without room or freedom for the decision of faith. That is why, as Niebuhr has pointed out, Jesus held apart the prophetic and the apocalyptic views of the Kingdom (*Gifford Lectures*, ii. p. 49). However, just because room and time are given for reaction, the terrible possibility is allowed for the reaction of evil in its final and intense contradiction to the Kingdom of God. That is what the New Testament calls the mystery of iniquity, which is also unveiled through the preaching of the Gospel, and will be unveiled fully at the last day and destroyed. But just as in the earthly ministry of Jesus that was provoked out of its mystery and pressed by the finger of God to the point of ultimate decision in the terrible conflict that issued in the Cross, so the Church as the Body of Christ proclaiming the same Word of the Kingdom in order that all men may repent and believe the Gospel also provokes such a reaction of evil in the conflicts of history that there is also an eschatological fulfilment of evil culminating in the last judgment. The tares and the wheat grow side by side, and so as Niebuhr has said history is "the story of an ever-increasing cosmos creating ever-increasing possibilities of chaos" (*An Interpretation of Christian Ethics*, p. 108).

"Realized eschatology" does not do justice to the New Testament teaching of this mystery of iniquity *vis-à-vis* the mystery of the Kingdom and can therefore have no teleological word to say to the desperate conflicts of history. It is precisely because the New Testament thinks of the Kingdom as a present but as yet veiled reality, because it refuses to identify the Kingdom with the Church or teach the unveiling and complete realization of the Kingdom in the conditions of this present evil world, that it carries with it a doctrine of final justification and consummation that gives meaning and sacred purpose to all things as working together for good. To dissolve the distinction in the actual continuation of the fallen world

between the Kingdom as present veiled reality and unveiled reality yet to come is to dissolve the New Testament eschatology and indeed the New Testament Gospel.

## VII

A much more satisfactory view of New Testament eschatology has been sketched by Professor W. Manson of Edinburgh in a profound study of the Gospels, *Jesus the Messiah*. (This registers a considerable advance upon his earlier views in *Christ's View of the Kingdom of God*.) Professor Manson has taken pains to point out that in His thought of the Kingdom Jesus starts from present events and experiences to the coming of the Kingdom and not vice-versa (p. 50). He takes His stand in the prophetic view of history, but what was new in that was the importance that He attached to His acts among men. "If I by the finger of God cast out demons, then has the Kingdom of God unexpectedly reached even to you." And so "Jesus becomes the presentation-point, so to speak, of the divine working in history, the focus through which all lines of the divine plan concerning the past and the future are drawn". "The Kingdom of God, hitherto only a dream, a transcendent object of hope or aspiration, had come into immediate and verifiable relation to history. The advent and claim of the End had been registered" (p. 13). The decisive factor in all this is not only that He proclaimed the Kingdom of God as a glorious event in the future, but the complete identification of Himself with the coming of that Kingdom, and indeed of its actual arrival in Himself.

In Judaism "all righteousness or justification is denied to, and withdrawn from, the present order and existence of things in the world, and is transferred to a world to come, a new age in which the righteous will of God will be the only source and perfect norm of life" (p. 16), but in Jesus that absolute will of God is realized, and realized not only as demand but as grace, and it is in the fulfilment of the Kingdom as such that Jesus goes toward the Cross as the Son of Man who represents the fullness of the sacrifice by which men are made sharers in the Kingdom. It is thus that the Kingdom enters time and becomes actual in the human midst.

The crucial fact for eschatology, however, is the bearing of this absolute on us as we are placed in the world. There is no doubt that the Kingdom of God is already at work in power,

forcing its way (*βιάζεται*), demanding that men break with the existing order of this world, but its full power is concealed and has yet to be revealed. Here and now the Kingdom of God intersects the orbit of our mundane existence, but that intersecting is necessarily partial. It at once comes into time with Jesus Christ as its focus, but it remains infinite in its recession. To use Professor Manson's spatial figure (which of course is only metaphor), the Revelation is not a circle or an ellipse which can *wholly* pass into and be absorbed into our orbit. It is rather like a parabola or hyperbola which, while entering into time, runs wholly and at all points into infinity. The boundary of its entrance into history is the boundary line of time and eternity. History does not coincide with it but is asymptotic. An eschatology such as "realized eschatology", which does not deal faithfully with this infinite recession, lacks vision and does not take the measure of the mystery involved. It is because that mystery remains that apocalypse remains an essential element at the heart of faith. Christianity cannot abandon the apocalyptic opposition of the then and now. It looks for the consummation of redemption to take place only in the world to come.

