

Chapter XIX

Apocalyptic and New Testament Theology

George Eldon Ladd

[p.285]

We are witnessing a renaissance of interest in apocalyptic literature and its theology. A little over a decade ago, one of Germany's most influential New Testament scholars, Ernst Käsemann, published an essay entitled "The Beginnings of Christian Theology".¹ Käsemann bases his argument on a form-critical analysis of the Gospel of Matthew and posits a theological movement after Easter in which the primitive Jewish Christians interpreted the meaning of Jesus' resurrection in terms of Jewish apocalyptic. Jesus was not an apocalypticist; he preached the "immediate nearness of God". Furthermore, the preaching of Jesus cannot really be described as theology. Primitive Jewish-Christian apocalyptic thus became "the mother of all Christian theology".² "The heart of primitive Christian apocalyptic... is the enthronement of God and of his Christ as the eschatological Son of Man".³ "Its central motif was the hope of the epiphany of the Son of Man coming to his enthronement; and it is a question whether Christian theology can ever make do, or be legitimate, without this motif which arose from the experience of Easter and determined the Easter faith".⁴

Käsemann's essay at once provoked a vigorous reaction from his German colleagues, particularly Ebeling and Fuchs. These essays, together with contributions by H. D. Betz, Frank M. Cross, David Freedman, and Robert W. Funk, were published together as volume 6 of the *Journal for Theology and Church* under the title "Apocalypticism".⁵ In his essay, Freedman goes so far as to say, "The discovery and subsequent demonstration that the controlling factor in the literature of the New Testament is apocalyptic" is one of the developments of modern scholarship.⁶ Käsemann's essay provoked a searching reaction from Wayne G. Rollins⁷ who argues that the origins of Christian theology are much more complex than Käsemann suggests, and that apocalyptic was only one of several

[p.286]

influences forming early theology. Rollins also lists a number of important contrasts between early Christian theology and Jewish apocalypticism which set the former apart.

Renewed interest in apocalyptic has been expressed not only by New Testament scholars but also by the systematic theologian, Wolfhart Pannenberg. In obvious reaction to the prevailing existentialist theology, Pannenberg has argued that revelation occurs in history. It takes place indirectly and partially in the events of history, and fully in the whole of history as that whole

¹ "Die Anfänge christlicher Theologie," *ZThK* 57 (1960), pp. 162-85. Published in English in *Journal for Theology and Church* 6, Robert W. Funk, ed. (New York, 1969), pp. 17-46. References are to the English Translation.

² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵ See n. 1.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

⁷ "The New Testament and Apocalyptic," *NTS* 17 (1971), pp. 454-76.

is embodied in the end of history. Pannenberg discovers the full revelation in the eschatological event of the resurrection of the dead which can be understood only in the context of Jewish apocalyptic. The event of the resurrection has already occurred proleptically in the resurrection of Jesus.⁸ Thus apocalyptic is made the vehicle for the understanding of revelation.

Pannenberg's thesis has been severely criticized by William R. Murdock who points out that Jewish apocalyptic sees no revelation in history. Essential to apocalyptic is the doctrine of the two aeons or ages. The future age is not the fulfilment of history but the end of history. For this reason, Murdock feels that Pannenberg has not caught the genius of apocalyptic.⁹

The growing interest in apocalyptic in America is illustrated by the fact that an entire issue of *Interpretation* was devoted to four essays on this subject.¹⁰ William A. Beardslee first surveys the main characteristics of apocalyptic and then discusses the role apocalyptic thinking plays in the thought of Schweitzer, Buri, Käsemann, Pannenberg, and Altizer. Beardslee points out that while a renewed historical study of apocalyptic is now getting under way, there remain many unsolved problems.

