

XVI. ESCHATOLOGY

THESIS: "Io sono l'alfa e l'omega, il primo e l'ultimo, il principio e il fine (ap. 22.13). L'evento Cristo che include non solo la sua incarnazione e il mistero pasquale, ma anche la sua venuta nella gloria (cf. il credo niceneocostantinopolitano) è ultimo e definitivo. Gesù diventa così il "riassunto" di tutte le "cose ultime" e la chiave d'interpretazione delle "tensioni" dell'eschatologia cristiana: eschaton vs. eschata; presente e futuro della salvezza; eschatologia finale ed eschatologia intermedia.

I. Definition of "Eschatology"

A. Starting Point: Relationship of Anthropology and Christology.

Anthrology is seen in light of fulfillment in Christ. Eschatology is the fullness of salvation that comes from Christ. Thus, there is a priority that comes from Christology insofar as salvation's completion comes through Christ.

B. Definition of Eschatology:

1. What it is Not:

- a. Not an intramundane reality
- b. Not a description of the end times
- c. Not a description of the future eternal world.

Why? One cannot describe what is not of this world!

2. What is it:

a. It is radically new; it is an interpersonal event with Christ.

b. It is not neutral but a call to salvation in God: The future is God himself, manifested in Christ; unlike the other, partial futures which we anticipate, this future is not the result of human effort but is God's fullest self-manifestation in Christ.

a. If we believe the future to be God's full self-manifestation in Christ, then already that future which we await is present in Christ. Thus, what we await is proleptically made present.

b. The horizon of the absolute future grounds our present experiences of that proleptic presence of the Kingdom here and now; therefore, while the absolute future remains hidden in the mystery of God himself, it is not foreign to us since it grounds our experience of the Kingdom here and now.

c. Human action forms part of the mystery of human **cooperation with grace**. Our attitude toward the future is not one of just waiting; our attitude is one of hope -- a hope which is active (similar to giving birth). Cf. G.S. 39: "The expectation of a new earth must not weaken but rather stimulate our concern for cultivating this one. For here grows the body of a new human family, a body which even now is able to give some kind of foreshadowing to the new age."

II. Principles of a Christian Eschatology:

A. Eschatology is the Christ Event

1. Christ is the eschatological event in that He is the ultimate revelation of the Father and the definitive manifestation of salvation to man. Insofar as it is salvation that Christ brings, and salvation necessarily involves God himself, the primary object of Christian eschatology is God revealed in Christ.

2. Globality of Christ Event: Unity of Incarnation, Paschal Mystery and Parousia (2 Tim. 11 ff.)

a. Unity of the One Salvific Mission: The conclusion of the salvific event in the Incarnation is related to the Parousia. In a sense, we can speak of **one coming of Christ with many different aspects** (Incarnation, Paschal Mystery, Parousia).

1. Justin: spoke of two Parousias
2. Our Point: There is an historical sequence of Jesus' life but there is only one event of God's definitive self-communication in Christ.

b. The total existence of Christ as an eschatological event. The incarnation, death and resurrection of Christ, the God-man, are three fundamental moments of one eschatological event -- God's definitive self-disclosure to the world of human destiny. The Incarnation and the Death-Resurrection are mutually interdependent aspects of the one eschatological mystery.

a. The Incarnation points toward the death resurrection: Incarnation (the mystery of the God-man) is the mystery that manifests man's union with God; however, it is a mystery that finds its fullest expression in the cross and resurrection. The Son surrenders to the Father in absolute hope and confidence in the saving power of God; the Father vindicates his Son and offers him as our future.

b. The death-resurrection as unique and Transhistorical, meta-historical events are grounded in the Incarnation. Jesus is not just a model of obediential sonship vindicated by God (Abraham and the sacrifice of Isaac would suffice as a model in that regard); rather, Christ's actions are eschatological insofar as they are the actions of the God-man.

