

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM

By
HERMAN RIDDERBOS

Translated by H. de Jongste
Edited by Raymond O. Zorn

THE PRESBYTERIAN AND REFORMED PUBLISHING COMPANY

Copyright, 1962
by The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company
Philadelphia, Pa.

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 62-15429

Printed in the United States of America

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company is highly privileged to make available in English this monumental contribution to the study of the kingdom of God by the illustrious professor of New Testament in the Theological Seminary of Kampen, the Netherlands.

The translation was prepared by H. de Jongste, under the direction of Dr. David H. Freeman. The Rev. Raymond O. Zorn is the English editor. George C. Fuller prepared the indices.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY RAYMOND O. ZORN	ix
INTRODUCTION	xi
I. THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (THE BACKGROUND).....	
1. The Old Testament	3
2. The Later Jews	8
3. No Eschatological a priori	13
II. THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN (JOHN THE BAPTIST AND JESUS).....	
4. Theocentric	18
5. Dynamical	24
6. Messianic	27
7. Future	36
8. Present	47
III. THE KINGDOM HAS COME (FULFILLMENT)	
9. The Wicked One Overcome	61
10. Jesus' Power to Work Miracles	65
11. Preaching the Gospel	70
12. The Possession of Salvation	76
13. Jesus is the Christ	81
IV. THE KINGDOM HAS COME (THE PROVISIONAL CHAR- ACTER)	
14. Presence and Future	104
15. The Time of the Evil One	106
16. The Miracle as a Sign	115
17. Speaking in Parables	121
18. The Sower	129
19. The Delay of the Judgment	136
20. The Effect of the Word	141
21. Seeking What Is Lost	148
22. The Servant of the Lord	156
23. The Kingdom and the Cross	169
V. THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM (THE BASIC MOTIF) .	
24. The Gospel of the Poor	185
25. The New Covenant	192
26. The Good Pleasure of the Lord	202

VI. THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM (SALVATION)	211
27. Remission of Sins	211
28. The Fatherhood of God	232
29. The Fulfillment of the Father's Will	241
30. God's Fatherhood and Temporal Life	259
31. God's Fatherhood and Eternal Life	269
VII. THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM (THE COMMAND- MENTS)	285
32. "Kingdom of God" and "Righteousness"	285
33. The Fulfillment of the Law	292
34. The Application of the Demand of Love	321
VIII. THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM AND THE CHURCH	334
35. General Viewpoints	334
36. Basileia and Ekklesia	342
37. Foundation and Authority	356
38. Apostolate and Baptism	369
IX. THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER	397
39. The Twofold Motif of the Lord's Supper	397
40. The Redemptive-Historical Meaning of the Lord's Supper	406
41. The Character of Jesus' Action at the Last Supper	418
42. Symbol and Reality	432
X. THE FUTURE OF THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN	444
43. The Problem of the "Nah-erwartung"	444
44. Resurrection and Parousia	456
45. The Great Future as Orientation-point	468
46. The "Discerning of the Time"	472
47. The Echatological Speech of Mark 13	477
48. The So-called Time-Limit Pronouncements	498
49. The Meaning of the "Parousia-Parables"	510
50. Fulfillment and Consummation	516
51. Prophecy and History	523

INDICES

Index of Subjects	541
Index of Authors	542
Index of Scripture References	546

FOREWORD

It is with a deep sense of privilege that this monumental work by Dr. Herman Ridderbos, Professor of New Testament since 1942 in The Theological Seminary, Kampen, The Netherlands, is presented to the English-reading world. Dr. Ridderbos, a scholar of international reputation, has written many books in his native Dutch language, but it has only been in recent years that a number are now beginning to make their appearance in English translation for the enrichment of the English-reading public. This book, also first published in the Dutch language approximately a decade ago, has remained a solid contribution of permanent significance to the fascinating subject of the kingdom of God. Its appearance now for the first time in English is therefore to be welcomed.

At a time when much that is taught and written about the kingdom of God is of a speculative nature based upon concessions that have been made to the naturalism of modern science or the "demythologizing" approach of higher criticism and that have been conditioned by shifting and often faulty presuppositions, it is refreshing to find a theologian of Dr. Ridderbos' stature who accepts the Scripture's claim of full integrity and permits the Bible's message to speak for itself. And, as Dr. Ridderbos ably proves, the message of Scripture is capable of defense and worthy of a hearing. Rather than coming to the Scriptures with inadequate speculative, or even philosophical, presuppositions; Dr. Ridderbos governs his exegesis by a thoroughly biblical-theological approach, i.e., the Scriptures must be understood as they furnish their own interpretation in the light of the grammatico-historical circumstances of their impartation to man by the sovereign God of the universe who is at the same time the covenanting Redeemer of his people.

The basis for an understanding of the coming of the kingdom of God, therefore, centers in Jesus Christ. It is he, as

God's promised Messiah, who gives answer to the questions and problems about the nature of the kingdom, the manner of its coming, the way in which it is now present in history, and its future, final realization beyond history. It is to him, hence, that we must turn if we would learn of the full significance and meaning of God's dominion as defined by this biblical concept, "the kingdom of God." Consequently, Dr. Ridderbos concentrates attention upon the coming of the kingdom as proclaimed by Jesus himself, according to the witness of the three synoptic gospels. From Christ's word and works, we learn of the full scope and significance of the kingdom. In short, we find that the kingdom has come in Christ's accomplished redemption, the reality and saving power of which, as announced in the gospel, being experienced through faith by union with Christ. But the full and final realization of the kingdom yet awaits the triumphal return of Christ in power and glory upon the clouds of heaven.

Dr. Ridderbos' presentation of the kingdom is thorough and comprehensive, and takes into account a broad range of influential, though varying views, including those of critical scholarship. Moreover, his exegesis is masterly and satisfying as he repeatedly marshals powerful and irrefutable arguments to disprove erroneous viewpoints while establishing the validity of his conclusions.

