FUTURISTIC AND REALIZED ESCHATOLOGY IN THE EARLIEST STAGES OF CHRISTIANITY

WERNER GEORG KÜMMEL*

I

One of the most important results, full of consequences for the historical investigation of the New Testament, was the recognition, established toward the end of the nineteenth century, that the imminent coming of the rule of God and of the end of the world had been of fundamental importance for the thinking of primitive Christianity. Naturally this is not to assert that up to that point no one had been aware of the presence in the New Testament of an expectation of the imminent end of things. Numerous New Testament texts speak too clearly of this fact for it to have gone unnoticed. Hugo Grotius had already called attention to Paul’s conviction that he would experience the final judgment even in his lifetime.1 Granted, Grotius drew only chronological conclusions from this exegetical observation. A century later, however, the English deist Matthew Tindal, in his Christianity As Old As the Creation: Or the Gospel a Republi-
cation of the Religion of Nature (1730), made the more inclusive observation that in almost all the writings of the New Testament the conviction existed that the end of the world was near, and that the early Christians had based their ethical admonitions on this conviction. "But, if most of the Apostles . . . were mistaken in a matter of this consequence, how can we be certain that any one of them may not be mistaken in any other matter?"2 Tindal therefore identified the expectation of an early end of things as the fundamental view of almost the whole of early Christianity and concluded that because this expectation was not fulfilled, the apostles could have been mistaken also in other points. When G. E. Lessing published Von Zwecke Jesu und seiner Jünger (1778) by the Hamburg gymnasium professor H. S. Reimarus (taken from the unpublished Apologie oder Schutz-
schrift für die vernünftigen Verehrer Gottes), these deistic observations became known in German-speaking lands.3 Reimarus’ point of view was that Jesus had proclaimed the nearness of the messianic kingdom of the Jews. However, both because Reimarus presented this point of view in the context of a historical construction that was fantastic and because it was so different from the traditional conception of the preaching of Jesus, that is, a teaching laid down for all time, Reimarus’ contemporaries were not convinced that Jesus expected an early end of things. D. F. Strauss, too, considered it only probable that Jesus expected his own return.4 Even Albert Schweitzer did not notice that A. Schwegler in his presentation of the post-Apostolic age (1846) pointed to "the general expectation of the immedi-

---

* The author of this essay is at present professor of theology at the University of Marbourg, Germany. The translation is by Peter Kjeseth, assistant director, Department of Theology, Lutheran World Federation, Geneva, Switzerland, and Cora Klick, assistant professor, Department of Religion, Wittenberg University, Springfield, Ohio. The article is taken from New Testament Studies, Vol. V (1958–59).
ately imminent return of Jesus which
animated the whole church in the earli-
est period.\textsuperscript{16} All these references to the
New Testament expectation of the im-
minent end did not influence subsequent
research very strongly.

It was, therefore, a new discovery
when in 1892–93 J. Weiss and R. Ka-
bisch pointed out the determinative role
that the expectation of an early coming
of God's kingly rule and of the new age
played in the thought of Jesus and of
Paul. Shortly before this, various in-
vestigators had stressed the importance
of the knowledge of late Jewish apoca-
lyptic for the understanding of primitive
Christianity.\textsuperscript{6} It was possible for J.
Weiss, therefore, through a comparison
of the proclamation of Jesus with the
views of late Judaism and through the
unprejudiced investigation of the New
Testament texts, to conclude that for
Jesus "the return is conceivable only
within the lifetime of the generation
among whom he worked."\textsuperscript{27}

Similarly R. Kabisch pointed out that
Paul preached "the Messiah, Christ and
his kingdom, that is, eschatology in the
living consciousness of being one of
those who had come near the end of the
world."\textsuperscript{28} Both Weiss and Kabisch em-
phasized that for Jesus and for Paul
this fundamental eschatological view
determined their conception of the prom-
ised salvation as well as the nature of
their ethical admonition. In the work of
these men the presence of the expecta-
tion of the early return in primitive
Christianity was not just pointed out
in passing, but was demonstrated to be
the ruling center of the preaching of the
earliest Christians. And even though
this assumption at first met disbelief,\textsuperscript{9}
it nevertheless gradually won ground
and finally seemed no longer to be a
matter of discussion.