3. Event is Definitive with two foci- Present and Future:

a. Present: Linked to His person, Teaching, Death:

1. Christ knew that the definitive coming of the Kingdom **was with him.** (Mk. 1:15: shows his knowledge that the Kingdom was with him)
2. He also knew it was radically **new.**

b. Future: Revealed in his Preaching of the Coming Son of Man, the "not yet" of the Kingdom, etc.

1. Yet, the future coming is linked with His Person and no one else.
2. Man's present attitudes will determine Christ's later response.

c. Summary: Two Foci of Present/Future Dialectic:

1. Linked with the Person of Christ
2. Eschatological Value of Present Moment insofar as eschatological import of present attitude will determine the future attitude of Christ

3. Christ as L'Eschatos (Ultimate) is hermeneutic for L'Eschata (last things).

a. L'eschata: are those "things" related to the definitive manifestation of the ultimate presence of Christ in the world.

b. Principle: Only from Christ as ultimate do ultimate things have sense. There is an intimate relationship of all things with Christ. All that will be has its consequence and constitution in Christ.

B. Christian Eschatology, with Christ at its centre, is a Positive message of Salvation.

1. Future is not of concrete things but God Himself. The absolute Future is God.

a. Jesus Himself reveals God; the Parousia then is the Final Revelation and manifestation of the Father. (cf. DV 4a)

b. Eschatology then by definition cannot describe the absolute future because:

1. To do so means to describe God Himself!
2. To do so means to radically link it to our time with the loss of the sense of radicality that is revealed in Christ (cf. GS 38,39).
3. Neither SS or tradition have attempted to do so.

2. Two-Fold Dynamic involved with Ultimate Future:

A. First Moment: Advent: An event that walks towards us. Eschatology sees the Ultimate Future as an event that walks towards us (similar to the Incarnation which was an event). The future of Christ, as was the Incarnation, is a gift and grace. It is a descendent moment. Thus, we do not walk towards it but it, as an event, walks towards us.

B. Second Moment: Active Hope as our response

a. God's self-gift demands our acceptance because of the reality of human freedom. The relationship is between God's self-gift and our acceptance of it.

b. Our acceptance is the logical second moment. This is the time for the acceptance; our response to grace and the Parousia. Thus, the present moment has great eschatological value. The future already highlights the present and gives to us a sense of hope.

c. The eschatological value of man's present action lies precisely in Christian hope. Charity has a transcendental dimension because it flows from hope. Furthermore, the radical transformation of this world involves in some sense continuity with it. Thus, there is a value to what we do here and now. "If we believe in the transformation of the cosmos, which is a work of God, it does not seem possible to exclude that which we do according to God, which in root is also his work."

C. Since Eschatology is Salvific and not a neutral term, the salvific end of History is already determined in Christ but our individual participation within it is not guaranteed.

1. In Christ, history achieves its final determination.

- a. This does not mean that history ends with Christ.
- b. History: as a succession of events can be overcome because God Himself enters into it. The Transcendent becomes radically immanent.
- c. Result: Christ gives history its definitive, unsurpassable meaning.

2. Church: Christ:: Holy Spirit. History is now in the Age of the Church which moves in towards perfection in Christ.

3. Universal Salvific Will- There is no guarantee of individual participation in salvation because of the reality of freedom. However, history's direction is definitively salvific.

4. Perdition: is to exclude oneself from this way.

III. Parousia and the Final Resurrection:

A. Nature of Parousia:

1. The Parousia is the nucleus of the absolute manifestation of the Christ event because it is the fulfillment of his salvific work.

- a. Absolute part of Christology: all was put under his feet.
- b. Christ opens history to salvation's fullness begun in the paschal mystery.

2. Relationship with the Resurrection: Early Church had the hope of an imminent Parousia. Their chronological mistake it not important but their attitude is. If Jesus Christ is the Lord and is exalted, then this dominion must make itself visible to all men. Thus,

there was a link between the resurrection, (enthronement of Christ in glory) and the Parousia (requirement that all be subjected under his feet). Thus, the Christ event needs to be extended over all creation.