Amos N. Wilder discusses the "Rhetoric of Ancient and Modern Apocalyptic". Paul D. Hanson writes on "Old Testament Apocalyptic Re-examined", in which he argues that Jewish apocalyptic has its roots in Old Testament prophecy.¹¹

The issue concludes with a statement by a systematic theologian, Carl E. Braaten, "The Significance of Apocalypticism for Systematic Theology". He insists that "there is no unapocalyptic Jesus",¹² and argues that we must "cheerfully... acknowledge the apocalypticism of Jesus and... make it

[p.287]

the point of departure for systematic theology today".¹³ Braaten sees the fundamental element in apocalyptic to be its doctrine of the two ages, and he insists that a Christian interpretation of history is impossible without the dualistic element in apocalyptic, namely, the dialectical differentiation of all reality into this present evil age and the new world of promise to come. Here are embodied the principles of negation and transcendence: negation of the structures of this present evil age by the transcendent power of the age to come. Braaten has now brilliantly worked out this thesis in his book, *Christ and Counter-Christ*.¹⁴

⁸ The work of Pannenberg and his co-labourers was published under the title *Offenbarung als Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1961), and translated as *Revelation as History* (London, 1968).

⁹ See "History and Revelation in Jewish Apocalyptic," *Interp* 21 (1967), pp. 167-87. Murdock arbitrarily distinguishes between the eschaton and the age to come, the eschaton being the goal of history while the age to come lies beyond the end of history.

¹⁰ See *Interp* 25 (1971), 419-99.

¹¹ This position is also held in essays by Cross and Freedman while Murdock holds that apocalyptic dualism and eschatology "together ... formed the core of Zoroastrianism, and they were taken up together by apocalypticism under Iranian influence." (*Interp* 21 (1967), p.174).

¹² *Interp* 25 (1971), p. 480.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 482.

¹⁴ Philadelphia, 1972.

The revival of interest in apocalyptic in Germany is accentuated by the recent book by Klaus Koch, *Ratlos vor der Apokalypitik*, translated into English with the title *The Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*.¹⁵ Koch surveys the situation in England as well as in Germany and bemoans the numerous efforts to "save Jesus from apocalyptic". He goes on to show that the problem of apocalyptic is the problem of Jesus. Koch insists that apocalyptic is one of the main links that joins together the two Testaments, and that Jesus must be understood against the background of apocalyptic.

Finally, the renewed interest in apocalyptic is reflected in the most recent publication of the one whom we honor in these essays: *Apocalyptic*.¹⁶ This little book contains an analysis of the various characteristics of apocalyptic, both literary and theological, and concludes with a discussion of apocalyptic and the New Testament, particularly Mark 13 and the Revelation. Morris agrees that apocalyptic contributed something to Christianity, but he thinks that it is going too far to say that apocalyptic was the parent of the Christian faith.

The Christian movement has its affinities with the apocalyptic movement. The language of the apocalyptists has influenced that of the Christians. The characteristic expressions of the Gospels often seem to receive more emphasis in apocalyptic than they do, for example, in the Old Testament.¹⁷

Morris insists that Jesus himself was not an apocalyptist,¹⁸ and he emphasizes the fact that the characteristic literary form of Christianity was the gospel and not the apocalypse.¹⁹

In his discussion of dualism, Professor Morris seems to admit a larger debt to apocalyptic than his conclusion would allow. He first sketches the apocalyptic doctrine of the two ages—this age and the age to come. The present age is under the control of demonic spirits; it is full of evil and hopeless. All hope is posited in the age to come which will be the age of eternal life and immortality. Although Morris does not stress the point, this age will be brought to its end and the new age inaugurated by a

[p.288]

cosmic act of God, sometimes in the person of a heavenly Messiah who comes to raise the dead and judge the wicked. In evaluation of this eschatological dualism, Morris comments, "To this day we are indebted to the apocalyptists for making this point so firmly that it has become an integral part of subsequent religion".²⁰

This is a judgement with which I heartily agree, and in this essay I wish to exploit it and to expound its relevance for New Testament theology, If I seem to differ with Professor Morris, the difference is in emphasis, not in substance.

¹⁵ *Studies in Biblical Theology*, Second Series, 22 (London, 1972).

¹⁶ Grand Rapids, 1972.

¹⁷ Leon Morris, *Apocalyptic*, p. 73 [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/apocalyptic_morris.pdf].