Today, however, the view that the
proclamation of the imminent coming
of the kingdom was the fundamental
proclamation of Jesus and primitive
Christianity has again been strongly
called into question.\textsuperscript{10} The various hy-
potheses, according to which statements
about the future made by Jesus and
primitive Christianity could not have
been intended in a temporal sense be-
cause the action of God belongs not to
the end of time but is above time, are
irrelevant at this point. For the fact
that both Jesus and the first Christians
reckoned with a future in which time
continued becomes so clear from an un-
biased consideration of the text that it
is impossible to establish the complete
elimination of a temporally future ex-
pectation. Of importance, on the other
hand, is the assumption—also repeated
in various forms—that at the beginning
of the primitive Christian proclamation
the conviction existed that God's action
of eschatological fulfilment was accom-
plished in the presence of Jesus and in
the historical events immediately there-
after, whereas the expectation of a
speedy apocalyptic final occurrence—
first clearly recognizable in Paul—may
be traced to a renewed infiltration of
Jewish conceptions. As early as 1936,
C. H. Dodd advocated the thesis that
earliest Christianity, in continuity with
Jesus, preached the eschaton as already
entered into history, so that it remained
for the Risen One only to complete
what was already in the process of ful-
filment: "The more we try to penetrate
in imagination to the state of mind of
the first Christians in the earliest days,
the more we are driven to think of res-
urrection, exaltation, and second advent
as being, in their belief, inseparable
parts of a single divine advent." Within
a few years, however, this unity broke
ESCHATOLOGY IN THE EARLIEST STAGES OF CHRISTIANITY

apart, and "the second advent of the Lord . . . came to appear as a second crisis yet in the future." This view that the expectation of a speedy end stood not at the beginning of the primitive Christian thought world, but was rather the product of a development in primitive Christian faith and hope, has recently been given striking expression in two independent works that appeared almost simultaneously. In his contribution to the Festschrift for C. H. Dodd, which appeared in 1956, as well as in his book on Jesus (1957), E. Stauffer explicitly called into question the widely accepted view of the more primitive character of the synoptic eschatology. Jesus, he asserted, had never preached the message of the nearness of the end of the world and had sharply denied the Jewish messianic expectation that the disciples held regarding him. He claimed only to be the Christ who was different from what was expected; "the fourth evangelist corrected the synoptists with the claim of the eye-witness, who knew Jesus and his story better than the early evangelists, who had to get their knowledge 'second hand.'" Immediately after the death of Jesus, however, "the eschatological fever comes to unrestrained expression and infects increasingly wider circles," including even the original apostles and Paul. Thus the sayings about the second coming were intruded into the tradition about Jesus. Whereas Stauffer sees the origin of the expectation of the Messiah's imminent arrival in the early beginnings of the church, J. A. T. Robinson, on the other hand, in his book, Jesus and His Coming (1957), challenges the view that Jesus expected his own speedy return or the imminent end of the world. Instead, he explains the later origin of the expectation of the impending parousia of Jesus as based on Christian presuppositions. Jesus anticipated his glorification in immediate connection with his death and saw the decisive crisis in the immediate future within history, "but what fails is the evidence that Jesus thought of the Messianic act as taking place in two states, the first of which was now shortly to be accomplished, the second of which would follow after an interval and must in the meantime be the focus of every eye and thought." But even the earliest faith of the church and the most primitive level of the synoptic tradition knew nothing of an expected second coming of Jesus. This expectation is first found in Paul when it becomes uncertain whether the earthly life of Jesus can be regarded as messianic. So the mythological expectation of a speedy second coming of Jesus develops. John, however, represents a tradition of the teaching of Jesus that had not been exposed to the destructive influence of apocalyptic.

These theses of Stauffer and Robinson not only deny the historical picture that has been accepted since J. Weiss and A. Schweitzer (namely, that the proclamation of the impending rule of God belongs at the beginning of the thought development of primitive Christianity) but also challenge the assumption that has been widespread since the time of D. F. Strauss and F. C. Baur that in the Gospel of John the proclamation of Jesus is presented in a later recasting.