B. Theological explanation of the Parousia:

1. Christological Dimension: Dominion of Christ over all.

2. Trinitarian Dimension (1 Cor. 15: 20 ff.) Subjection of all to the Father

a. Subjection of Kingdom to the Father:

1. Father brought Christ into the world

2. Christ returned to the Father and was glorified in Him. His work and mission in his earthly life were fulfilled.

3. Christ continues his work by his intercession against the powers that work against man (last, being death)

4. Christ, at this point, with all humanity, returns Kingdom to the Father. The Final Point of History = return of all to the Father.

b. Result: all reality, in the fullness of the life of God, submits itself in the life of the Father, through the Son, in the Holy Spirit.

c. Key: This is not the personal subjection of Christ. To give the Kingdom to the Father does not mean that Christ ceases to exist.

3. Ecclesiological Dimension: (Social Dimension: Fullness of Individual in the fullness of the Church which is the Body of Christ)

a. Image is of Christ's body = the Church. Church which is not yet finished because of sin and death is subjected to the Father.

b. Key: An individual cannot achieve fullness, in eschatological sense, without insertion into a community (ie. the church). Thus, while individuality is irrepeatable, man as a social being requires fullness in a social sense.

c. The Church: sign of the Kingdom to come.

1. The future of mankind is not to be seen as an individual participation in the Kingdom -- (communion of saints.)

2. Humanity was made for union with God but also for communion with one another. This is why the Church, the Body of Christ on earth, is "sign of the Kingdom" (Lumen Gentium, 3). Just as Christ reveals the future of mankind, the Church, the presence of the risen Christ here on earth, is the revelation of the communal future of mankind. "Therefore, the promised restoration which we are awaiting has already begun in Christ, is carried forward in the mission of the Holy Spirit, and through Him continues in the Church." (Lumen Gentium, 48).

3. Social fullness is not something that is added to individual fullness. We have been so constituted by God that our personal, individual fullness is not only mediated by community but takes its fullness in community. That future communion of saints, signified and anticipated by the Church, is nothing more than the "all-in-Christ-through-the-Spirit-to-the-Father which is the ultimate destiny of mankind.

C. Parousia and Judgment:

1. Christ as Ultimate Criteria:

a. Judgment is not a process in time (first the arrival of Christ and then a judgment). Rather, judgment is part of the full manifestation of Christ. In Christ's manifestation there is judgement.

b. Why? Because in Christ is revealed the fullness of who man is to be. He is the ultimate criteria and center of history. Thus, discrimination/judgment is inevitable with his appearance.

2. Judgment as Salvific from God's perspective:

3. Problem of chronology: We are forced because of our limitedness to separate chronologically our individual judgment and the universal, social judgment. Their relationship is best left as part of the mystery of God. [Mercy and justice are values that do not have an existence above God but are given foundation in God.]

D. Parousia and Resurrection:

Since the Parousia has an anthropological import, the question of the resurrection arises.

a. Resurrection can be seen in two different ways:

1. Full Sense: Full participation in the life of the Risen Christ (NT sense).

(a) 1 Cor. 16: The life of the saved:

1. They will rise in glory (Christic).

2. Spiritual, which means the fullness of God's spirit does not mean for Paul immaterial.

2. Restricted Sense: as dead rising and then being judged (platonic neutrality). This sense is necessary but it is not the full sense that is described in part one.

b. Meaning of Resurrection:

1. Resurrection cannot be described in phenomenological terms.

Rather it must be seen in Christological sense: all in which we are called to participate in the life of God is realized in Christ.

2. The bodily is worthy and not to be disparaged because Christ took over all human dimensions. All of man, in a complete sense, participates in salvation. Thus, we cannot describe the phenomenon of the material in the resurrection.

3. It is also anticipated in the life of Christians in baptism.

c. Three Principles regarding the resurrection:

1. It is not solely for the elect but is an extension of the same resurrection of Christ.

2. Involves the spiritual and the corporeal in transformation.

3. Cosmic transformation (includes society) which occurs as a factor in the transformation of man (man-as-in-the-world)

E. Eternal Life:

a. Eternal Life = participation in the life of God Himself, who is man's final destiny. The NT link with Jesus and eternal life is clear.

b. Beatific Vision = fullness of sonship in Christ.