Nevertheless, continues Professor Manson, "a change has come over its attitude to the present sphere of existence in that this shadowed world of sin is now seen under the immediate sign and power of the world to come. The future and higher sphere of glory already in a real sense penetrates and intersects this sphere of humiliation through the power of the Spirit. Something has crossed the dividing-line, and this not merely a *Vox*, a summons from the world beyond to repent and believe, but a higher manifestation. While much of the traditional apparatus of apocalyptic ideas is retained in the Synoptic records and in the New Testament, the thing which is new and distinctive in Christian revelation of God is the experience which expresses itself already in the words of Jesus about His mighty acts: 'The Kingdom of God has come upon you.' 'The Kingdom of God is in your midst.' 'The Kingdom of God is as if a man should cast seed into the ground.' This is not all an enthusiastic prolepsis of things to come. It means that the world is not wholly left to itself but stands, despite all demonism, under the power, and, by grace, within the range of the salvation of God" (*Jesus the Messiah*, p. 152). It is thus that the apocalyptic dualism is transcended.

## VIII

There is still another interpretation of the Christian hope that must be discussed, for it has a great deal to teach us. It is more a tendency than a clearly articulated view. Here the Kingdom of God is thought of as so present in space and time that the eschatological tension tends to disappear in spite of the intention of the sponsors themselves. This idea which might well be called "realized teleology" is traceable (with very differing emphases) in the younger Blumhardt, H. Kutter, Ragaz and in this country in men like G. F. MacLeod and other "incarnationists" for whom "community" occupies a supreme place in their thought. It is the tendency to think of the Church not as eschatologically identical with the Kingdom of God but as the extension of the Incarnation, and to think also of the unbroken wholeness of Christ as a possession possible in the conditions of space and time. It is not content with the eschatological relation between having and hoping, but insists on the possession of total salvation secure in the continuity of this-worldly reality. Nor is it content with the sacramental confirmation of faith but insists upon transmuting it at every point and every moment into objectivity. To a certain extent this runs parallel to the totalitarian eschatology of Rome, but whereas in Roman doctrine the earthly realities are transubstantiated into realities of grace, here the realities of grace are transubstantiated into the earthly realities of the daily life. God is earthed, as Dr. MacLeod says.

Like realized eschatology, realized teleology repudiates evolutionary Utopianism, for it thinks of salvation as wholeness realizable here and now and refuses to throw the Kingdom of God forward into the future either in the way of a futurist eschatology or an ultimate ideal. The decisive event has already taken place in the Incarnation which means not only the union of God and man but the integration of the material and the spiritual. In some sense the whole creation has been renewed already, though it waits for its manifestation through the action of the Church as the sphere within which and through which that integration is made good.

If realized eschatology tends to take its stand one-sidedly on the end as *eschaton*, this eschatology tends on the contrary to take its stand one-sidedly on the end as *telos*, which correspondingly is conceived as capable of fulfilment here and now in the

conditions of time and space. In other words, this is *realized teleology*. Thus, for example, faith in the integration of the material and the spiritual carries with it the doctrine of the healing of the body as an essential part of whole salvation. That refers not simply to healing from disease but the healing of the body social and politic as the extension of the Incarnation. That has already been accomplished in the Body of Christ and is therefore to be realized in the obedience of the Church as earthed to the material world. In all this there is a manifest dissatisfaction with the eschatological tension between salvation as once and for all accomplished in the death and resurrection of Christ, and yet as one whose fullness is yet to be realized, a tension which is enshrined in the two sacraments of baptism and holy communion. Realized teleology refuses to hold this doubleness in eschatological tension, and so tends to slip in a third sacrament or other sacraments in which the two elements are *fully* integrated. Thus while the New Testament thinks of the fullness of Christ as the final goal of the Church and indeed of all things in heaven and earth, Dr. MacLeod thinks of it as the cosmic fullness which must be realized here and now in the total healing of soul and body. The teaching of St. Paul that while we are redeemed already we must also wait for the redemption of the purchased possession receives little place in this thought.