The thesis, so energetically debated today, that the expectation of an imminent end is a secondary element in the tradition, is of course not as new as some might suppose. The deistic physician, Thomas Morgan, in his work, The Moral Philosopher (1737–40), which
appeared anonymously, was the first to represent the view that the disciples misunderstood everything that Jesus had said to them about the Kingdom of God: when the disciples came to believe in the resurrection of Jesus, they expected a second coming very soon, in which he should establish his historical rule, whereas Jesus had spoken of a spiritual rulership. Morgan therefore clearly advocated the view that the earliest primitive congregation misunderstood the eschatological preaching of Jesus in a Jewish fashion, although the problem of the expectation of an imminent end had been of no great importance to Jesus. However, when H. S. Reimarus attributed to Jesus the expectation of the impending messianic kingdom, the Göttingen professor C. F. Stäudlin (1814) objected: “Such a Jesus would have been an enthusiast with a . . . disordered mind, but as such he has not appeared to me in the holy documents of his teaching and life. He intended to introduce a general and eternally continuing religion.” Clearly the expectation of an imminent end is here denied to Jesus not on exegetical but on systematic doctrinal grounds. If we see in this view a hint of one essential aspect of the modern historical construction that was mentioned above, we also see that Karl Hase not much later in his first book of instruction on the life of Jesus (1829) emphasized the necessity of understanding Jesus’ promises for the future symbolically. This necessity he based on Jesus’ “sobriety” and referred to the Gospel of John as the most dependable witness to Jesus’ eschatological view: “Only John . . . seems to have preserved in pure form the view of the return of Christ as a symbol for the victory of Christendom.” Liberal scholarship repeated the thesis that the primitive community transformed the preaching of Jesus about the rule of God in the hearts of men into the expectation of a future rule of God. Adolf von Harnack’s lectures on the essence of Christianity are the best-known example of this point of view.

Today this view is advocated again with special emphasis: the expectation of the imminent end was a secondary addition to the primitive Christian preaching of salvation and was certainly not shared by Jesus. Yet it is also true that not only the proponents of “consistent (futuristic) eschatology” but also numerous other scholars cling to the view that the imminent coming of God’s rule had central significance for Jesus and for earliest Christianity. In this situation the sole question is whether Jesus promised only the future of the eschaton and saw at the most a sign of the coming kingdom in the present, or whether he spoke about the kingdom as being both present and future. Naturally, the answer to this question will be differently evaluated depending on whether the earliest Christian community, like Jesus, only expected the eschatological completion of salvation or had already experienced it as present.

With this observation, the methodological problem with which New Testament scholarship sees itself confronted today has become evident: on the one side the expectation of the impending parousia is represented as a secondary development in earliest primitive Christian thought; on the other side the central proclamation of earliest Christianity is seen precisely in this expectation. Both sides attempt to give detailed exegetical reasons for their assertions. But the difficulty of finding a generally
satisfactory solution lies not only in the fact that the territory intervening between Jesus and Paul can be illuminated only through reconstruction, but also precisely because even the beginning point of the development, the eschatology of Jesus, is by no means as “easy to abstract” as H. Conzelmann has recently maintained. Unless we want to talk past each other constantly, methodological reflection must attempt to clarify how the question of the relationship of present and future in the earliest primitive Christian eschatology may be answered appropriately—that is, from the documents.

II

Stauffer and Robinson, two scholars who recently have challenged the fact of the expectation of an imminent end in the proclamation of Jesus, are, in spite of all their other differences, united in the assertion that the eschatology of Jesus is more accurately handed down by John than by the synoptists, where the problem is to uncover the original beneath the retouching process inspired by the faith of the primitive church. The problem is solved through recourse to the alternative “John or the synoptists” set up at the beginning of the nineteenth century, and John is unhesitatingly preferred. This means of solving the problem is, however, untenable. Certainly it is true that in the problem of the sources involved in understanding the historical Jesus we must not ignore this alternative set up by D. F. Strauss and F. C. Baur. Such an action is forbidden by insight gained from the study of the history of religions and the history of traditions that John’s Gospel is “late.” And, although it is basically true that the question of how much early tradition about Jesus is preserved in John must remain open, it is also true that in the reconstruction of the life or of the teaching of Jesus, the Gospel of John cannot be the basic document which in turn is to be supplemented by the synoptics. Even though the determination of the historical relationship between the synoptics and the Johannine form of the proclamation of Jesus still remains an unsolved problem, the question of the role of the futuristic imminent expectation in the thinking of Jesus and in the earliest Christianity cannot possibly be answered on the basis of the presupposition that the historical value of the synoptic tradition may be tested by comparison with the basic concepts of the Gospel of John. If Johannine eschatology cannot be the means for determining the earliest tradition, it is equally impossible to find this by simply referring to the reports in the account of the primitive community in Acts 1–12. For in spite of all efforts it has not yet been possible actually to disentangle the early traditions that are undoubtedly present in the book of Acts, and only in cases where the earliness of the tradition may be demonstrated in another way can the reports of the book of Acts be used as a source for the primitive community. The question of the role played by futuristic imminent expectation in the beginnings of the church may be answered in a methodologically sound manner only by attempting to uncover the earliest traditions of the primitive church.