1. It is not just an intellectual process but rather must be seen as a communion with God that embraces the whole man.

2. It is not just to see God through Jesus Christ but IN Christ, i. e. incorporated into his resurrected body, leading to the Father.

3. Two ways to understand the Beatific Vision:

a. **As Man before God:** as if God were a monad

b. **As Man within God:** since God is a Trinity, God has the space to insert man into his very life. (This is important for the consideration of the Beatific Vision in Christ).

c. **Summary: To see God is to be in God!**

F. Eternal Death or Hell:

a. **Definition: Contradiction in terms.** Since man was made to be with God, eternal death, the eternal refusal of God, is a contradiction in terms.

b. **The two possibilities of heaven and hell are not equal terms.** However, to banalize hell is to banalize human freedom.

c. **The possibility of eternal condemnation is real and possible.** There is no need to a-priori limit Christ's victory and to say that there are those who are actually damned.

G. Intermediate State

a. **Question:** How do you hold together: **Intermediate state of individuals (between now and the Parousia) and the Final Resurrection (Parousia)?**

b. **Magisterium:** Benedict XII in 14th century taught those who died will enjoy the Beatific Vision immediately, from the moment of their death while the damned go directly to hell. How do we explain this?

c. Rejected Solutions:

1. Immortality opposed to resurrection? Yet, immortality of the soul allows for personal continuity in the resurrection

2. Dormition of subject until the final resurrection? This goes against Benedict's teaching. (Also against Jesus discussion with St. Dismas).

3. Retain the idea of a body but in the sense of a "spiritualized body" that is united with the soul after death. The problem is whether this takes corporeality seriously.

4. Coincidence: for the person who dies, the moment of death and resurrection are the same moment (insofar as it is beyond history). The problem is: does this take history seriously?

d. Ladarria's solution:

1. **Resurrection - best left for the end-time.**

2. **Separated soul can be understood as an "I" in union with Christ,** even if awaiting the fullness of transformation with the endtime. Traditional theology does not refer to such a separated anima as an "I".

IV. Summary: There always remains tensions in Christian eschatology;

A. **Primacy of Christ's work; social dimension vs. Eschatology of the individual inserted within it.**

B. **Present and Future Tension (Not opposed: similar to nature - grace relationship)**

C. **Continuity and Discontinuity Tension**

V. Further Background:

A. **Christ and the Kingdom: Eschatological event himself:**

1. In his earthly ministry, Christ not only announce future coming of the reign of God but proclaimed that he was making that reign present. God's definitive victory over the powers that destroy his kingdom - sin, sickness and death itself -- was now happening.

a. Salvation in miracles, exorcisms, raising the dead, forgiveness of sins.

b. The invitation: metanoia; more than just a moral message (although it has a moral content to it). The focus of metanoia is a radical re-orientation of one's life, making God-in-Christ the center. It is the faith response to the revelation of God's definitive presence in Christ Jesus.

c. The Kingdom is proclaimed as a future event: and yet the quality of that future Kingdom is proleptically present:

(1) God and sinner are at table sat down.

(2) The intimacy of the Abba experience made available to all.

(3) our participation in that future Kingdom hinges on our response to Jesus in the present. Not only a confession of faith in him but doing the will of the Father in Jesus ("When I was hungry, you gave me food...")

d. Presence of the Kingdom in the person of Christ -the Johannine perspective. John's Christology and realized eschatology: Christ is the sign of the God's irrevocable presence -- the definitive manifestation of his kabod in the flesh.

(1) He who sees me sees the Father

(2) "I am" statements -- what was announced by the prophets is in the person of Jesus.

(a) Messianic banquet -- I am the bread of life;

(b) the vineyard of God -- I am the vine;

(c) God's promise to shepherd Israel -- "I am the Good Shepherd."