Unquestionably we have laid hold of here one of the most important elements in the Christian faith, the resurrection of the body, the resurrection as historical fact, and a great attempt is being made to work out its deep implications for Christian life and thought on earth. There is no separation between creation and redemption here, and yet it must be said that this is to heal the hurt of God's creation too lightly. It does not see the Incarnation sufficiently in the light of the death of Christ, that the Incarnation therefore terminates this world as well as fulfills it, so that, in the words of Prof. Farmer, "an essential element in the whole experience of forgiveness which lies at the heart of the Christian's reconciliation with God, is eschatological, is a pointing forward to a divine consummation which involves the cessation of the present sinful order in which man now is. As Althaus says: 'Without eschatology the doctrine of forgiveness in view of our present abiding state of sinfulness, cannot be saved from falling either into frivolity or into rank scepticism'" (*The World and God*, p. 218).

Dr. MacLeod has pointed the Church to a fullness of its duty in the world which is a pressing challenge, but it is a mission that is far profounder and more difficult than he apparently realizes. It is without doubt the function of the Church to live out the atonement, or at-one-ment, as he would say, in the world, that is, to be in the flesh the bodily instrument of God's crucial intervention, and so become the sphere in which the great reconciliation already wrought out in the body of Christ is realized among men, so that the life and action of the Church, now the suffering servant in the world, become as it were sacramentally correlative to the life and passion of Jesus Christ. In realizing at-one-ment in the world, the Church must learn to enter into the judgment of God in the death of Christ upon humanity, and to enter thereby into the travail of Christ for the new universal humanity. The Church cannot be at one with the world, for its at-one-ment with God brings it into critical tension with the world reflecting the judgment of the Cross, but that is precisely the point at which there is introduced into the world the Gospel of a new humanity at one with God, and indeed of a new heaven and a new earth.

There is no doubt that the Christian ethic is an absolute ethic and not an interim-ethic, and that it requires an absolute obedience organic to existence in this world and to its orders of life which have been given divine sanction. For that very reason, however, as Professor W. Manson has pointed out, love towards God cannot require men either to abandon the ordinary obligations of citizenship or to "press upon the State ideals of action such as non-resistance to armed aggression, which under given circumstances would overthrow the foundations of law and order and defeat the good which the State exists to serve" (op. cit., p. 93). "It would seem, therefore," continues Dr. Manson, "that it is not Christian to press the Christian absolute, understood in its true character as love, upon orders of life which stand outside of the powers of the Kingdom of God. As the ethic of a spiritual life revealed by Jesus Christ, the Christian ideal binds all who have been brought by him to see God, and as such it will determine the spirit of their citizenship in the State and their whole life in the world. In this manner Christianity will ultimately affect the State's conception of its functions. But so long as the Kingdom of God only intersects our mundane existence, and does not fill the whole sphere of it, there will be limits to what can be demanded of the State in its

name, and to what can be set up as definition of social duty. What the Christian ethic does here is not to provide a law for society, but to create a tension in its midst which cannot but have transforming results. The Kingdom of Heaven is as heaven."

"Realized teleology" does not really enter into this critical situation and is therefore unable to understand the tension of world-denial and world-affirmation that belongs to the heart of Christian experience (see Cullmann, *Christ and Time*, pp. 211 ff.). Consequently, it is the tendency of these theologians to believe the regulative idea of communism or of a secularized eschatology, that the perfection of the indirect relationships of the community of labour and of society will in fact be the realization of the Kingdom of God. No doubt the Church must encourage every effort to produce the kind of society in which community can best be realized, but the Church that lives in repentance acknowledges that that sin can be fully realized (or as St. Paul would say, fulfilled) in the collective as well as the individual life (see Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, p. 149), and therefore must acknowledge before the judgment of God that even the form and fashion of the historical Church must pass away as a compromised form of the will of God. In the words of H. H. Farmer: "Eschatological faith provides a solution for this world which does not evacuate the world of its meaning as a sphere in which God's presence may now be known and His will served, even though these will never be perfectly realized. It does this by conceiving the divine Kingdom as the end of the present order in the double sense of the word 'end.' Somehow there is at work within the limitations and frustrations of this world a divine purpose which transcends it and cannot be comprehended in terms of it. The consummation of that purpose will therefore at one and the same time mark the end of this world and be the fulfilment and justification of it. And the divine will, which will be fully realized only then, can none the less be served now, even as the far-off ocean may swell the water of an inland creek and lift the boats of those who have never seen its infinite horizons. Eschatological faith is thus both pessimistic and optimistic in regard to this world. It says yes and no to it at the same time. It is God's world and yet it is not God's world in the fullest sense, being only preparatory to it" (*op. cit.*, p. 214 f.).