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 86.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 49. He quotes with approval the words of R. Meyer in *TDNT* VI, p. 827, "The idea of two world epochs... was designed to outlast apocalyptic and become an enduring principle of faith."

We must first note the important role eschatological dualism plays in apocalyptic thought. The fully developed idiom does not appear in Jewish literature until the last years of the first century A.D. "The Most High has made not one age but two" (IV Ez. 7:50). "The Day of Judgement shall be the end of this age and the beginning of the eternal age that is to come" (IV Ez. 7:113). "This age the Most High has made for many, but the age to come for few" (IV Ez. 8:1).²¹ However, the terminology is implicit in Enoch: "The age shall be consummated" (En. 16:1); "this world of unrighteousness" (En. 48:7); "he proclaims unto thee peace in the name of the world to come" (En. 71:15). As Ringgren says, "Der Gedanke 1st in den altesten Apokalypsen nicht ausdrücklich formuliert, aber die Vorstellung steht deutlich im Hintergrund".²²

The idea, which precedes the formulation of the idiom, is (to the present author) clearly rooted in the Old Testament prophetic hope.²³ The prophets continually look for a new redeemed order, which will be established by divine intervention, not by forces arising from within history. The Day of the Lord was conceived "as the time of the divine inbreaking into history in spectacular fashion. While God was believed to be always active on the plane of history, using nations and men to fulfil his ends, the Day of the Lord was thought of as a day of more direct and clearly manifest action". The prophetic predictions "were of a future not causally linked with the present".²⁴ The degree of continuity and discontinuity between the two orders is differently expressed by different prophets; but Isaiah expresses the hope of a new order in terms of new heavens and a new earth (Isa. 65:17; 66:22).

"This eschatological dualism is the essential characteristic of Apocalyptic

[p.289]

so far as its contents are concerned".²⁵ Ringgren devotes a third of his article on "Jüdische Apokalyptik" in the last edition of *Die Religion in Geschichte and Gegenwart* to a discussion of this dualism as the most essential feature of apocalyptic.²⁶ Von Rad says, "The characteristic of apocalyptic theology is its eschatological dualism, the clear-cut differentiation of two aeons, the present one and the one to come".²⁷

The debt of the New Testament to Jewish apocalyptic has been expounded most vividly by Oscar Cullmann in his book *Christ and Time*.²⁸ Cullmann proves that the New Testament Gospel has as its background the Jewish concept which conceives of redemption taking place on a linear time line which divides time into the two ages: the present age and the coming age. For Judaism, the mid-point in the time line is the transition point from the present age to the

²¹ See also 2 Bar. 14:13; 15:7; Pirke Aboth 4:1, 21, 22; 6:4, 7. Volz cites a possible reference to Hillel (ca. 30 B.C.), but this is not certain. See P. Volz, *Die Eschatologie der jüdischen Gemeinde* (Tübingen, 1934), p. 65. For the whole subject, see Wm. Bousset, *Die Religion des Judentums im späthellenistischen Zeitalter* (Tübingen, 1926), pp. 243-49.

²² H. Ringgren, "Apokalyptik," *RGG³I*, col. 465.

²³ This point is argued in detail in the author's volume, *The Presence of the Future* (Grand Rapids, 1973), chap. 2. See also S. Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (Oxford, 1956), p. 265.

²⁴ H. H. Rowley, *The Growth of the Old Testament* (London, 1950), p. 179.

²⁵ P. Vielhauer, "Apocalyptic," *New Testament Apocrypha*, Win. Schneemelcher, ed., (Philadelphia, 1964), II. p. 589.

²⁶ H. Ringgren, *op. cit.*, cols. 464-66.

²⁷ G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology* (New York, 1965), I, pp. 301 f.

²⁸ Philadelphia, 1950. Rev. ed., 1964.

future. Cullmann argues that the difference between Christianity and Judaism is that Christianity sees the mid-point no longer at the end of this age but in the historical mission of Jesus.

