

WHAT IS ESCHATOLOGY?

AND

WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

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Recently I called a religious bookstore and asked the lady there if the store had a selection of books on eschatology. “Oh yes,” she said, “We have several books on the signs of Christ’s coming and the millennium, including The Late Great Planet Earth by Hal Lindsey.”

Her reply reflected the popular association many Christians make with eschatology. What cup is to saucer, eschatology is to last day events. Nor is she to be blamed, because it is true that even the classical works on theology of the nineteenth century treat the matter in the same way.¹ Moreover, as any informed lay person knows ta eschata in Greek clearly means “the last things” and is the second coming of Christ not one of the last things in human history?

Nor is this view simply a hangover from nineteenth century scholarship. No less a figure than R. H. Fuller, the founder of Fuller Theological Seminary, argues that in eschatology there are only two options: The kingdom has come or it has not. Then of the two he defends the latter.² Without fear of serious contradiction it can be said that the predominant view of eschatology amongst conservative, evangelical Christians is that of future expectation. What more precisely is meant by future expectation? Here we run the risk of caricaturing but it often seems to involve elements such as the drawing of charts in order to map out exactly what lies ahead; reading modern entities like Russia, the Common Market and the Pope, etc., back in to the New Testament; living in a state of imminent crisis because of a zero hour mentality - in short, a Star Wars presentation of eschatology. Perhaps the above description is unfair. Perhaps what we have here is future obsession rather than future expectation. But even in its most sophisticated forms future expectation is a theological system that gives little or no eschatological significance to the arrival of the Messiah two thousand years ago.

Seventh-day Adventist scholars have treated eschatology in much the same way but with much more definition. In our tradition eschatology begins with “the time of the end” which began precisely in 1798. George McCready Price opens his book, *The Time of the End*, with a chapter entitled “Eschatology.” The upshot of this chapter is the simple equation: Eschatology = Time of the End = 1798 —>. ³ He is supported by virtually every book dealing with “last day events” within Adventism. ⁴

Eschatology as mere future event has had an enormous impact on both the doctrine and the life of our church. Adventists are fundamentally a people of prophecy with a “last warning message.” It is not surprising then to find a great number of our doctrines cast in a futuristic mold. The Sabbath is a final test. A correct understanding of the state of the dead is protection against the great last spiritualistic deception. The reception of the Holy Spirit is a preliminary preparation for the latter rain. A healthy body is part of surviving the time of trouble. Every name must yet come in to the investigative judgment.

But we must now ask the fundamental question, Is this slant on eschatology the biblical one? Is eschatology only forward-looking? Is our concept of eschatology not too limited?

IS ESCHATOLOGY ONLY FUTURE EXPECTATION?

Hebrews 9:26 reads, “But now once in the end of the world hath he [Christ] appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” A parallel to this is found in the epistle’s very first chapter (Heb 1:1,2), “God who at sundry times and in diverse manners spake in times to the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by his Son.” From these two verses alone one could conclude that the New Testament writers saw eschatology as applicable to their day. It is interesting to

note that a form of the very word eschatos is used here, namely, eschatou ton hemeron.

But how was it possible for them to view themselves as living in the last days? How could eschatology begin in their day? Their eschatology from our end of things was clearly wrong. History has emphatically disproved their view. We live at the end of the world, we are part of the last days, they were way too early! Two-thousand years of hours, minutes, and seconds pile up as empirical reality against them. Yet in saying this we already betray our basic misunderstanding of New Testament eschatology.

How then did the early church view eschatology? How was it possible for them to view themselves as existing at the end of the world? How did they define eschatology?

JESUS CHRIST THE ESCHATOS 5

It is an astounding discovery to one schooled along popular lines of eschatology to find that the New Testament writers did not see the essence of the eschatos in a time period but in the person and message of Christ. For them the time period was most decidedly a secondary consideration that paled beside Jesus Christ the eschatos. In other word the person category totally dominated the time category. The eschatos was a person. To them Jesus was the first and the last (ho eschatos Rev 1:17; 2:8 ; 22:13), the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega.

Adrio Konig has demonstrated that these expressions do not mean that Jesus was the first to be created and will be the last one around at the end of time. They are designations of office, of exaltation. When Peter is called the protos, or

first, in Matt. 10:2 it means that he is the chief of the disciples; it is not a matter of chronology. The same is true here, Christ is the lord of the entire span of history, of the totality of creation. He is the goal of creation and of history. He is the eschatos. Thus when Christ comes the end has come. Christ is the eschatos.