(d) The promise of life (dry bones) -- "I am the resurrection and the life."

(3) Call for a decision: Judgment is now.

2. In the resurrection, the one who proclaimed the future Kingdom becomes part of the proclamation: That which is announced as radically new has now happened as historical event. The resurrection is the eschatological event -- the prism through which we see all of human history.

a. Christianity has always understood Christ's resurrection, first and foremost, in terms of the future, as the anticipation and the guarantee of salvation to come at the end of time. With the resurrection, we presently live in the Messianic Age that awaits its final fulfillment.

b. The essence of paschal faith lies in the conviction that Christ's resurrection is an historical reality and a work of God's creative power. The historicity of the event is critical (against Bultmann). Christ is risen from the dead: it is not just a statement expressing a judgment on the Meaning of Christ's life or on our life -- it is a proclamation of fact.

(1) The identity of the crucified Jesus with the risen Christ -- the purpose of the resurrection appearances.

(2) The "spiritual body" of the risen one: (cf. I Cor 15: "What is sown is a soma sarkikos what is raised, a soma pneumatikos) -- a transformed body.

(3) The resurrection/ascension as the glorification of Christ. History has entered into a new era - the God-man, exalted to the right hand of the Father, has authority and sovereignty over the cosmos. The future victory over the powers of the earth has been realized in him who reigns triumphant.

3. The Christ event and the sending of the Spirit: “If the spirit of the one who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, the one who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also, through the Spirit that dwells in you. . . . We ourselves who have the firstfruits of the spirit, we also groan within ourselves as we await for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.”

a. The Spirit of God is the foretaste of the promise of future glory. The gifts of the Spirit are the gifts of the eschatological age already enjoyed in the present moment.

b. In the Spirit we cry out Abba, Father. That unique Experience of Jesus, intimacy and communion with the Father, is what the eschaton is all about (when we shall see face to face). And yet, right here, we have a foretaste of that future intimacy, that union with the Father in the Spirit which has been poured out into our hearts.

B. Christ, the Eschatological Event for Mankind, for History, and the World.

1. Christ as eschatological Event for mankind:

A. “If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are the most pitiable people of all.” Paul’s point in I Cor 15 is that the resurrection of Christ is the foundation for hope in our own resurrection. Christ Risen is the manifestation of the God’s design for all humanity. The risen Lord is given to us as the future of mankind He is the “firstborn from the dead.” Our participation in that resurrection will be in the Parousia. But, what does that mean?

1. **Resurrection:** It is the will of God that death not be the last word. We are destined for a real immortality.

2. **Bodily resurrection:** The gnostics sneered at the redemption of the body, or materiality. Yet, it is the sign that God takes this world seriously. All of God’s creation is both an extension of himself (a creation out of goodness); yet the world remains infinitely Other (we are not Pantheists) and therefore can be the object of love. And yet, the goodness of creation has been smeared by sin -- it is in need of redemption. Christ’s glorified body is the sign that our own corporeality will be caught up in that redemption.

a. **Irenaeus:** Our bodies themselves are the similitudo Dei; Christ came in the flesh to restore that likeness for us. What was scandalous to the gnostics (flesh) was the means to salvation -- Christ, in the flesh, reveals the Father to us.

b. **The body is not something I use,** an instrument of the mind -- somehow my body is a sacrament of the self; in many ways, I am my body. It is the sacrament for communion with others and the Absolute Thou. This body, glorified, means that the communion for which I have been made will be freed from the impediments and limitations that destroy communion. The kingdom of heaven is the community of saints in Christ.

c. **How is the material body to be transformed?** What does that mean? Doesn’t the body go into the grave and decompose? On the one hand, we are not literalists when we speak of a bodily resurrection (but then again, neither was Paul --”soma pneumatikos”); still, Christ’s resurrection undermines any biologist/chemist who would want to make the absolute claim that physical matter (as we know it) is the only kind of matter!