It is difficult to see how anyone can successfully challenge this position. The two-age terminology appears in every stratum of the Gospel tradition except Q.²⁹ The most important of these sayings, from a critical point of view, is that of Mark 10:30. When the young man asked Jesus how he might inherit eternal life (Mk. 10:17), he had no thought of life as a present possession in the Johannine sense. He was concerned about his future destiny, the life of the age to come. Probably he had in mind the words in Daniel when "many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2). In the subsequent discussion with his disciples, Jesus equated eternal life with the Kingdom of God (Mk. 10:23-25), and also with the age to come. In this age, his disciples will enjoy certain rewards in return for the sacrifice they are called upon to make, but they are also to expect persecutions (Mk. 10:30). The supreme gift, eternal life, belongs to the age to come. So far as this saying is concerned, apart from the age to come God's people will not experience eternal life.

The same eschatological dualism is reflected in a saying in the Fourth Gospel: "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life" (Jn. 12:25). This is a saying which has parallels in the Synoptics.³⁰ Dodd has pointed out that "the Fourth Evangelist alone has given it a form which obviously alludes to the Jewish antithesis of the two ages: he who hates his soul *ba'olam ha-zeh*

[p.290]

will keep it *la la'olam ha-ba'* and consequently will possess *hayye ha'olam ha-ba'*.³¹ Indeed, the very idea of ζωὴ αἰώνιος is eschatological.³² It is the life of the age to come.

This eschatological dualism is also patent in Paul. Christ has been exalted far above every name that is named, "not only is this age but also in that which is to come" (Eph. 1:21). This present age is evil (Gal. 1:4). Satan has been allowed in the providence of God to exercise such power that he can be called the "god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4). Because this age is evil, Christians are not to be conformed to its norms and patterns (Rom. 12:2). It was the rulers of this age who brought about the death of Jesus (1 Cor. 2:8).³³

Even in the book of Hebrews, which many critics interpret against a background of philonic, i.e., Greek, dualism, the eschatological perspective remains. "For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come (τὴν οἰκουμένην τὴν μέλλουσαν), of which we are speaking"

²⁹ Mark (Mk. 4:19; 10:30); M (Matt. 13:39-40; 28:20); L (Luke 16:8); Matt. 24:3; 12:32 and Luke 20:34-35.

³⁰ Mk. 8:35; Mt. 10:39, 16:25; Lk. 9:24, 17:33.

³¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel* (Cambridge, 1953). p. 146.

³² See H. Sasse, *TDNT* 1, p. 209.

³³ It would take us far afield to discuss the critical problem of whether "the rulers of this age" are political rulers or spiritual powers. For a further discussion of Pauline dualism, see G. E. Ladd in *EQ* 30 (1958), pp. 75-84 [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/pdf/eq/place_ladd.pdf].

George Eldon Ladd, "Apocalyptic and New Testament Theology," Robert Banks, ed., *Reconciliation and Hope. New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L.L. Morris on his 60th Birthday*. Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1974. pp.285-296.

(Heb. 2:5). This is clearly an eschatological expression which is synonymous with *ha'olam ha-ba'*.³⁴

Cullmann's thesis seems unassailable. The basic structure of New Testament theology is the same as that of Jewish apocalyptic.

At this point, a difficult question must be raised, if it cannot be finally answered. Did Jesus and the early Christians borrow the two-age scheme from Judaism? We have seen that the fully developed terminology of the two ages appears in Jewish literature first in IV Ezra. The witnesses for this terminology from the rabbinic writings before 70 A.D. are very infrequent and uncertain.³⁵ However, Sasse believes that "The NT borrowed the doctrine of the two aeons from Jewish apocalyptic".³⁶ So far as our literature is concerned, the Pauline letters are the earliest documents to use the idiom of the two ages; but if our Gospels correctly report Jesus' words, Jesus himself is the first one according to our texts to have used the idiom.