All readers alike will profit from the study of this book's contents, and are sure to gain a better understanding of the kingdom's nature, its fulfilled aspects and presence in the world as the result of Christ's first advent, along with its yet future final consummation to be accomplished at his second coming.

RAYMOND O. ZORN
Fawn Grove, Pa.

INTRODUCTION

The central theme of Jesus' message, as it has come down to us in the synoptic gospels, is the coming of the kingdom of God or, as it is usually expressed in Matthew, of the kingdom of heaven. This is not only borne out by the frequent occurrence of that formula, in the first three gospels, which marks them off from John's tradition, as regards their form and manner of expression; it also appears from the recapitulatory characterization of Jesus' preaching that they give in more than one passage.

Jesus entered upon his ministry with the preaching of the gospel of God, and saying: "The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye and believe the gospel." Thus Mark 1:14,15 introduces the description of Jesus' coming and his activity in Galilee. Matthew and Luke have the same message in different words: Matt. 4:17,23; 9:35; Luke 9:11. In Luke 4:43 we are told in Jesus' own words that the purpose of his mission was the preaching of the kingdom of God. The word of God he preached (Luke 8:11) is therefore also called, "the word of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:19); and the gospel by which the entire New Testament *kerygma* is summarized (Luke 4:43; 8:1; 16:16) has the kingdom of God and its coming for its content. It may be rightly said that the whole of the preaching of Jesus Christ and his apostles is concerned with the kingdom of God,¹ and that in Jesus Christ's proclamation of the kingdom we are face to face with the specific form of expression of the whole of his revelation of God.² These preliminary remarks may show that for insight into the meaning and the character of the New Testament revelation of God, it is hardly possible to mention any other theme equal in importance to that of the kingdom of heaven. And we must also add that hardly any subject in the whole field of New Testament research has provoked greater diversity of opinion

or given rise to fiercer controversy. The latter is especially true of the last fifty years. The study of the clash of opinions entails the great danger of getting involved in all kinds of problems which later on appear to have been introduced into the gospel from the modern world of thought and which are not conducive to a correct understanding of the purport of Jesus' preaching. This controversy is on the other hand also a rich source of instruction to the attentive observer. It is above all the confirmation that the power of divine truth which finds its sublime and most variegated expression in the gospel of the kingdom of heaven again and again triumphs over all human limitations and commitments. As an introduction to the subject proper of our study we first wish to get acquainted with the chief points of view that have been recently adopted by various interpreters of the gospel, with respect to the general character of the kingdom proclaimed by Jesus.

For more than fifty years the study of the general purport of the kingdom of heaven has been dominated by the problems posited by the so-called eschatological school.³ Johannes Weiss may be mentioned as the "father" of this movement. In 1892 he published *Die Predigt Jesu vom Reiche Gottes*, which has retained its significance to the present day. In this work Weiss attacked the use made of the concept "kingdom of God" by the influential theologian Albrecht Ritschl. Ritschl thought he could appeal to the preaching of Jesus in support of his own conception. He conceived of the kingdom of God as the ethical-religious community founded by Jesus and composed of all who wish to practice the evangelical law of love. It is this community which must be promoted by the church. The character of this kingdom of God is entirely immanent, because it belongs to this world, and is strongly determined by the idea of development and human activity. The basic law of this kingdom is found in Jesus' commandments, and lends a predominantly ethical character to the entire process of its coming and its revelation.⁴

According to Weiss, however, Ritschl's conception of the

kingdom of God can in no way make an appeal to the gospel. Its origins are rather to be sought in Kant's view of the kingdom of virtue, and in the theology of the Enlightenment. As a representative of the history of religions school, Weiss argued that Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of God can only be understood in the light of and against the background of the world of thought of his time, especially of the late Jewish apocalyptic writings. On this view, every conception of the kingdom of God as an immanent community in course of development or as an ethical ideal is consequently to be rejected; for it becomes clear that the kingdom of God is a purely future and eschatological event, presupposing the end of this world; and, therefore, cannot possibly reveal itself already in this world. For the kingdom of God, which Jesus proclaimed to be near at hand, is nothing but the commencement of the new world, expected in the apocalyptic literature, and which will reveal itself after the catastrophic upheaval of the present era.

It is true that there are passages in the gospel representing this kingdom as having come, and consequently, as being present. According to Weiss, our first concern should be to investigate their authenticity and the extent they are derived from a later spiritualizing conception of the kingdom. To such a conception Weiss also wants to ascribe the preaching of the kingdom found in the gospel according to John, in which the eschatological viewpoint is far less dominant. Still, there remain passages in the synoptic gospels in which Jesus speaks of the kingdom as being present (the so-called *Gegenwartstellen*, "present" references, such as Matthew 12:28, and others). But according to Weiss, Jesus is here in a kind of spiritual ecstasy, in which he sees the first beginnings of the great break-through, and speaks of the coming of the kingdom in a proleptic sense. However, Jesus had not always lived in the spell of this high tension. Rather, at first, Jesus expected the coming of the kingdom before his death. Only later, under the impact of disappointing experiences, did he postpone the time of its coming. There is, however, no question

of a gradual revelation and development of this coming. The kingdom will come suddenly, owing to God's irresistible intervention, and it will bring the present dispensation to a close.

The echo to this eschatological keynote is heard by Weiss especially in Jesus' commandments. They do not denote the standard of the kingdom of God in its development in this world, but are intended as conditions for the entry into the future kingdom. They not only function as conditions, but are also thoroughly eschatological in character. The radicalism of Jesus' ethics is the radicalism of those who know that the end is near, and who have therefore on principle taken leave of all earthly possessions and interests. Now that the end of the world may come at any moment, there is no point in quarrelling about right or wrong. Such was the sense of crisis that gave birth to Jesus' commandments. They cannot be understood as rules of conduct given for all time, and acceptable at any period, but as a kind of "exceptional legislation." Just as in times of war the normal order of things is temporarily suspended and everything is made subservient to the great cause, so in the same way Jesus' radical commandments are to be understood only from the eschatological expectation of the coming kingdom of God.⁵

The man who has advocated this new interpretation of the gospel with the greatest energy, and who may therefore be called the most typical propagandist of the eschatological conception, is Albert Schweitzer. Weiss's writings were especially devoted to Jesus' preaching, but Schweitzer in addition tries to prove that Weiss's insight is also the long-sought-for key for the understanding of Jesus' life. Schweitzer speaks of "consistent eschatology." If Jesus lived in the expectation that the end was near at hand, the history of his life must have been dominated by such an expectation. Thus Schweitzer arrives at an entirely new and partly fantastic description of the life of Jesus. In his book *Das Messianitäts- und Leidensgeheimnis*,⁶ and especially in his large volume *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*⁷ (published later under the title *Die Geschichte der*

*Leben-Jesu-Forschung*⁸), Schweitzer gives a brilliant survey of the efforts made by theology since the Enlightenment to arrive at a consistent view of the life of Jesus.