2. Christ as eschatological event for history:

A. Jesus Christ as trans-historical, meta-historical event:

1. If we consider Christ as a merely historical event, we might conceive of him as any important figure. This is an immanentist view of history and says nothing about the future.

2. In faith, we believe that Christ has been given to us as the future of mankind. Therefore, present to us is our own future. Christ is trans-historical because he is given to us as goal, as future.

3. Christ then is the interpretative key for history. History is a unified whole which has Christ as its goal; all of the individual parts are to be interpreted in light of Christ.

B. In faith we say that all events find their meaning in Christ.

1. The early Church, both in apostolic times as well as the early Fathers saw the unity of the plan in Christ. The Old covenant was fulfilled in the new.

2. Early Christologies attempted to show this unity in the Christ event by pointing to Christ as the one “who represents the Logos” (Justin Martyr). What this means is that as the Logos is present throughout all cultures (even Socrates), Christ possesses the fullness of the Logos. Augustine’s view: Plato reveals a shadow of what will be fully disclosed by Christ.

C. What is the relation of human freedom to this history? There seem to be two world-views, each of which are overcome in Christian faith.

1. **Utopianism:** freed man, authentic man, creates his own future, his own Kingdom. History is totally in my hands. I can face that future of non-being with existential angst (Kierkegaard) or utopian hope (Marx).

2. **Determinism:** man is the net result of forces that are beyond his control -- all, at best he can do is understand them. (Freud, Skinner).

3. **Redeemed freedom:** the future redemption which is now involves a redemption of our freedom -- God’s powering love as absolute future reaches into the present to heal freedom. One of the first fruits of the Kingdom present now is that we no longer need to live as slaves of sin, but in the spirit can live as sons. The healing of human freedom now is the possibility of participating in the absolute future through human choice. We don’t create the kingdom - human freedom doesn’t make it happen, it is God’s gift. But that future kingdom, which is already present as redemptive love, heals human freedom. Our actions will not bring about a kingdom that is up for grabs (may or may not happen); rather, our actions are signs of the infallible future in that they are the products of a redeemed freedom in love. And yet, the future is still offered to us in freedom, which means that there is the possibility of reaching it.

3. Christ as eschatological event for the world.

A. Why would the world participate in the eschatological victory of Christ?

1. Creation was made for Christ; he is not only the instrument of creation but also the one “for whom all things were made” -- Col 1:16; the creation is structured in such a way as to become the place where God’s self-disclosure can happen. In God’s plan, his self-disclosure is not just to disembodied intellects but to embodied humanity in a cosmos. Not only is man a potential hearer of the divine word, but the cosmos in which he is situated participates as the ground of possibility for such a self-disclosure.

2. Creation, as it participates in the mystery of God's self-disclosure in Christ is also to participate in Christ's glorification.

B. The proclamation of a transformed cosmos has been a constant part of our revelation: Kingdom of Isaiah 11; Isaiah 65: 2 Peter 3:10; I Cor 3:13; Rom 8: 19-22; Rev. 21.

C. Is the new cosmos the work of human hands? Or is it the transformation wrought by God through the destruction of the old? Some hold a radical eschatology -- absolute discontinuity with the past through a destruction of the past. However, that minimalizes the importance of man's actions. Others hold radical continuity and leave no room for a complete newness through God's intervention. And yet, both extremes have been criticized, even condemned in our Church's history. Quietism (God does it all) and Messianism have never been able to do full justice to the mystery.