It has become customary to try to determine the earliest traditions by tracing the development of a given conception as an event in the history of ideas. So, on the one hand, there is the unquestionably correct observation that Jewish-apocalyptic material has been
introduced into the gospel material during transmission and that the words of Jesus have undergone an apocalyptic refining.23 This has been made the point of departure for a construction, according to which the whole apocalyptic and therefore also the whole combined present-futuristic point of view first came into being as the consequence of a reconstruction of the original, purely present (realized) eschatology of Jesus. On the other hand, however, scholars have noted that in the synoptic "words of Jesus" the futuristic statements are more numerous and that the primitive community awaited the coming of the Resurrected One in glory (μαραθάνα δια).24 From this it is concluded that the notion of an already present eschaton is only the consequence of a development away from the purely futuristic eschatology of Jesus and the early community. In both cases it has been concluded on the basis of explicit exegetical observations—whose correctness it would be impolite to challenge—that the development of eschatological thought forms took one particular direction. But precisely here lies the error: the question must still be answered, what direction the intellectual-historical development took; and the presupposition that this development worked itself out logically in only one direction is quite unfounded.

It is possible to come to a dependable articulation of the most primitive stage of the tradition only if one attempts on the one hand to sort out within the entire synoptic tradition and out of the speeches in the first part of Acts the stratum of the original tradition. On the other hand one must pose the question of how well this most primitive tradition fits into the framework of comparative religions that we know as the historical presupposition of primitive Christianity. Concern with literary sources, to which the individual synoptic pericopes belong, should not be assigned any decisive importance in this process. For the fact that an idea is missing, say, in the sayings source (Q) does not demonstrate that this idea did not yet exist at the time of the compilation of this source,25 since none of our sources was in the nature of a compendium. Generally, reference to a literary source can be used only positively as proof of the existence of an idea at the time of the compilation of the source. Likewise, it carries little weight to point to the fact that there are no parables of Jesus "in which the kingdom of God is clearly claimed to be present."26 It is neither a justified assumption that our Gospels include the full list of Jesus’ parables, nor is it possible to establish that Jesus had to give parabolic expression to each essential thought in his proclamation. On the contrary, only by investigating and testing the early tradition in the synoptic tradition at all levels and in all types can one fully identify the material that can serve as the basis for answering the question as to the nature of Jesus’ eschatological preaching.

If one analyzes the synoptic tradition on the basis of these methodological presuppositions, it is easy to see that it is impossible to derive from the earliest tradition an apocalyptic picture of the future that contains a consistent progression of the events belonging to the end time. For even if the form-critical argument should not be conclusive—that the apocalyptic elements of Mark 13 and parallels appear to be later additions to the tradition because they are not formulated out of Jesus’ peculiar eschatological view of history— even then there can be no doubt about
the fact that the present form of the synoptic apocalypse is not original and that therefore no coherent apocalyptic picture of the future belongs to the early tradition. On the other hand there can be no doubt that the early tradition includes both sayings of Jesus that promise the coming of God’s rule and the appearance of the Son of Man in glory, and other sayings that proclaim the presence of Jesus as beginning the realization of the promised eschaton. This assertion could be established with certainty only through a discussion of all the words of Jesus that could be proven to be early, something which in this connection is impossible. However, it must be pointed out that only through exegetical violence is it possible to rob the promises of the speedy beginning of eschatological fulfilment of their meaning. Particularly Jesus’ answer to the question of the high priest (Mark 14:62) and the statement about the introduction of the kingly role before all of Jesus’ hearers should die (Mark 9:1) have been recently the object of such attempts. But it is in no way demonstrable that Jesus in Mark 14:62 answers the messianic question by publicly using the theophany formula, “I am God,” in the present tense without at the same time making any references to time in connection with his heavenly appearance; for the existence of such a theophany formula has neither been proven nor has it been demonstrated as probable that Mark’s εγώ ειμι is the transmission of the supposed Hebraic theophany formula. It will do even less so to transpose the Markan form of Jesus’ answer before the high priest—on the basis of the Matthew text—that the original Mark text supposedly read: σὺ εἶπας δὲν εγὼ εἰμί, πλὴν ἀπ’ ἀρτι δῆλον, KTL. so that the saying refers to the glorification of Jesus which came to pass in the moment of his death. This textual criticism as well as the explaining away of Jesus’ affirmative response to the question about messianic honor is exegetically untenable. As far as Mark 9:1 is concerned, the assumption that the transmitted reading was originally deduced from a genuine word of Jesus is no more established than the claim that the pericope spoke originally of an occurrence immediately after the death of Jesus, or that it was not even intended in a temporal sense. It is therefore impossible to explain away the fact that Jesus here reckons with the temporally limited nearness of the eschatological fulfilment; similarly there is no adequate reason to question—with respect to the wording of Matt. 12:28—the fact that Jesus spoke of a present existence of God’s kingly rule.