Schweitzer clearly shows how much the whole history of exegesis has been determined, not by historical objectivity, but rather by subjective theological prejudice. He especially criticizes the liberal picture of Jesus, so long accepted by a large number of theologians of the modern school. Schweitzer's teacher, H. J. Holtzmann, the great representative of the liberal school, was one of the authors of this liberal portrait. Schweitzer sympathizes most with such figures in the history of New Testament research as Reimarus, Strauss, and Bruno Bauer who, in his opinion, have described Jesus' life in a way that is free from all dogmatic premises. He shows that it was especially these radicals who realized that Jesus lived in the eschatological tension which, according to Schweitzer, Weiss's book on Jesus' preaching of the kingdom had indicated. Therefore, in the tradition of these predecessors, Schweitzer tries to describe Jesus' life as a life which was wholly dominated by the eschatological dogma.⁹

Schweitzer's consistently eschatological reconstruction of the life of Jesus has not found much support. Nevertheless, this view has remained very characteristic of the general theological position of the eschatological tendency. On the one hand, it was intended as a protest against the humanizing and ethicizing of the gospel, and against the consequent distortion of the picture of Jesus found in the gospels. On the other hand, this movement fought for what it considered a purely *historical* rectification. By exclusively viewing the coming of the kingdom mentioned in the gospel as the beginning of the great final catastrophe, these writers could only assert that Jesus' preaching of the nearness of the kingdom was the effect of a delusion. They were thus compelled to base the ethical imitation of Jesus—which especially fascinated Schweitzer who qualified it as "the heroic surrender of life"—on something different from this eschatological expectation.

This is why both Weiss and Schweitzer have recourse to the modern idealistic outlook for their own theology and view of the world.¹⁰ Thus their work did not result in a new theology founded on the gospel. It only frustrated the efforts previously made to establish a bond between the gospel and the current theological conception.

This failure is one of the reasons why the first great representatives of the eschatological interpretation at first had so little influence. They were unable to give theological expression to the eschatological character of Jesus' preaching which they had re-discovered. The result of their activities was only that, for the time being, the eschatological character of the kingdom of God, preached by Jesus, was more and more being recognized. But this character was considered to be merely the mythical or contemporary expression of the spiritual change which takes place in man and in the world when people begin to listen to Jesus' commandments and to regulate their lives by them.

Characteristic for this (eschatological) form (spiritual-moral) content schema was, for example, that which another well-known representative of the history of religions school, W. Bousset, adduced to refute Johannes Weiss's book. Bousset admitted that Jesus' preaching was entirely based on the eschatological conception. But in his opinion a sharp distinction should be made between the "phenomenological" and the "intelligible" character of Jesus' personality and message. The apocalyptic element in Jesus' preaching, his expectation of the kingdom of God, his words about the "Son of Man" were supposed to be only the forms of a metaphysical conviction, according to which an eternal, invisible world of a higher order surrounded our little world. "This dualism was the husk of the tremendous moral seriousness and the religious depth of the gospel. But the kernel has everywhere burst the husk."¹¹ The result is that according to Bousset, Jesus did not live in a mood ruled by the sense of a crisis, nor did he give exceptional commandments to his disciples who would then no longer have

had any future. But, contrary to what Weiss had said, Jesus preached a positive kind of ethics in which this world was accepted, and through his faith in God the Father he really freed himself from the eschatological frame of mind. As an historian of religion, Bousset tried in this way to do justice to the historical view of Jesus' preaching and to leave room for the ideal Jesus as conceived by the liberal Ritschlian theology.

There were other influential representatives of the older school, such as Harnack and Wellhausen, who made use of the form-content schema in order to be able to appeal to the gospel for their liberal theology, and to put aside the hypothesis of the eschatological tension in Jesus' preaching. For this eschatological tension did not at all fit in with their ethical evolutionistic conception of the kingdom of God. Thus in his *Das Wesen des Christentums* Harnack relegated the eschatological aspect of Jesus' preaching entirely to the background. In fact, he admitted that the Kingdom of Heaven preached by Jesus must be understood as a future and external dominion, as a kingdom that will manifest itself on the new earth. But, in Harnack's opinion, this structure of Jesus' preaching must be explained by referring to the conditions of the time in which Jesus lived. Jesus' interest did not lie in these elements of his message. As Jesus' own spiritual possession we must consider the conception of the internal kingdom of God which is present in the souls of men. We must, therefore, lift this "essential" element from its contemporary framework, and remember that the kingdom of God is not concerned with "thrones and principalities, nor with devils and angels, but with God and the soul, with the soul and its God."¹² In this way Harnack reconstructed the eschatological traits in Jesus' preaching, and continued to appeal to the gospel for his rational-moral theology. It is true, he did not lay as much stress on the social element as did Ritschl in his conception of the kingdom of God, but he found the dominant element in Jesus' preaching in the value of the individual human soul.