D. Some reflections from the council documents:

1. Gaudium et Spes, 38: *“Christ is now at work in the hearts of men through the energy of His Spirit. He arouses not only a desire for the age to come, but, by that very fact, He animates, purifies and strengthens those noble longings too by which his human family strives to make its life more human and to render the whole earth submissive to this goal. Now, the gifts of the Spirit are diverse. He calls some to give clear witness to a desire for a heavenly home and to keep that desire green among the human family. He summons others to dedicate themselves to the earthly service of men and to make ready the material of the celestial realm by this ministry of theirs.”*

2. Gaudium et Spes, 39: *“We do not know how all things will be transformed. As deformed by sin, the shape of this world will pass away. But we are taught that God is preparing a new dwelling place and a new earth where justice will abide, and whose blessedness will answer and surpass all the longings for peace which spring up in the human heart. . . . While charity and its fruits endure, all that creation which God made on man's account will be unchained from the bondage of vanity.”* The Council tries to create a balance, a both and, saying that there is a transcendent value to man's works, that charity and its fruits remain, but recognizing that, realistically because of sin, human works are not identified with the Kingdom. The Council teaches that to man's humanizing the world: “Far from diminishing our concern to develop this earth, the expectancy of a new earth should spur us on, for it is here that the body of a new human family grows, foreshadowing in some way the age which is to come. That is why, although we must be careful to distinguish earthly progress clearly from the increase of the kingdom of Christ, such progress is of vital concern to the Kingdom of God, insofar as it can contribute to the better ordering of human society.” (GS 39)

3. The tension between the present and the future in Christian eschatology .

A. The witness of Jesus in the New testament to the “already and not-yet” of the Kingdom.

B. Tensions in Pauline eschatology:

1. With the death and resurrection of Christ, we have moved into a new era. The eschaton has begun. Does this mean that Pauline eschatology is a realized eschatology? “Now is the acceptable time; now is the day of salvation.” (2 Cor 6: 2) Hardly.

Christ, the kosmokrator does not yet reign supreme; he has not yet handed over everything to the Father (cf. I Cor 15:24). All this is related to the “Parousia of the Lord.”

2. We are living in the in-between times, that is between the resurrection (whence the first-fruits are present) and the Parousia. The famous image in Paul is the predawn day. The light of the inbreaking Day is already shining. Living in the “in between” times means that we are committed to living a “people of the day.” (Cf Rom 13: I Thes)

C. Summary of some present positions of eschatology:

1. **Future eschatology: A. Schweitzer.** The gospel message is dominated by a belief in the **imminent coming of the Kingdom**. Schweitzer sees the proclamation of the future Kingdom as the focus and content of Jesus’ earthly mission. The expectation of an imminent inbreaking of the Kingdom likewise focused the initial teaching of the Church to announce what was yet to take place.

2. **Realized eschatology: C.H. Dodd:** The Kingdom of God, as presented in the parables, is precisely and event that is happening in the present -- **a call to be open to what God is doing now in Christ**. Objectors say, obviously the end of the world has yet to happen. How can you talk about a realized eschatology? For Dodd, the “end” like the “beginning” of the world is shrouded in mythic language. The Kingdom of God, as such, is beyond history, although it has definitively entered history in Jesus Christ. “There is no coming of the Son of Man ‘after’ His coming in Galilee and Jerusalem, whether soon or late, for there is no before and after in the eternal order.

3. **Existential eschatology: Bultmann:** He demythologizes the question of the future coming of God, saying that what the Gospels present are not a literal description of the future, but **an existential call to decision in the present**. In other words, the future Kingdom (coming as a thief in the night) motivates the person in the present to make a decision for Jesus.

4. Attempts to understand the tension of Already-Not Yet:

a. **O. Cullmann:** (coined the phrase of “already and not yet”): His understanding of eschatology is based on the **biblical notion of time**. Salvation and redemption take place “in” time (as opposed to the Greek understanding of cyclical time where salvation is an escape from that prison of time to timeless eternity. “The decisive battle in a war may have occurred in a relatively early stage of the war, and yet the war still continues. Although the decisive effect of the battle is perhaps not recognized by all, it nevertheless already means victory.”

b. **W. Pannenberg:** Revived Hegel’s understanding of the idea of **universal history** -- only all of history, history completed comprises the self-communication of the divine. **“ontological priority of the future:”** This means that the end of history alone can provide the ultimate perspective from which to understand the total course of world history as revelation. In Christ, the future is already here in the present. Normally, we see the future as something caused by the past and present. In saying that the future Kingdom has an ontological priority, we mean that the end of all human possibility has already occurred in Christ. Since that possibility is anticipated in the present, the Kingdom is proleptically present now. What does this mean? It means that all of our present experiences are interpreted through that future which is already revealed to us.