This is not to say that time did not feature in the apostles' eschatology. It did. Christ is born in time. But the fact is that the Kingdom of God came not because time elapsed but because the Messiah appeared. Christ in his person created the new era, the new aeon. He is the eschatos.

Because the end is basically a person category and only secondarily a time category it is possible for the end to be reached (albeit in a limited way) before the natural history of the planet comes to a close. When Martha defined the resurrection as a simple last day event Jesus immediately expanded her limited view by proclaiming, "I am the resurrection." The future was present because he was present. Resurrection could occur by him without any necessary lapse of time. The eschatos was present in his person.

It is not surprising then to discover that the New Testament authors describe the totality of his life in eschatological terms. His birth, life, death, resurrection, ascension, second coming are all part of the great last day when Messiah would be present. Never do the inspired writers restrict the end to the second advent alone. The end is much more fluid than that. To illustrate this we refer again to the passage found in Hebrews 9:26-28. Here the crucifixion, the judgment, and the second coming are all referred to side by side. In the popular scheme of things this threesome would include one regular event in the life of Christ (the crucifixion) and two eschatological events (the judgment and the second coming). But such a theological applecart is quickly overturned by the discovery that in these verses, in the very presence of the judgment and the

second coming, it is the crucifixion that is eschatologically designated. The sacrifice of Christ occurs “in the end of the world.” This of course does not mean that the second coming is excluded from the last day, but it does show that the second coming is not the whole eschatological story. A survey of each phase of the Messiah’s existence will confirm this fact.

CHRIST’S BIRTH AND LIFE

“But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons” (Gal 4:4). With these splendid words the apostle Paul indicates that God had fulfilled the promise he made to Abraham and Sarah and thereby indicates the radically eschatological nature of the incarnation.

Christians are often inclined to grow the tree of eschatology in the soil of Matthew 24 where Christ gives his sermon on the signs. In this way eschatology remains mere future expectation. But Scripture does not grow the tree in Matthew but in Genesis. For Israel, and the New Testament writers, who were Israelites, eschatology began with Abraham and the promise of the seed, the land, the presence of God.

This means that the New Testament writers viewed their day as a glorious time brimming with intense eschatological excitement. No wonder then that Peter declares that the Lamb “was manifest in these last days for you” (1 Pet 1:20); that Paul tells the Corinthian congregation that they are the ones “upon whom the ends of the world are come” (1 Cor 10:11); that Luke rejoices that that the acceptable year of the Lord has dawned (Lk 4:19,20). Messiah was the heart of the Old Testament eschatology, and Messiah has come.

Perhaps the clearest evidence that the life of the Messiah was the eschatos is seen in connection with demonology. The Jews believed that when the Kingdom of God would come Satan would be defeated. Here was a deep eschatological hope. It is not surprising then that Matthew sees in Christ's treatment of demons a conclusive evidence that the Kingdom of God had already come. He records the startling words of Jesus to the Pharisees, "But if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the Kingdom of God is come unto you" (Mt 12:28). In this regard it is important to see not only the fact that Christ drives out the devils but to also observe their reaction when when he does so. They scream in fear (Mk 1:23; 5:5,6), they collapse in total powerlessness (Mk 1:34; 3:11; 5:12), they sense his coming as their own doom, destruction and judgment (Mk 1: 24; 5:17).

From this it must be seen that after Messiah came the Kingdom of God is no longer mere promise, or an abstract entity that has come in the minds of men, but a reality has broken in human history itself. Messiah has come, fulfillment is here - but consummation awaits.

CHRIST'S DEATH

The Gospel writers describe the cross in unmistakable eschatological terms. Not only do the evangelists place Christ's sermon of the signs of the end directly before the crucifixion, but they reveal how many of these signs immediately take place in Gethsemane and Calvary.

- (i) Love will wax cold — his disciples forsake and deny him (Mt 24:12 cf Mt 26:69ff).
- (ii) Jesus appeals for watchfulness — in Gethsemane he expects it from his disciples (Mt 24:42 cf Mt 26:38)
- (iii) Betrayal is a sign of the end — Judas betrays Jesus

(Mt 24:12 cf Mt 26:14-16).

(iv) Sign will appear in nature — during the crucifixion
the sun is darkened and an earthquake occurs
(Mt 24:7, 29 cf Mt 27:51).

These prophecies fulfilled at the cross demonstrate how decidedly eschatological in character the crucifixion is. And who of us who read the Scriptures have not seen the dramatic parallel between the “It is finished!” cried out on the cross, and the “It is done!” cried out in Revelation. Both are the same eschatological cry, with this difference — the first is fulfilled without consummation, the second is fulfillment and consummation.