Because both sets of assertions can in similar fashion be demonstrated to be early, it is impossible to show that the sayings that stress the realized moment represent an older level of the tradition or the actual meaning of Jesus. Now the expectation of the imminent end of the world belonged “among the most common phenomena in Palestinian Judaism of New Testament times. This is actually a sign for the originality of the tradition that says Jesus expected the kingdom of God soon, because it demonstrates precisely that this proclamation of Jesus worked itself out in the context of conceptions belonging to his immediate environment. Yet, in spite of its kinship to the variety of eschatological expectations rife in his age, the proclamation of Jesus bore a character unmistakably its own. This is evident not only from its connection with the expressions of realized eschatology, but also
from the unapocalyptic, and especially from the soteriological interpretation of this eschatological proclamation, an interpretation which runs contrary to basic Jewish views. Against the Palestinian-Judaic conceptual form that appears in the synoptic proclamation of Jesus, however, the Gospel of John, in spite of the persistence of individual apocalyptic expressions, exhibits in eschatological statements a gnostically tinged conceptual world which is completely foreign to contemporary Jewish thought as far as origin is concerned, and with which it was combined only with difficulty. Precisely for this reason, from the comparative religions point of view, it is impossible to assert that this conceptual world is original with Jesus and the primitive community. Nor will it do to postulate the Johannine eschatology as an historical starting point for the development of this view in the primitive community.

The question, finally, how the primitive community’s conviction of faith differed from the conceptual world of the earliest traditions about Jesus known to us, hardly permits a definite answer in spite of the recent trustworthy answers to individual instances of the problem.\(^{34}\) For it depends chiefly upon whether individual pericopes of the synoptic tradition are attributed to Jesus himself or are seen as coming from the early community. For example, if we, like Hanz Conzelmann, deny that Jesus expected a period of waiting between the resurrection and the parousia, we must assume that the community “regarded itself differently in the period of waiting from the way Jesus regarded it.” But it is more probable that Jesus himself reckoned with such a period of waiting.\(^{35}\) In this case, the primitive community only strengthened this expectation of Jesus. On the other hand, as we have already emphasized, it is certainly impossible to distinguish in Peter’s speeches at the beginning of Acts that which really belongs to him from that which belongs to the community. Although it is naturally permissible to try to separate certain kerygmatic elements from these speeches, there can hardly be any doubt that Acts 3:13–15, 19–21 belongs among the early traditions.\(^{36}\) If on the basis of Acts 3:20 ff. one looks for the time when Jesus the Messiah, whom God has taken up into heaven until the restoration of all things, will come again, it is a contradiction both of the context and of the plain meaning of the words when Robinson tries to find here a tradition according to which Jesus is not the Messiah now, but instead is expected as the Messiah in the future. For there is really no reference in the Acts 3 sermon to the speedy appearance in majesty of the Risen One. However, even if an accurate delineation of the concepts held by the earliest Christian community is impossible, nevertheless, the combination of the facts that can be demonstrated—namely, that the primitive community held its meal celebrations ἐν ἀγαλλίασι (Acts 2:46) and prayed for the coming of the glorified Lord μαράνα θα (I Cor. 16:22)—shows that there was also in the primitive community the consciousness of living in the final period of time that had begun, as demonstrated in their expectation of the impending coming of the glorified Lord. And there is really no sufficient evidence for the assumption that one rather than the other of these interrelated statements of faith came into being only in the course of the early development of the primitive church. As a matter of fact, even in his earliest letters Paul not only is an unambiguous witness for the expectation of the im-
ominant parousia of Christ (I Thess. 1:9–10, 4:13 ff.) and a witness that salvation from this evil age has already come to pass for the Christian (Gal. 1:4); he also appropriated both of these statements of faith, and we see from the tradition embodied in Rom. 1:4 and in I Cor. 11:26; 16:22, Paul systematized these juxtaposed statements of faith through the idea of the interlocking character of the dying evil age and the new age that had already begun,37 but he always held fast both to the conviction that the eschatological fulfilment had already begun and to the hope that salvation would be fully completed (cf. Phil. 1:23 with 3:20–21; 4:5). Nor can it be that the later Paul, like the Gospel of John, has returned to “original” tradition which no longer reckons with a fulfilment of salvation in the near future.38 It is rather quite clear that Paul’s view of God’s dealing with the world in Jesus Christ stands—in its basic features—in agreement with the view of Jesus and of the earliest primitive congregation.