In this and in similar ways, liberal theology, before the First World War, tried to maintain as the proper and lasting element that which is considered to be the spiritual purport of Jesus' preaching, notwithstanding its historical recognition of the "eschatology of the gospel." And on the other hand, it put aside as much as possible the cosmic and eschatological *endgeschichtliche* traits of the gospel as unessential.¹³ The liberal theology took up a very strong position especially with respect to the eschatological interpretation of Jesus' commandments. In consequence of the heavy criticism thus brought to bear on the eschatological explanation of the kingdom of God, even Weiss was obliged to state in the second edition of his work that not all of Jesus' preaching was ruled by his eschatological expectation, and that not all his commandments could be interpreted as "crisis commandments." He admitted, for example, that the double commandment of love does not only hold for the exceptional times before the coming of the kingdom, but that it is a commandment for all time and was intended as such. In this manner Weiss detached large parts of Jesus' religious and ethical preaching from the conception of the kingdom of God, giving rise to a dualism in the content of the gospel which is difficult to explain. On the one hand, it contains the preaching of the kingdom, i.e., of the crisis, and on the other, there is supposed to be found in it a perfectly un-eschatological faith, which has nothing to do with the preaching of the kingdom. This dualistic view of the gospel¹⁴ has been emphatically rejected by the advocates of the consistent eschatological interpretation,¹⁵ but has not failed to find adherents, as appears from the well-known writings of H. Windisch, for example, on the Sermon on the Mount. Windisch distinguishes between two main streams in the synoptic preaching of Jesus, viz., the prophetic-eschatological proclamation of salvation and judgment, and a purified radicalized teaching of wisdom.¹⁶ All such views have contributed to diminishing the authority of the eschatological interpretation of the preaching of Jesus, and have made it increasingly

clear that the so-called crisis-motive could not be the dominant viewpoint leading to the right conception of the purport of the original gospel. It has become more and more manifest that Jesus' commandments especially form an insurmountable obstacle to any consistent eschatological interpretation of the preaching of the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand if the kingdom of heaven has a primary eschatological meaning, it must more and more become clear that this meaning could hardly serve as a "framework" or a "shell" for the liberal ethical conception of the gospel. It is remarkable how this truth suddenly seemed to dawn upon a wide circle of people, and how then the "eschatology of the kingdom of God" became the focal point of interest. This time it was discussed as a reality, which was willingly faced not only in an historical-exegetical respect, but in a thoroughly theological sense.¹⁷ Only then did the structure of the liberal theology suddenly collapse. In spite of all the historical-exegetical researches of its own adherents, it had been able to maintain its optimistic and ethical conception of the kingdom of God. But now it had to give way to the theology of crisis, which could seemingly start directly from the gospel. Had not historical research established that Jesus' preaching of the kingdom also submitted all human data to the radical judgment of God's intervention which was so near at hand?

Yet it is clear that this new development in eschatological thought also was bound to meet with a serious obstacle in the gospel. For Weiss and Schweitzer had tried to show that all of Jesus' preaching was based on the conviction of an approaching final catastrophe, from which its fundamental sense of crisis was derived. But then it follows that any one who wishes to orientate his theology to this conception of the kingdom of God is confronted with the inevitable task of accounting for what, with an inexorable sense of reality, Schweitzer has again and again called "the delay of the *parousia*." No wonder that in order to maintain the eschatological interpretation not merely—like Weiss and Schweitzer—as an historical but as a

theological principle, a conception of eschatology different than that of the fathers of the eschatological movement appeared to be necessary.¹⁸ Thus arose what might be called the change of the final-historical (*endgeschichtliche*) into the supra-historical (*übergeschichtliche*) eschatology. This means that eschatology is no longer concerned with that which lies at the end of the horizontal line of history—this is final history (*Endgeschichte*) but it is concerned with the supra-temporal, the divine, which from moment to moment determines the existence of the world and man. The category of time is eliminated in this eschatological picture. The preaching of the approach of the kingdom of heaven should no longer be understood in the sense of the end of the world being at hand, and of the shrinking away of the time of its advent. But this message should be taken to denote the immediate relation of every moment of time to eternity. The "last things," therefore, assume a different meaning. The temporal indication of "post" is replaced by that of "trans." There is no question of an approach in a temporal sense. Every time may be the last, and at every hour the call is valid: "The kingdom is at hand."

This new interpretation of the eschatological character of Jesus' preaching is clearly based on dogmatic premises, and has had no less influence on New Testament science than the ideology of the liberal theology. As a typical transition from the old ethical-immanent conception of the kingdom of God to the new existential-eschatological interpretation we may mention M. Dibelius' *Evangelium und Welt*.¹⁹ In this book the belief in the approaching end of the world, which is supposed to be the foundation of Jesus' preaching, is called the historical garb of the supra-historical and the permanent in Christianity. For not only have Jesus' words thereby been given an increased actuality, an inevitable seriousness, but this eschatological perspective lends to Jesus' preaching an unconditional absoluteness,²⁰ no longer dependent on any historical situation or chance. All this imparts to man a new ground of life,²¹ elevated above any temporal contingency, and enables him to be in

communion with what is eternal and imperishable, in that which Jesus called the kingdom of God.

But in this view the eschatology of the New Testament has not yet been taken quite seriously, because the immanence conception of the kingdom of God has still been maintained, although freed from any historical determination. In this respect Dibelius followed Harnack and the liberal theology. Not Dibelius, but very definitely Bultmann, is the typical representative of the new (in its turn "consistent") eschatological view of the gospel. He, too, is of the opinion that we should distinguish in the gospel between the revelational content proper and the "contemporary mythology" expressing this essential content. According to him this mythology includes the preaching of the approaching end of the world. This direction to the absolute end constitutes the permanent and essential element of the concept, kingdom of heaven. "The dominion of God is something miraculous, and the miraculous as such, that is the absolutely different, opposed to all of the here and the now."²² The preaching of the *basileia* is the precipitation of the conviction that "even in the 'now' man is confronted with the necessity of deciding because the 'now' is the last hour for him."²³ The *basileia*, therefore, is not a condition or an entity that is realized on earth. It does not interest Jesus as an eschatological condition, but as "the miraculous event, meaning the great either-or, inducing man to come to a decision."²⁴ The dominion of God does not enter the world but calls to man to make a choice against the world.