Throughout this the accent must undoubtedly fall upon the triumphant certainty of the finished work of Christ (much more

than it does in Farmer's thought), for Christ is already the New Man in whom all things are become new, and in whom we have proleptically even now the consummation of the divine purpose of creation. Just because that is complete already we cannot think in terms of an extension of the Incarnation, but only of an eschatological repetition of the Incarnation (including the death and resurrection): which is the doctrine enshrined in the sacrament of holy communion. The proclamation of this new humanity is the most explosive force in the world not only because it is proleptic to the final judgment of holy love and proleptic to the new heaven and new earth, but because in it the last things actually confront man creatively here and now in time. It is therefore only as an eschatological magnitude that the Church can really carry out her divine mission in the world, to confront all men with the crucial word of the Gospel, and so to penetrate every aspect of human life with the power of the resurrection, intensively as well as extensively. The great missionary task of the Church lies therefore both in the evangelization of the world and in being the instrument by which the dynamic Word of this Gospel intervenes in every form of human existence and action, social, national and international. Without such thorough-going fermentation in the world the Church will not be in a position to proclaim the Gospel in any way proportionate to her great passion, nor will she have the power to alter the face of present human society so as to make it by the very power of God an instrument in the furtherance of His redeeming purpose.

## IX

The most exciting work on the eschatology of the New Testament since that of Albert Schweitzer is *Christus und die Zeit* by Professor Oscar Cullmann.<sup>1</sup> This is a great attempt to turn eschatological thought away from the dialectic of this-worldly/other-worldly, or of time/eternity, to the deeply Biblical tension between the present and the future. The main emphasis is placed where "realized eschatology" places it, in the person of Christ, but here we have a formulation of eschatology that both brings creation and redemption together and yet takes the time element with the utmost seriousness.

<sup>1</sup> Translated into English by F. V. Filson: *Christ and Time* (London, 1951). The quotations given above are Dr. Torrance's renderings from the German text.

Because the teleological and eschatological ends are brought together in this way Cullmann can also give within his eschatology a doctrine of history or rather of salvation-history in two main phases as the narrowing of the universal purpose of God's creation through Israel, then through the Remnant to the One, Christ Jesus, in whom the decisive event of all history takes place. From Jesus Christ salvation-history widens out again through the Apostles, through the Church which now becomes the Body of Christ and plays the part of the Remnant of the people of God until it reaches out at last to the fullness of the new heaven and the new earth in the complete purpose of God. "Thus salvation-history progresses in two movements: the one goes from the many to the one, that is the old covenant. The other goes from the one to the many, that is the new covenant. Exactly in the centre stands the atoning deed of the death and resurrection of Christ. Both these movements have this in common that they are fulfilled according to the principle of election and substitution. This is supremely regulative for the present period which runs out from the centre. According to the New Testament the earthly Church, in which the Body of Christ manifests itself, plays a central part for the redemption of all men and for the whole creation" (pp. 101 f.).