CHRIST’S RESURRECTION

For Paul the resurrection of the believer and the resurrection of Christ seems to be part and parcel of the same event. So close is the connection in his mind that he can state, “But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen” (1 Cor 15:13). Notice that he does not argue that if Christ did not come from the grave then we cannot, but that if we do not rise then Christ did not. The resurrections are the same eschatological thing. Nygren says:

“... for him [Paul] the resurrection of Christ and the resurrection of the dead are not two totally different things. In the final analysis they are one and the same truth. For Paul the resurrection of Christ is the beginning of the the resurrection of the dead ... that which has happened to the head also happens to the body ... the resurrection has already begun.” 7

The future resurrection may not simply be separated from the resurrection of Christ. They are as much part of the same thing as the first fruits and the rest of the crop are part of the same harvest (1 Cor 15:22,23).

THE ASCENSION - PENTECOST EVENT

At the time of his ascension Jesus instructed his disciples to wait for power in Jerusalem. The giving of that power was to be an astounding eschatological event. Fire, wind, tongues, near drunken excitement follow each other in quick succession. How was this drama to be explained? “Why”, said Peter, this is nothing less than the fulfillment of Joel’s prophecy, “And it shall come to pass in the last days,” saith God, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh.” From this remarkable event Israel was to know that the very Jesus whom they crucified was “both Lord and Christ.” The last days had come because Messiah had come.

This was fulfillment in the clearest sense of the word. Yet it was fulfillment without consummation. But fulfillment nevertheless.

SECOND COMING

The second coming is the great eschatological day of consummation for which the whole creation groans and we inwardly groan. For it is the day when this mortal puts on immortality, this corruption puts on incorruption (1 Cor 15:51-54). when at last we are like him (1 Jn 3:2). This is the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time (1 Pe 1:5). This too is the last day (Jn 6:39, 54). What Christ had inaugurated is now consummated. But we emphasize again that it is the same last day that is consummated that had been inaugurated, because the same Lord reigns at both ends of the last days.

From this brief overview it becomes clear that the writers of of the new Testament regarded the whole history of Jesus as the eschatological event involving the kingdom. Eschatology is therefore the study of every phase of the end of the

world as it is revealed in the life of Christ. It begins with the inauguration of the kingdom of God at his birth and ends with the consummation of of the Kingdom at his second coming.

On the other hand, eschatology is not merely the study of of an end time which lies either in the present or the future alone. Such a definition simply does not do justice to the eschatological presence of Christ during his earthly incarnation and during the age of the Spirit. No Christian has ever lived in an eschatological vacuum. No single believer from even the earliest time has spent one moment in an empty concert hall waiting for the orchestra to arrive and tune up. The grand symphony struck up in Bethlehem and several of its movements have already been played. The Church now awaits the great final crescendo and prepares to give the conductor a standing ovation.

THE RADICAL IMPORTANCE OF ESCHATOLOGY

We have asked the question, What? Now we ask the practical question, So What? So, what difference does it make how one defines eschatology? Why should it matter if the end comes with the incarnation and not simply in the future? Are we not just rearranging the same old furniture in the same old room? We believe that our definition has enormous practical repercussions for the doctrinal structure and life of the Church. We look at three vital areas, namely, salvation, mission, and behavior to illustrate the crucial importance of the eschatological past for the future.

SOTERIOLOGY

Because Christ is the eschatos it is possible for the end to be reached (albeit in a limited way) before the natural history of the planet comes to a close. In the

being of Christ the future is brought in to the present. Or to put it another way, all future eschatological events are merely a recapitulation, a repetition of the history of Jesus. The great tribulation, the judgment, the resurrection, glorification, hell, etc. have already happened with Christ. He experienced each of these in his earthly existence. He is the eschatos.

Now the beauty of it is that the outcome of these last day events can be determined for us ahead of time, if we accept Christ in the present. By participating in Christ we participate in final events. Thus the believer can have the assurance now that he will come from the grave in the future resurrection day because he holds onto Christ the resurrection. The believer can already know that that he will survive the great tribulation because he rests in Christ who has passed through Gethsemane. The believer can at this moment know he will be glorified because he has accepted the ascended Lord. The outcome of the future has already happened. And we can participate in that outcome if, and as long as, we participate in Christ.

In this regard one particular area deserves special attention, namely, the relation between justification and the future judgment. Few issues have vexed the Christian community more. Believers know that they face the judgment in the future. They also know that they have been justified, or, to use a synonym, acquitted. But what is the value of being acquitted if you face an evaluation of the same works in the future? Is a Christian tried twice for the same crimes? Are we now acquitted by grace and then finally acquitted by works? Why two acquittals? The matter distresses and confuses.