K. L. Schmidt is also representative of the new eschatological view in Kittel's *Wörterbuch zum N.T.*²⁵ According to him, too, the kingdom of God in Jesus' preaching is purely future. In a negative sense this means—and here Schmidt literally agrees with Bultmann and R. Otto's formula—that "it is opposed to all that is present and earthly, to all that is here and now." In a positive sense this kingdom of God is a catastrophe realized in certain events described as the eschato-

logical drama found in the Jewish apocalypses. However, that Jesus took over the conceptions of his contemporaries is not conclusive, but the important thing is that he consciously did not go as far as they did. He gives up depicting the final state and the calculations of the signs. In contradistinction to Judaism he emphasizes the fact that its coming cannot be calculated, that nobody can dispose of it one way or another, that it is an entirely divine cause. The negative statement that God's kingdom is nothing but a miracle must be maintained rigorously. This negative truth that God's kingdom is the entirely different, the absolutely "supra-cosmic and anti-cosmic" is the most positive thing that can be said about it, generally speaking. "The realization of God's dominion is future. And this future determines man's present."²⁶

No wonder that in the long run this new eschatological interpretation of Jesus' preaching has also met with serious opposition. The interpretation of the biblical future as a permanent tension between time and eternity, and the explanation of the near approach of the kingdom in terms of the existential situation of decision, in which man finds himself placed from moment to moment before God, all too clearly bear the stamp of philosophical re-interpretation of the gospel. It is here almost easier to speak of an allegorical explanation than of an acceptable exegesis of the gospel. It is true that vigorous attempts have been made to vindicate the identity of the New Testament and this "suprahistorical eschatology." For example, Karl Barth for a while thought he could appeal to the New Testament and silence every protest against this conception. "For in the New Testament the end is not a temporal event, not a fabulous downfall of the world; it is entirely without any relation to any historical, terrestrial, or cosmic catastrophe, but it is the real *end*; so much the end that the nineteen hundred years (of Church history) do not only mean little, but nothing at all with respect to the nearness or the remoteness of the end. . . ." ²⁷ But it has become more and more evident²⁸

that such an elimination of the time-category, and such a change of the realistic and cosmic view of the New Testament into the purely existential conception of the recent eschatology, at bottom only means relinquishing the New Testament expectation of the future (an *Enteschatologisierung*). This is why this newer eschatology stands condemned, however much it tries to make the essential element of the New Testament message about the kingdom the dominant viewpoint of theology. It is open to the same criticism as the older school which tried to distinguish between the "phenomenological" and the "intelligible" elements, the "form" and the "essence" in Jesus' preaching.²⁹ In opposition to this, others have argued that at bottom all such reasoning is an idealistic abstraction of the truth (revelation) and of history.³⁰ The temporal character of New Testament eschatology has been maintained with great emphasis. Thus, for example, joining Robert Winkler's opposition to the consistent eschatology,³¹ Wendland asserts that every theology which removes the element of what is final (*endzeitlich*) and future from the notion of eschatology, estranges itself from the knowledge of faith of the New Testament.³² Of late years this insight has been expressed in ever greater clarity, e.g., by Kümmel, who declares that there is no changing of the fact that to Jesus the prediction of the future occurrence of the eschatological consummation has a real prospective sense.³³ Especially Cullmann in his *Christus und die Zeit* has shown that the linear concept of time is characteristic of the biblical eschatology and soteriology. The *history* of salvation is the heart of the New Testament *kerygma*, and any one who tries to find an Archimedean point of orientation above it should know that he opposes the Christian message as such. That is why Cullmann rejects any attempt on the part of Schweitzer and his followers to arrive at a "theological" interpretation of the gospel while ignoring the expectation of the approaching end, which, historically speaking, they hold to be a delusion. He also points out to Bultmann that it is impossible to look upon this "mythological" conception of the

end of this era as the setting to this form of the central content of the gospel. In opposition to this, Cullmann shows that the salvation preached in the gospel is bound up with a progressive course of time encompassing the past, the present and the future. It is essential for us to be keenly alive to the rigorously rectilinear conception of time in the New Testament, in contradistinction to the Greek idea of cyclic time, and to maintain the former in opposition to every kind of metaphysics in which salvation is always restricted to the opposite side of the line between God and man (*Jenseits*).⁸⁴

Acknowledging the real meaning of the category of time in Jesus' preaching, it is no longer possible for us to ignore the final act of the drama of history described in the *endgeschichtliche* parts of the gospel. Nor can we pass by in silence the meaning of history and the cosmic meaning of the kingdom of heaven, if our aim is to accomplish a really theological exegesis of the gospels. Obviously, in this context renewed actuality and a new (now *theological*) importance will be attached to the questions connected with the historical nearness of the end, in general with the *Naherwartung* (the imminent advent) of Jesus, so emphatically posited by Weiss and Schweitzer. Nor is it accidental that with the decline of the supra-historical (*uebergeschichtliche*) phase of the eschatological interpretation it is necessary again to defend one's own position against the original theses posited by Weiss and Schweitzer, especially against the one about the *Naherwartung*. Moreover others, such as Buri and Werner, are making fresh and energetic attempts to establish the fact that Schweitzer's historical reconstruction of the original evangelical history is irrefutable. We shall have to revert to these things when elaborating the theme of the future perspective of Jesus' preaching of the kingdom.⁸⁵

Meanwhile the controversy about the purport of Jesus' preaching has not only been concentrated on the *meaning* of the evangelical eschatology, but also on its *limits*. We have already made mention of the impossibility of explaining the

whole of Jesus' preaching and in particular his commandments, from the expectation of the end. Weiss also admits that this is impossible. It is true that Bultmann thought he could maintain the unity of Jesus' eschatological and ethical message by conceiving of Jesus' commandments merely as exhortations to come to a decision, i.e., as a purely eschatological message.³⁶ But apart from the denaturing of the New Testament idea of eschatology evidenced in this effort, such a conception is only possible if the unity of the synoptic kerygma is dissolved after the manner of the exponents of form criticism. The kerygma is split up by them into a multitude of very small units of tradition each one of which is supposed to be capable of investigation as to its originality.