Many scholars believe that the Gospels do not correctly record the words of Jesus and that he could not have used the two-age terminology. While it is clear that several uses of the phrase are secondary, there is no convincing reason to conclude that the terminology does not in fact go

[p.291]

back to Jesus. G. Dalman says, "it is clear that the ideas, 'this age', 'the future age', if Jesus used them at all, were not of importance in His vocabulary... The idea of the 'sovereignty of God' filled the place of that of 'the future age'."³⁷ This is a surprising statement in view of the fact that he had already said, "the true affinity of the idea of the sovereignty of God, as taught by Jesus, is to be found, not so much in the Jewish conception of *malkuth shamayim* as in the idea of the 'future age', or that of the 'life of the future age'."³⁸ However, if the idea of the two ages is found in Jesus' teachings, we should admit the probability of the terminology unless strong reasons prevent it. In the words of T. W. Manson, who was not inclined to "play up" eschatological concepts, "Parousia and judgement mark the division between the present age and the age to come. They usher in what is described as 'the Kingdom of God' or as 'life'. These two terms appear to be used interchangeably".³⁹

We must recognize the possibility that this terminology existed in Judaism and that both Jesus and Paul brought it into the Christian tradition. However, for this there is no final proof. It is more likely, in view of the appearance of the terminology in our sources, that it came into the Christian tradition through Jesus teaching, and Paul uses the same terminology, which was also emerging simultaneously in Jewish idiom. Geerhardus Vos was convinced that

³⁴ See G. W. Buchanan, *To the Hebrews* (New York, 1972), p. 26. For the eschatological perspective of Hebrews, which many scholars have denied, see Wm. Robinson, *The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews* (Birmingham, 1950; a much-neglected little work), and C. K. Barrett, "The Eschatology of the Epistle to the Hebrews," in *The Background of the New Testament and its Eschatology*, ed. by W. D. Davies and D. Daube (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 363-93.

³⁵ H. Sasse in *TDNT* I, p. 206.

³⁶ *Loc. cit.*

³⁷ *The Words of Jesus* (Edinburgh, 1909), p. 148. See also the long note in W. G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment* (Naperville, Ill., 1957), p. 49.

³⁸ G. Dalman, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

³⁹ T. W. Manson, *The Teaching of Jesus* (Cambridge, 1935), p. 276.

there is no escape from the conclusion that a piece of Jewish theology has been here by Revelation incorporated into the Apostle's teaching. Paul had none less than Jesus Himself as a predecessor in this. The main structure of the Jewish Apocalyptic is embodied in our Lord's teaching as well as in Paul's.⁴⁰

if Christianity took over the eschatological dualism of Jewish apocalyptic, it did so with a difference—a difference so striking and significant that it is easy to contrast the Gospel with apocalyptic, as Morris does.⁴¹

The fact is, if our thesis is correct that the doctrine of the two ages is a natural development of the Old Testament prophetic hope,⁴² that this doctrine as it emerged in Jewish apocalyptic lost one of the most important features of prophetic theology: the truth that the God who is to act finally at the end of the age is also the God who acts in history and who reveals himself in historical events. The prophets believed that God had revealed himself in delivering his people from slavery in Egypt, in preserving his people from their enemies, and even in judgement in the captivity. The same God who had acted in history would intervene at the

[p.292]

end of history to manifest his glory by bringing his redeemed people into the new order of the Kingdom of God.⁴³

The apocalyptists lost the reality of God's acting in present history, Indeed, the evil plight of God's people in history was precisely their problem. In Maccabean times, the Jews rallied to the law, and many suffered martyrdom rather than violate the law. Yet God did not deliver them. Israel's historical experiences led them to the conclusion that history was irremediably evil. No hope for deliverance could be expected in history; all hope was focused on the eschatological event when God would rise up to judge the wicked and bring his people into the blessed age to come. Thus the apocalyptists reflect pessimism about this age. The blessings of the Kingdom cannot be experienced in the present, for this age is abandoned to evil and suffering.