Two thoughts run throughout this which have importance both for realized eschatology and realized teleology: the distinction which Cullmann draws between the Kingdom of God and the Reign of Christ, and a linear conception of time. The Kingdom of God has come decisively among men in Christ, but it remains essentially a future reality. The Reign of Christ on the other hand has already begun and continues through the Church and is actualized in the Word of the Gospel reaching out to the whole world so that all worldly powers and authorities are made to function only within the Lordship of Christ. This means that we are really living in the last times, for the reign of Christ is essentially proleptic to the Kingdom of God which will be established at the end of this present age. The conception of the Kingdom of God carries with it the element of judgment upon this present evil world whose form and fashion must pass away. Apart from final judgment history becomes meaningless, but with the final judgment is given the teleological end of the conflicts of history. In the conception of the Kingdom of Christ, on the other hand, the essential oneness of God's purpose in creation and redemption is maintained, inas-

much as in Christ there is a new creation, and carried through history into the Kingdom of God, where it entails the eschatological judgment of all history. Because in the eschatological reserve of the New Testament those two ends are held partially apart until the *Parousia* and the completion of both ends in one, the new creation is as yet a hidden creation, hidden with Christ in God, but always on the point of becoming manifest. Until then the Church lives in the eschatological tension between the first coming of the Kingdom and the final coming, and carries out her task as the crucified body in the realm where sin and the flesh are still found and where the subordinate powers still try to break free from the Lordship of Christ. Nevertheless the Church lives in the Spirit on the Day of the Lord, that is to say, on the victory side of the Kingdom, and the song in her mouth is the triumphant chant of the second Psalm. "Why do the heathen rage and the people imagine a vain thing? . . . I have set My King upon my holy hill of Zion. Ask of me, and I will give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession. . . ."

The distinctive thing about this faith is that both the sides of the eschatological tension are given full weight, and consequently the eschatological tension is not transmuted into a dialectic between other-worldly/this-worldly as it is with C. H. Dodd, or eternity/time as it is with Niebuhr, nor on the other hand into an integration of spirit/matter as it is with George MacLeod. It is essentially a tension between time and time, redeemed time and time waiting for the full reality of its redemption. It is with this view of time that the distinction between the two eschatological moments of the first *Parousia* and the second *Parousia*, or the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Christ is given. There can be no doubt that some such distinction must be made; else we have on the one hand the Roman Catholic totalitarian eschatology with the virtual deification of the historical Church, or on the other hand the virtual denial of history in the distortion by "realized eschatology" of the Kingdom of God into a timeless supernal world beyond history. Both these views cut the nerve of the Biblical teaching on the Kingdom. At the same time it is doubtful if the Bible does operate with the strictly linear conception of time attributed to it by Cullmann. Is he not confusing time (*chronos*) with duration (*aion*), for example when he says that "time and eternity have temporality in common" (p. 55)?

Does not the fact that guilt has entered into time, destroying man's freedom toward God, binding him hand and foot, a slave of *chronos*, the god of this *aion*, mean that time has itself fallen from grace and been changed for man? Is it not part of our faith that Christ Jesus both was born of a virgin and rose again from the dead, and that therefore there is already a new creation which is neither the product of the old world nor holden by the sin and the necessities of guilt-impregnated time, and therefore the powers of this world, including *chronos* (cf. Rev. x. 6), have been dethroned? Do not the resurrection as a historical fact (in Martin Kähler's sense) and the forty days between the resurrection and the ascension mean that the reality of the new creation is temporal fact now though its reality veiled since the ascended Lord is yet to be unveiled in the *Parousia*? Must we not think of the Kingdom of God and with it the new creation as interpenetrating our old world within the Reign of Christ here and now, if only in some contrapuntal fashion? At any rate we must say that the New Testament emphasis upon the future of the Kingdom of God is not the future of the reality but the future of its full manifestation, so that the eschatological tension in linear time must be modified into eschatological tension between the time of a present but hidden reality and the time of the same reality manifest in the future. It is that very modification which lies at the back of the constant expectation in the New Testament of the proximate nearness in time of the Lord—Maranatha. That was felt just as poignantly at the close of St. Paul's ministry as at the beginning. The very nearness of the Lord (Phil. iv. 5) cuts short the time (1 Cor. vii. 29). And that is surely the thought that St. Paul puts into the otherwise puzzling citation from Isaiah: "He will consummate and cut short the work of His word upon the earth" (Rom. 9. 28).

It is a mistake therefore to speak of the expectation of an early return of the Lord as illusory or false—the mistake lies rather in reading either a realized eschatology or a purely linear view of time into New Testament eschatology.

*(To be concluded)*