And this does not only hold for Jesus' commandments, but for the whole of the preaching of the kingdom of heaven that has come down to us. It has become increasingly clear that a large number of very important utterances and elements of the gospel will have to be denied to Jesus, if his preaching is to be considered from the viewpoint of the crisis, the approaching end, the idea of "decision." For the synoptic preaching of the kingdom is not exclusively concerned with the approaching or the expected kingdom of the future, neither in its ethical elements, nor in its statements concerning the history of salvation. But in many respects the evangelical message bears the character of fulfillment. In order to prove the truth of this assertion on evident grounds, an unwarranted restriction has been made in the appeal to the so-called "presence pronouncements" (i.e., to those passages explicitly stating the presence of the kingdom). But it has been seen with ever greater clearness that this is not a matter of a few scattered pronouncements but of the character of the whole gospel as the gospel of the fulfillment, and that in this case everything depends on the view taken of *the person of Jesus*. In other words, the question of the meaning of the kingdom in Jesus' preaching is at bottom the question of the Christological quality of the gospel.

Schweitzer has seen the importance of this fact and has

always acknowledged that where Christ is there is the kingdom. The revelation of the kingdom is the revelation of Christ. The kingdom of God and the Messiah are correlates. In perfect agreement with his consistent eschatological conceptions Schweitzer has, however, also represented Jesus' Messiahship as something that had not yet begun but was simply an honor to be conferred at a future time. Jesus was not the Messiah, but the Messiah-designate. Undoubtedly here, too, the radical wing of criticism has tried to detach the purport of Jesus' preaching from his person. So long as the preaching of the kingdom is conceived of as a purely ethical message—as was done, e.g., by Harnack—such a separation can hardly be objected to from a purely factual standpoint (i.e., apart from historico-exegetic considerations). And in the same way, if with Bultmann the preaching of the kingdom is looked upon only as a call to a "decision" (*Entscheidung*) with a view to the "approaching end," the question whether Jesus really took himself to be the coming Messiah may be declared to be of secondary importance (*nebensächlich*).³⁷ As soon, however, as one views the gospel with an open mind, and takes account of the central position which the gospels assign to Jesus as the Christ, it will no longer be possible to ascribe a purely future meaning to the kingdom of heaven. It is, therefore, the emphatic recognition of the Christological content of the synoptic kerygma which has revealed the limits of the eschatological purport of the gospel of the kingdom to a wide circle of people, without any relapse into the hypotheses of the liberal theology. Characteristic of the reaction to the one-sidedly eschatological conception after the first world-war are, e.g., the works of G. Gloege, *Reich Gottes und Kirche im N. T.*,³⁸ and of H. D. Wendland, *Die Eschatologie des Reiches Gottes bei Jesus*.³⁹

These writings are typical of the new interpretation of the gospel. They start from the eschatological qualification of the concept, kingdom of God. On the one hand they reject the notion that the kingdom is developing in this world as an

immanent entity, and on the other hand, they reject the basic tenet of radical eschatology, according to which the kingdom is supposed to have a merely future character.

Thus Gloege lays great emphasis on the dynamic meaning of the concept "kingdom of God," by which he understands the eschatological, redeeming and judging *activity* of God. This kingly activity cannot be merely limited to the future, says Gloege. In Jesus' action as the Messiah, God's dominion—which is his, too—has actually started.⁴⁰ Present and future have been merged into a living organic unity of action (*lebensdig-organische Wirkungseinheit*) in Jesus' Messianic activity. As the Messiah Jesus introduces God's kingdom as a working power into the present. However, he will not hear of the kingdom of God as a permanent datum, not even in the person of Jesus as such, but in his action, i.e., in his action as God's Christ.⁴¹

Equally important and influential are Wendland's expositions. He fully recognizes the merits of the radical-eschatological movement in opposition to the earlier conception of the kingdom of God as immanent and present. "We cannot go back beyond the eschatological conception."⁴² This is not saying that "eschatological" coalesces with "future." The kingdom of God is not only concerned (*endzeitlich*) with the end of time but also supra-temporal (*ueberzeitlich*), pre-existent, eternal. This eternity is not to be conceived of as timelessness, however. The eternal kingdom may break through in time and does so indeed, namely, in Christ. The pronouncements about its presence must not be understood solely in a subjective sense as psychological anticipations, as Weiss believed. Nor is it permissible to take one's stand on Bultmann's opinion according to which the transcendent kingdom of God places man before a "decision" at every moment. But the kingdom comes *into* this world in the divine miracle wrought in Christ. This presence, however, is not to be thought of in an exclusively dynamic sense, as Gloege conceives it. It also consists in Christ as a divine gift, as the creation of the new life, the being

adopted as a child of God. In all these relations of the kingdom to the world this presence is connected with the person of the messenger of the kingdom. "The ultimate answer to the question about the presence of God's reign will always be of a Christological character. Any one who denies the impersonation of the kingdom in the Bearer of the kingdom deprives the reality of the presence of the kingdom of its power."⁴³ This Christological foundation of the presence of the kingdom and of the character of the gospel as fulfillment has found expression in all kinds of ways in the recent literature. It may be said that in Kittel's *Theologisches Wörterbuch* the majority of the articles discussing the "theological" content of the synoptic gospels are dominated by it, and, in their turn, have greatly contributed to its recognition. All kinds of monographs relating to parts of Jesus' preaching (e.g., the parables, the Church, the Last Supper, redemption, parousia) are based on this thought and thus they arrive at quite different results.⁴⁴ In what follows we shall be confronted with them in all kinds of ways.

As has been indicated, this integral Christological view of the synoptic preaching of the kingdom of heaven in the recent literature is accompanied by a definite emphasis on the redemptive historical significance of the coming of the kingdom. That which Jesus preaches is not a timeless truth, and what he brings is not only a new spirituality, a new disposition. No more is it a new form of society (in the sense of the social gospel) or an action carried on by men and slowly developing to its consummation.