This pessimism with regard to history is vividly reflected in the Dream Visions in Enoch. God has personally guided the experiences of Israel throughout its history until the Babylonian captivity. Then God withdrew his personal leadership, forsook the temple, and surrendered his people to wild beasts to be torn and devoured. God "remained unmoved, though He saw it, and rejoiced that they were devoured and swallowed and robbed, and left them to be devoured in the hand of all the beasts" (En. 89:58. Then God turned the fortunes of the nation over to seventy shepherds, instructing them as to the number of Jews who might be slain. However, the shepherds were self-willed and faithless, ignoring the divine directive and permitting fearful evils to befall God's people. When reports of the evil conduct of the shepherds were brought to God, he laid them aside and remained unmoved and aloof (89:71, 75), A record was made of the angels' faithlessness that they might be punished on the day of judgement when Israel would be delivered. Between the years 586-165 B.C., God was conceived to be

⁴⁰ Geerhardus Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, 1952), p. 28. However, see p. 288, n. 4 [now n.23].

⁴¹ *Apocalyptic*, p. 86.

⁴² See p. 288, n.4 [now n.23].

⁴³ The term "Kingdom of God" is not used in the prophets, but the idea is constantly recurrent.

George Eldon Ladd, "Apocalyptic and New Testament Theology," Robert Banks, ed., *Reconciliation and Hope. New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L.L. Morris on his 60th Birthday*. Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1974. pp.285-296.

inactive in the fortunes of Israel. God's people found themselves at the mercy of faithless angels. No deliverance could be expected before the messianic era.⁴⁴

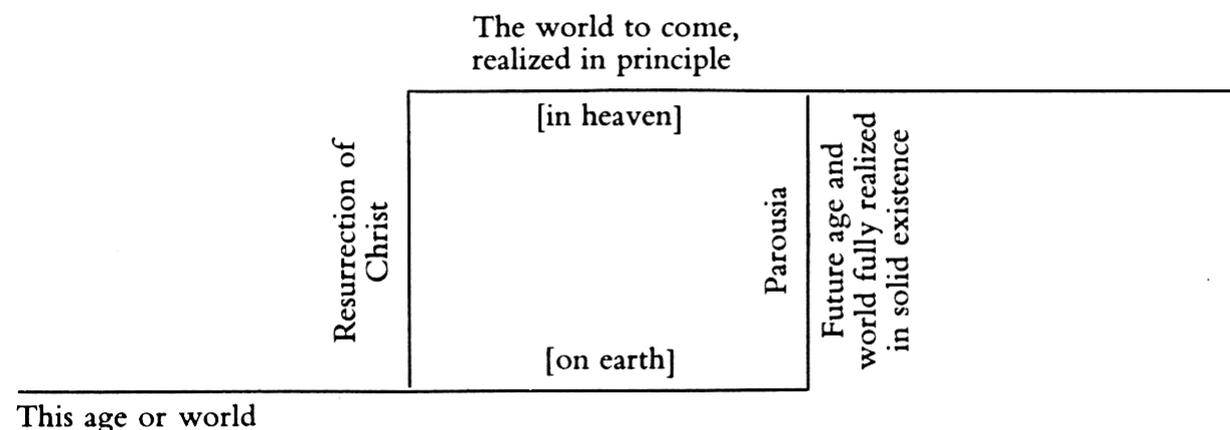
The apocalyptic rejection of history was the subject of a paper read at the hundredth meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in America by Stanley B. Frost. He argues that far from having a philosophy of history, apocalyptic did not take history seriously, and did not view history as the medium of revelation. Salvation is to be sought not in this world but in a transcendent order. He points out that this fact has not been widely recognized.⁴⁵

It is precisely at this point that the apocalyptic thought of the New Testament most notably differs from Jewish apocalyptic. In fact, the

[p.293]

difference is so great that many scholars would not call the basic structure of New Testament thought apocalyptic. It was this primary difference that led the present writer some years ago to suggest that we ought to distinguish between prophetic-apocalyptic and non-prophetic apocalyptic.⁴⁶ Non-prophetic apocalyptic has completely lost the sense of God's acts in history. It is completely pessimistic about history; history is surrendered to the powers of evil. Prophetic apocalyptic builds its world view on the apocalyptic doctrine of the two ages, but it retains the consciousness of God's acts in history. This is what led Cullmann to say that the main difference between Judaism and Christianity is that the latter places a new centre in the time line without surrendering the eschatological dualism.⁴⁷

Long before Cullmann wrote his influential *Christ and Time*, Geerhardus Vos had expressed the same idea in what seems to the present writer to be an even more effective way. Instead of a straight line with two climactic points⁴⁸—the incarnation and the parousia—Vos suggested the following diagram.⁴⁹



⁴⁴ For further illustrations see G. E. Ladd, *The Presence of the Future*, chap. 3,

⁴⁵ Stanley B. Frost, "Apocalyptic and History," in *The Bible in Modern Scholarship*, ed. J. P. Hyatt (Nashville, 1965), pp. 98-113.