b. Theology of hope in Moltmann: The danger of Christianity is the danger of an established religion -- the deification of the status quo: In one sense, even the revolutionary movements in society to establish a bright and better tomorrow are idolatrous. Yet, Moltmann sees (from Bloch) that human consciousness is anticipatory--it lives in hope. Without hope, as without hungering, one cannot long exist. God = the “apocalypse of the promised future.” The creaturely forms of signification through which the self-disclosure of God is mediated do not function as descriptive references corresponding to some completed state of being but as statements of hope and anticipations of a further coming of God. (Yahweh isn’t I Am as much as I WILL BE FOR YOU.) Religious language names God only through expressing God’s promise of self-commitment in covenant for a future.

A. The Parousia of Christ (M. Hunt)

“... He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead...”
Council of Constantinople (381)

There is perhaps no area of dogmatic theology more ‘colored’ by the imagination than the discussion of the parousia of Christ situated within the branch of dogmatic theology known as eschatology. The biblical teaching is couched in apocalyptic imagery that is often intimately tied to notions of deliverance and victory over the enemy. Discussions on the subject throughout the patristic era and into the middle ages prompted the Church to refute error and to offer clarity. In the relatively few solemn teachings on the subject of eschatology, it is significant to note the Church’s concern that excesses in this area be diligently avoided in preaching and in teaching.

I. Biblical Data

A. New Testament

1. *parousia*

- a. approximately 25% of the references are found in Paul’s two letters to the Thessalonians
- b. in secular usage, *parousia* refers to the “visit of a ruler or high official.”
- c. in religious usage, *parousia* refers to the “helpful visit by a deity.”

2. “in glory”

- a. Scripture teaches the Lord’s coming and presence among people
- b. *parousia* is limited to describing, not the first coming, but the coming in glory at the end of the ages (eschaton)

3. “to judge”

- a. ratification of the decisions one has made for or against the Lord

B. Old Testament

1. Messianic hopes and expectations
2. establishment of God as world king
3. apocalyptic writings and imagery (eg. Book of Daniel)

C. Moral living

1. time (chronos) of the *parousia* is unknown

2. life lived in watchful expectation, vigilance

II. Select Patristic era developments

A. Biblical pattern

1. reflections often 'triggered' by contemporary events
2. confident hope for victory

B. Origen

1. apokatastasis panton
 - a. steeped in *imago Dei* anthropology
 - b. question, though, of reconciling the apokatastasis with free will
 - c. evil as non-being in Origen's thought
2. eventually condemned by the Church

C. Tertullian and Augustine

1. time of reckoning
2. emphasis, particularly in Tertullian, of divine justice in terms of punishment and reward
3. distinction, particularly in Augustine, between time and eternity
4. Caution though in the descriptions of the punishments

III. Select Conciliar teaching

A. Florence

1. 'purgatorial penalties'
2. value of prayers and offerings on the part of the faithful for those who have died
3. heaven for those with "no stain of sin"
4. hell for those who die in actual mortal sin, or with original sin only

B. Trent *Decree on Purgatory*

1. linked with teaching on indulgences and sacrificial character of the Mass
2. existence of purgatory and usefulness of offerings for the deceased

C. Vatican II

1. humanity situated in an eschatological context
2. pilgrim people
3. eschatology in ecclesial terms

IV. Theological Principles

A. Apocalyptic approach

1. a future vision 'read' into the present

B. Eschatological approach

1. a present vision 'evolved' to the future

C. Heaven, Hell, Purgatory

1. universal salvific will of God
 - a. Heaven/Hell not simply opposites
 - b. I Cor 2:9
2. Augustinian distinction of time/eternity
 - a. preference to speak in terms of 'states of being' rather than 'a place'

3. parousia in terms of a completion of what has already begun

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