The coming of the kingdom of God is most certainly to be looked upon as the realization of the great drama of the history of salvation in the sense of the Old Testament and of the Jewish apocalypses. This realization is not merely a matter of the future, however. It has started. The great change of the aeons has taken place. The center of history is in Christ's coming, in his victory over the demons, in his death and resurrection. In this sense, e.g., authors like Jeremias,⁴⁵ Stauffer,⁴⁶ Matter,⁴⁷ Cullmann,⁴⁸ Kümmel,⁴⁹ and others try to

do justice to both the eschatological and the present character of the Kingdom. Stauffer, e.g., states that present day theology still considers time, more or less in the manner of Kant, as a human form of intuition (*Anschauungsform*). The New Testament, however, considers time as the form of the divine action.⁵⁰ This starting-point also enables Stauffer to speak of the presence of the kingdom. It has come with the Son of Man. He discusses this coming especially as Christ's attack on the demonical powers. The kingdom concept in Jesus' words has a pronounced polemical accent. Jesus penetrates from the heavenly world into the earthly kingdom of the powerful one. The power of the great adversary is assailed. The *Civitas Dei* must have come and will one day be victorious.⁵¹

Matter's picture is a little different. He, too, is very critical of the thought of the realization of the kingdom within the limitations of this world, especially when the talk is about a human share in the "building up" or the "expansion" of the kingdom of God. However, Matter will not hear of an actualistic-dynamic conception of the kingdom in the sense of Gloege and others. He views the kingdom rather as the permanent, static omnipotence of God. In virtue of his divine nature Christ participates in this power and it is intermittently revealed in the world. The coming of the kingdom is therefore, according to Matter, not to be seen in a horizontal line but, it is always vertical. The "nearness" is not temporal, but spatial. The relations between Jesus' first and last coming are not, or not in the first place, of a religious and moral nature. "These relations are cosmic. This *world* was once the scene of the *revelations of God's power*; one day it will be so in the full sense of the word in the 'future' of Jesus Christ. The interim may therefore also be called '*basileia*.' Jesus Christ is now in control of the course of things even in their natural aspect. He manifests his power in this world in its rise as well as in its decline and fall." For the character of this relation Matter refers to the Apocalypse of John whose principal theme is the *basileia* as an interim.⁵²

The views advanced by Stauffer, Matter and others, are

the extreme opposites to the old immanence theology which sought the kernel of Jesus' message in the infinite value of the individual human soul, or in the spiritualization of human society. This old trend omitted every doctrine about angels, devils, thrones, and powers as a contemporary (*zeitgeschichtlich*) scaffolding. The difference of the eschatological conception, however, is that in these expositions the presence of the kingdom is taught unhesitatingly. The supra-human and cosmic character of the kingdom is again put in the center. Especially in Stauffer the dramatic history of salvation comes to the fore. Christ's coming is the decisive act in the great struggle between the kingdom of God and that of the devil.

To Cullmann, also, this great moment of the consummation of the history of salvation is the essence of the coming of the kingdom proclaimed by Christ. Where Christ acts and operates, the future is already decided upon. The time after Christ's first coming and before his second coming is the time between the decisive battle and "Victory Day."⁵³ The temporal tension between presence and future already exists for Jesus insofar as in his person the future may be considered to have been fulfilled and is still to be expected.⁵⁴ For this presence and future of the kingdom Cullmann can also appeal to Kümmel, whose book: "*Verheissung und Erfüllung*," published in 1946, again subjected the whole question of the presence and the future of the kingdom to investigation. He, too, is of the opinion that in principle the presence of the kingdom as well as the fulfillment of the promises have been given in the great history-of-salvation fact, the coming of Jesus Christ. It is true, Kümmel does so with greater reserve, and after eliminating from the gospel all kinds of pronouncements and motives that he supposes are "not to be attributed to Jesus." This author also recognizes the great importance of the eschatological interpretation of the gospel of the kingdom without, however, denying the predominating element of the fulfillment. However, this presence of the kingdom should not be conceived as an entity developing on earth or in the hearts of men, for it only

consists in the person of Christ, his preaching, and his action. In all these the coming kingdom of God becomes visible and present.⁵⁵

Lastly it must be mentioned that the exclusive view of the presence of the kingdom as well as the consistent eschatology still find powerful and able defenders. As proponents of the consistent eschatological view we have already mentioned the names of F. Buri and M. Werner. The view that Jesus considered the kingdom to have definitely arrived with his own coming has of late been defended by C. H. Dodd, in his influential work: *The Parables of the Kingdom*. His standpoint is that of the so-called *realized eschatology*. Jesus' pronouncements on the presence of the kingdom are beyond cavil. But this also means that the whole eschatological scheme has of necessity been broken through. The eschaton has become present instead of future, from the sphere of expectation it has passed into that of experience. What the apocalypse meant by the "kingdom of God" could only be expressed "in terms of fantasy." Jesus spoke about it as about an object of experience.⁵⁶ Though the gospel in its present form also contains all kinds of pronouncements about the future, Dodd thinks that there is nowhere a question of the future *of the kingdom*. This view is closely connected with Dodd's special conception of what Jesus meant by *basileia*. In his opinion the *basileia* belongs entirely to the spiritual sphere. Dodd considers the gospel from the standpoint of the history of salvation (in particular the parables), but he thinks that the whole of this eschatological expectation has been fulfilled in the spiritual world to which Jesus testified. He thus arrives at an explanation of all the parables of the kingdom of God based on the exclusive view of its presence.

Dodd's exegesis, which has met with a favorable response in the Anglo-Saxon world,⁵⁷ is at bottom a reversion to the old liberal conception of the kingdom of God in a modern scientific sense. It proves that in theology also there is nothing new under the sun. This may induce us to keep as far away as

possible from any ideological presuppositions about the kingdom, and to devote all our efforts instead to the study of what the *text of the gospels* teaches us about Jesus' preaching of the kingdom of heaven.

Notes to the Introduction

¹ K. L. Schmidt, in: G. Kittel, *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament* (to be referred to as T.W.B.), I. p. 584, the article on "basileia."

² H. D. Wendland, *Die Eschatologie des Reiches Gottes bei Jesus*, 1931, pp. 15, 19.