⁴⁶ G. E. Ladd, "Why Not Prophetic Apocalyptic?" *JBL* 76 (1957), pp. 192-200.

⁴⁷ See p. 289, n. 4 [now n.28].

⁴⁸ It can be argued that Christ did not in fact put a new center in the time line, for what he will do at his Parousia is as essential to the full realization of salvation as the incarnation, cross, and resurrection.

⁴⁹ G. Vos, *The Pauline Eschatology*, p. 38.

This diagram is intended to suggest that all of the redemptive blessings already enjoyed in Christ are, to use Vos's words, "semi-eschatological" realities. *This is to the present writer the unifying centre of New Testament theology.*⁵⁰ The Kingdom of God, which is the central theme of Jesus' preaching, belongs essentially to the age to come. God's rule will never be fully realized in this age. The Gospels, like Jewish apocalyptic, recognize the role of evil spirits in this age. Satan and his angels must be destroyed (Matt. 25:41) before God's Kingdom is consummated. However, this does not mean, as in Jewish apocalyptic, that God has abandoned his world and

[p.294]

human history. In fact, *history has become the scene of the conflict between the Kingdom of God and the powers of evil.* "But if it is by the Spirit of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you" (Matt. 12:28). The Kingdom of God belongs to the age to come, but in the person and mission of Jesus, that Kingdom has invaded history to bring to men living in the old age the blessings of the age to come.

Eternal life also belongs to the age to come.⁵¹ In the Synoptic Gospels, eternal life is always an eschatological blessing. But in the Fourth Gospel, Jesus has brought this eternal life to men while they still live in dying mortal bodies. "He who believes in the Son has eternal life" (Jn. 3:36). There is a distinct analogy between the concept of the Kingdom of God in the Synoptics and eternal life in John. Both belong to the age to come and are eschatological; in fact, eternal life is in reality the life of the future age. But by virtue of Jesus' mission, both the Kingdom of God and eternal life have become objects of present experience.⁵²

The same historicising of eschatology is found in Paul's teaching about the resurrection, justification, and the Spirit. Paul makes it clear that the resurrection of Jesus was an eschatological event. His resurrection is the first fruits of the eschatological resurrection (1 Cor. 15:23). First fruits is more than promise or hope; it is actual realization. The resurrection of Christ was an event in history, but it was not an "historical" event in the sense that it could be explained by antecedent historical events. It was an eschatological event. In the resurrection of Jesus, a piece of eschatology was split off from the end of the world and planted in the midst of history.

The same is true of justification. Justification is essentially the sentence of righteousness by the divine Judge in the eschatological day of judgement. This is what Paul expected when he was a Jew.⁵³ But now because of the cross, God has already pronounced the verdict of acquittal—and that not on the basis of good works but of faith in Jesus because of what he has done in history.

The gift of the Spirit is also an eschatological gift. The promise in Joel 2:28-29 of the outpouring of the Spirit was an event that belonged to the day of the Lord. Ezekiel (36:26-28) also predicted the gift of the Spirit but again it is in an eschatological setting. On the day of Pentecost, Peter proclaimed that the eschatological promise of the Spirit had been fulfilled—in history. And Paul's calls the gift of the Spirit both first fruits (ἀπαρχή Rom.

⁵⁰ See G. E. Ladd, "Eschatology and the Unity of New Testament Theology," *ExpT* 68 (1956-1957), pp. 268-73.

⁵¹ See p. 290, n. 2 [now n.32].