III

It may be concluded, therefore, that the oldest recognizable tradition of the preaching of Jesus and of the earliest Christian community, and the concept of faith that Paul took over and thought through theologically, all point in the same way to a combination of beliefs: on the one hand, the expectation of the imminent coming of the eschatological fulfilment of salvation and, on the other hand, the beginning of this fulfilment in God’s action in Jesus Christ, which is experienced through faith. For this reason there is no sense in claiming that in the very beginning of primitive Christianity in the period between Jesus and Paul, that is, immediately after Easter or a little later, there arose a develop-

ement from a purely present-realized eschatology to a futuristic eschatology which was an extension of Jewish apocalyptic. It is equally impossible to substantiate the assumption that earliest Christianity looked only to the near future, and that only gradually and as a parallel development there came about through the Easter experience a consciousness of the presence of the eschaton. Instead, both for Jesus and for the earlier primitive church, the main proclamation from the beginning consisted in pointing to the impending saving advent of God and the appearance of his anointed from heaven. Even though these proclamations were made within the framework of Palestinian-Judaistic ideas, nevertheless from the very beginning the expectation of the heavenly appearance of the earthly man Jesus was a new message for which there was no model in the history of religions. But just as it is not justifiable, moving from the definite lack of this type of awaited parousia in contemporary Judaism, to argue against the historical actuality of this expectation with Jesus and the first Christians, so it is unsound to question the fact, unheard of in Jewish eschatology, that Jesus and with him the primitive community combined a burning expectation of the fulfilment of salvation with a faith in the presence of this salvation fulfilled in Jesus and his work. This combination of two juxtaposed statements that contradict each other from the temporal point of view was undoubtedly as offensive and unfamiliar even to the first disciples of Jesus as it is for us who simply look back on the situation. But there is no justification for doing away with the futuristic character of this proclamation by reinterpreting Jesus’ statements with respect to particular events of the future which will be alike for all
men so that the statements about the structure of my relationship to the future and a statement about an event in time become the way of talking of my consciousness of time. Nor can one designate the expectation of the imminent parousia as “a remnant of the Jewish eschatological view of history,” and claim that in contrast the actual New Testament belief about salvation has as its object “not the running on of time, but the confrontation with Christ, that is, with God.” For the form of the primitive Christian proclamation of God’s saving acts in Jesus Christ is precisely the proclamation of the here and now as the eschatological future. Therefore, even in the post-Pauline New Testament writings, there is a strengthened emphasis on eschatological fulfilment both in the historical past of the man Jesus and in the historical present of the congregation of Christ, but the expectation of the imminent completion of the acts of salvation remains up until the theology of John the borderline which gives meaning to the statements about realized eschatology.