³ For what follows compare also: H. M. Matter: *Nieuwere Opvattingen omtrent het Koninkrijk Gods in Jezus' prediking naar de Synoptici*, 1942.

⁴ Cf. F. Holmström, *Das Eschatologische Denken der Gegenwart*, 1936, pp. 6ff.; E. Masselink, *Eschatologische motieven in de nieuwe theologie*, 1946, pp. 19ff.

⁵ Cf. also my *De strekking van de bergrede naar Mattheüs*, 1936, pp. 76ff.

⁶ 1901, 2nd edition, 1929.

⁷ 1906.

⁸ 1913. Since this date it has remained unchanged, (1926, 1933).

⁹ Cf. his *Gesch.d.L.-J.-F.4*, 1933, pp. 368ff.; for a survey cf. my *Zelfopenbaring en Zelfverberging*, 1946, pp. 8ff.

¹⁰ Cf. also Holmström, *op. cit.*, pp. 89ff.

¹¹ *Der Dualismus war die Hülle für den gewaltigen sittlichen Ernst und die religiös Tiefe des Evangeliums. Aber der Keim hat überall die Hülle gesprengt.* W. Bousset, *Die Jüdische Apokalyptik, ihre religionsgeschichtliche Herkunft und ihre Bedeutung für das N.T.*, 1903, p. 62. Cf. also Schweitzer on Bousset, *Gesch.d.L.-J.-F.*, pp. 236ff.; Holmström, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

¹² *Das Wesen des Christentums*, 1905, pp. 34-36.

¹³ We refer to the well-known expositions given by E. von Dob Schütz in his *The Eschatology of the Gospels, The Expositor*, 1910; and especially to H. J. Holtzmann: *Lehrbuch der neutestamentlichen Theologie* I², 1911 (published by A. Jülicher and W. Bauer), pp. 248ff.

¹⁴ For this construction of Weiss's cf. H. M. Matter, *op. cit.*, pp. 70ff.

¹⁵ Cf. my: *De Strekking der Bergrede*, p. 78.

¹⁶ H. Windisch, *Der Sinn der Bergpredigt*, 1929, p. 20.

¹⁷ Cf. also: G. C. Berkouwer, *Wereldoorlog en Theologie*, 1945, pp. 11ff.

¹⁸ Cf. on this, e.g., F. Buri, *Die Bedeutung der neutestamentlichen Eschatologie für die neuere protestantische Theologie*, 1934.

¹⁹ 1929, second edition of the work published in 1925: *Geschichtliche und uebergeschichtliche Religion im Christentum*; cf. my *De Strekking der Bergrede*, pp. 81ff., and especially N. B. Stonehouse, "Martin Dibelius and the Relation of History and Faith," in: *The Westminster Theological Journal*, 1940, pp. 105-139.

²⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 41.

²¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 60.

²² R. Bultmann, *Jesus*, 1929, p. 36.

²³ *Op. cit.*, p. 53.

²⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 40.

²⁵ Cf. article, "Basileia," I, p. 573.

²⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 588.

²⁷ K. Barth, *Der Römerbrief*, 1926, p. 484.

²⁸ Also Barth, cf. *Kirchliche Dogmatik*, II, 1, pp. 715, 716.

²⁹ Cf. also Holmström, *op. cit.*, p. 21; F. Buri, *Das Problem der ausgebliebenen Parusie*, in: *Vox Theologica*, April, 1948, pp. 111-115; E. Masselink, *op. cit.*, pp. 105ff.

³⁰ Ph. Bachmann, for example, calls the common root of the liberal and "supra-historical" interpretation of eschatology "the idealistic separation of time and eternity," cf. Holmström, *op. cit.*, p. 373.

³¹ R. Winkler, "Eschatologie und Mystik," *Zeitschr. für Theologie und Kirche*, 1931, pp. 147ff.

³² H. D. Wendland, *Die Eschatologie des Reiches Gottes bei Jesus*, 1931, p. 253.

³³ *Verheissung und Erfüllung*, 1945, p. 88.

³⁴ *Christus und die Zeit*, 1946, pp. 25ff.; cf. also his: *Le Retour du Christ*², 1945, pp. 14, 15.

³⁵ Cf. § 43 and the literature mentioned there.

³⁶ Cf. below § 32.

³⁷ As to the struggle concerning the Christology in the modern criticism of the gospels, cf. my: *Zelfopenbaring en Zelfverberging*, pp. 5-20.

³⁸ 1929.

³⁹ 1931.

⁴⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 110.

⁴¹ *Op. cit.*, p. 112.

⁴² *Op. cit.*, p. 29.

⁴³ *Op. cit.*, pp. 50-53.

⁴⁴ This especially applies to the view of the Church, cf. below § 35ff.

⁴⁵ *Jesus, der Weltvollender im N.T.*, 1929.

⁴⁶ *Die Theologie des N.T.*, 1941, and the following years.

⁴⁷ *Nieuwere opvattingen omtrent het Koninkrijk Gods*, 1942.

⁴⁸ *Christus und die Zeit*, 1946, and other publications.

⁴⁹ *Verheissung und Erfüllung*, 1945.

⁵⁰ *Op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁵¹ *Op. cit.*, pp. 103-106.

⁵² H. M. Matter, *Nieuwere opvattingen omtrent het Koninkrijk Gods*, 1942, pp. 180ff.

⁵³ *Christus und die Zeit*, p. 127.

⁵⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 62.

⁵⁵ Cf. also Kümmel, *Die Eschatologie der Evangelien, Ihre Geschichte und Ihr Sinn*, 1936, pp. 12, 17.

⁵⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

⁵⁷ Cf., e.g., A. T. Cadoux, *The Theology of Jesus*, 1940; F. C. Grant, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, 1940, who arrives at conclusions similar to Dodd's, although he has some criticism, pp. 145, 146ff.; and can only understand the purport of Jesus' preaching for the present time in the sense of the "social gospel": "In our days . . . the principles of Jesus' teaching can be applied only in terms of the social gospel," p. 134.