⁵² Leon Morris, *Commentary on the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids, 1971), p. 214.

⁵³ See F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (London, 1963), p. 102.

George Eldon Ladd, "Apocalyptic and New Testament Theology," Robert Banks, ed., *Reconciliation and Hope. New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L.L. Morris on his 60th Birthday*. Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1974. pp.285-296.

8:23) and a down-payment (ἀρραβών, 2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14) of the eschatological fullness.

It is because these eschatological blessings have come to men in history that Paul says that Christ gave himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age (Gal. 1:4), and that we are no longer to be conformed to

[p.295]

the pattern of this age but to be transformed by a new inner dynamic (Rom. 12:2). Although Paul does not say so, this new dynamic can be nothing less than the powers of the age to come (Heb. 6:5) which have come to men while they are still living in the old age.

This fact has led many scholars to the conclusion that in fact the turn of the ages has occurred. "Mit Jesu Person und Wirken als Gottessohn und Messias ist die zukünftige Welt, das ewige Leben mit seinen göttlichen Kräften, Gegenwart geworden, der zukünftige Äon reicht mit ihm in diesen Äon hinein".⁵⁴

In its view of the two aeons, the NT is in essential agreement with first century apocalyptic. The framework of eschatological notions is broken only by the fact that the αἰὼν μέλλων *is no longer merely in the future*. Believers are already redeemed from this present evil αἰὼν (Gal. 1:14) and have tasted the powers of the future αἰὼν (Heb. 6:5)... *The new aeon has already begun*, though as yet concealed from the eyes of men.⁵⁵

Michaelis strenuously objects to this notion that the turn of the ages has already occurred.

"Ein 'zukünftiger Äon' sollte, wenn er Gegenwart geworden wäre, eben nicht mehr zukünftiger heißen, bzw, wenn er nach wie vor 'zukünftiger Äon' genannt wird, sollte er nicht als gegenwärtig vorgestellt sein. Von einer Gegenwart des zukünftigen Äons zu reden stellt einen Widerspruch in sich dar."⁵⁶

This is certainly utterly logical. However, God transcends both time and history, and if not the new age itself, then at least the "powers of the age to come" have reached back into the old age. Vos's diagram certainly illustrates the situation in New Testament theology. Believers are living to all intents and purposes in two ages at the same time. We still sin, we are still weak, and frail, we still die; but we are nevertheless living by the power of a new life which is nothing less than the life of the age to come. The blessings of the new age do not constitute a worldly phenomenon. They are visible only to the eye of faith. They are now realized only in the spiritual realm.⁵⁷ In the age to come, the entire man—body as well as spirit—and creation as well (Rom. 8:21) will enjoy the blessings of God's salvation.

In any case, we have tried to show that the New Testament owes its basic structure to Jewish apocalyptic, which was in turn derived from the Old Testament. Apart from the inauguration of the age to come, God's

⁵⁴ Josef Schmid, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Regensburg, 5 1963) p.37.

⁵⁵ H. Sasse, *TDNT* I, p. 207. [Italics mine].

⁵⁶ Wm. Michaelis, "Reich Gottes and Äonenwende" in *Neutestamentliche Aufsätze* (J. Schmid Festschrift; ed. by J. Blinzler, et al., 1963), p. 162.

⁵⁷ Charismatics who believe that miracles and healings are normative for the entire church age will dispute this statement.

George Eldon Ladd, "Apocalyptic and New Testament Theology," Robert Banks, ed., *Reconciliation and Hope. New Testament Essays on Atonement and Eschatology Presented to L.L. Morris on his 60th Birthday*. Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1974. pp.285-296.

[p.296]

work of salvation remains ever incomplete. Because we have already experienced the powers of the age to come, it remains more than a hope; it is a certainty based both on the teaching of Scripture and on Christian experience.

© 1974 *The Paternoster Publishing*. Reproduced by kind permission of the Publisher.

Prepared for the Web in November 2008 by Robert I. Bradshaw. Footnote are numbered consecutively and do not reset each page as in original text. Square brackets in footnotes indicate the relevant note cross-reference.

<http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/>