The combination of future and present eschatological statements in earliest and subsequent primitive Christianity, however, is not the expression of a speculative handling of history which in an apocalyptic sense would be interested in the periodizing of world history and in speculation about and description of the events of the end of time. Instead, precisely this fundamental New Testament proclamation is an expression of the inseparable combination of a theological and of a Christological element in the primitive Christian gospel: from the beginning the promise of the imminent kingdom of God was connected with insistence upon the eschatological action of God which was already being fulfilled in the history of Jesus. If Jesus knew himself to be the one sent from God and understood his death as a divine commission (Matt. 15:24, Mark 10:38, Luke 17:25), and if the primitive community confessed that Jesus died for sin according to God’s will, and was raised by God, then God was understood as the real actor in this event. And if Jesus expected the coming of the kingly rule of God in power (Mark 9:1) and the primitive community promised the sending of Jesus as the Messiah from heaven at the end of time (Acts 3:20–21), then again in this eschatological expectation for the future God was seen as the one who finally creates salvation. Even though the earliest Christians, participating in Jesus’ own consciousness of calling, saw in God the final worker of all salvation, for these Christians Jesus was nevertheless a messianic figure in his own right. The consciousness of the presence of the Risen Lord in the congregation carried with it the sense of fulfilment in the primitive community (Matt. 18:20, I Cor. 1:2), and the hope of the Risen One’s appearance in messianic glory (I Cor. 16:22, 11:26) transformed the traditional eschatological hope into a joyful expectation of completed salvation. The experience of the present as the eschatological time of salvation and a burning anticipation of the impending eschatological completion of this salvation were fused into a composite view characteristic of the earliest Christian proclamation in which, in a temporarily conditioned but thoroughly appropriate form, the faith was expressed that the one God, the creator and consummator, bestows upon us his salvation in the historical and resurrected Jesus, the one Lord.
ESCHATOLOGY IN THE EARLIEST STAGES OF CHRISTIANITY

NOTES

1. Hugo Grotius, Annotationes in Novum Testamentum, II (1646), 448, 474, 664, 672.


3. G. E. Lessing, Von dem Zwecke Jesus und seiner Jünger. Noch ein Fragment des Wolfenbüttelischen Ungenannten, I, 29, in Lessings Werke, published by J. Petersen and W. von Olhausen, XXII (1778), 256. “If Jesus therefore preached and encouraged preaching that the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of Heaven would come, the Jews would understand by this that the Messiah would soon come and his reign would soon begin.”


11. C. H. Dodd, The Apostolic Preaching and Its Developments (New York, 1936), pp. 66 ff. See representatives of this point of view listed in n. 10 above, note 4, p. 135, and also p. 11, n. 3 of that work (English trans., p. 16, n. 3); cf. further F. Flückiger, Der Ursprung des christlichen Dogmas (1955), pp. 94 ff.


14. T. Morgan, The Moral Philosopher, III (1740), pp. 180 ff. “What he intended of a spiritual Kingdom, and the Deliverance of Mankind in general from the Power and Captivity of Sin and Satan, they understood of a temporal Kingdom to be set up at Jerusalem...and of the Deliverance of that Nation from their Captivity to the Romans.”


21. E. Stauffer, Jesus, Gestalt und Geschichte.

22. Cf., e.g., Bo Reicke, Glauben und Lehre der Urgemeinde (Bern, 1957), p. 43. Other than this, we have no direct information on the eschatology of the primitive congregation but can only move from the Lukan description.

23. Cf. Matt. 16:28 with Mark 9:1 (the coming of the Son of Man in his kingdom instead of the coming of the rule of God in power) and Matt. 24:3 with Mark 13:4 (“The sign of thy coming and of the ending of the age” instead of “The sign when all will be completed”). See also Robinson, op. cit., p. 116, n. 2; also pp. 52 ff.


25. Cf. Stauffer, Jesus, p. 117. “There is not a single word in the sayings source about the near end of the world. This has apparently not been noticed before, but deserves to be taken seriously.”


27. This is admitted even by G. R. Beasley-Murray who maintains that the whole tradition of Mark 13 and parallels comes from Jesus (Jesus and the Future [London and New York, 1954], pp. 205 ff.; A Commentary on Mark Thirteen [London and New York, 1957], pp. 10–11).


29. Stauffer, Jesus, pp. 94, 137, 143–44; and his article in Novum Testamentum, I (1956), 88.

31. Against Stauffer, _op. cit._, p. 120, and J. A. T. Robinson, _op. cit._, pp. 89 (see also page references, n. 30, above).


39. Thus, Conzelmann, _op. cit._ , 287–88.