But such confusion is immediately dissipated when justification is seen to be eschatological.⁸ In other words justification in Christ brings the future judgment in to the present. The believer is acquitted and thus the outcome of the future judgment is settled beforehand.

The Jews believed that there will be a great judgment in which men will be judged according to their works. They held that it is only in the final judgment that God would render his verdict and decide each man's destiny.⁹ But the New Testament writers made a radical modification to this doctrine. The realization that Christ is the eschatos made an incalculable difference to their judgement theology. They clearly saw that it is possible to be acquitted ahead of time. It was no longer deemed necessary to wait for the last day as Judaism believed. This becomes clear in a passage such as Romans 5:9, "Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath to come." In other words the future day of judgment or wrath loses its sting because of that which has happened in the present, namely, justification. Justification is forward- looking. Romans 8:33 asks, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." To paraphrase one could say, "If a person is already justified by God, who would dare file a case against him in the judgment?" Now already in the present there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1).

From this we conclude that justification is not simply a sort of preliminary hearing that gets the believer off the hook for the time being. Justification does not merely forgive sins for now and leave the real business of acquittal for later. No, what we have here is the real thing, the actual acquittal that gets us to heaven. Christ the eschatos has brought the future into the present. Ladd gives this magnificent summary:

Justification is one of the blessings of the in breaking of the new age into the old. In Christ the future has become present; the eschatological judgment has in effect taken place in history. As the eschatological Kingdom of God is present in history in the Synoptics, as the eschatological eternal life is present in Christ in John, as the eschatological

resurrection has already begun in Jesus' resurrection, as the eschatological Spirit is given to the Church in Acts (and in Paul), so the eschatological judgment has already occurred in principle in Christ, and God has acquitted his people. 10

This does of course raise questions about the final judgment and its importance. What exactly happens and what does not happen then? We start with the latter. The decision as to whether or not a person is saved is not made here. That decision has, as we have seen, already been made. John says, "He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son hath not life" (1 Jn 5:12). The person holding the Son does not face a second verdict yet to be rendered in the future (Jn 5:24). His case is decided in a positive way as long as he holds to the Son. This judgment does not therefore focus on giving a verdict. It only reaffirms the past.

The task of this judgment is to give each person a sentence or an award. First the wheat, the good fish, the sheep must be separated from the tares, inedible fish, and the goats. Then each group receives either a sentence or an award. But again we stress the people are either already saved or already lost. This judgment does not seek to determine eternal destiny a second time. It only reveals openly which verdict has already been operative. The saved are to be given heaven while the lost are to be sent to hell. Until now the wheat and the tares have flourished together in an indistinguishable way. That situation now suddenly ceases. An open distinction is made.

And how are the two classes distinguished? The answer is, by their works. Their works reveal which verdict has already been pronounced upon them. Men, by their works, are exposed for what they are in relation to Christ.

It is crucial to grasp that works are not evaluated meritoriously. That is to say, the works are not earning a particular verdict in a system of merits or demerits. Instead they are evaluated evidentially. Deeds are simply the evidence showing one's regard or disregard for Christ. Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not unto me" (Mt 25:40, 45). This is the great day when every work and thought is revealed for what it is (Mt 10:28; Lk 2:35, 12:2; 1 Cor 3:13). It is the day of revelation and of reward which simply reaffirms an earlier verdict.

Any doctrine of the judgment that looks only to the future will inevitably drive people to despair. As long as the believer still faces a verdict, there is no possible way to find rest. In Christianity justification fits into the doctrine of the judgment like the pin does in into a hand grenade. Remove the pin and a shattering explosion occurs in the spiritual psyche. There is no rest but only turmoil, uncertainty, yearning, fear. But if the eschatological past remains in place, he need not fear. "Therefore being justified by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1).

MISSION

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come" (Mt 24:14). From this verse the basic mission of the Church may be derived, i. e. it must preach the good news of the kingdom.

But what is the kingdom? When is it ushered in? It is evident that the answers given to questions such as these determine the way a church defines its mission. Those churches that define the kingdom as a future home for the Jews have as their mission the gospel of dispensationalism. Others which believe the

Kingdom of God has already come, and have no future dimension to their kingdom eschatology, often have a social gospel as their mission. A church such as ours, which sees the kingdom as finally arriving at the second coming, has a futuristic warning message aimed at preparing people for the event. Some churches even view themselves as the Kingdom of God and therefore have a sole goal of winning people into the “ark.”

The position of this paper is that the Kingdom of God was inaugurated on earth and in history with the coming of Jesus, and that it will be consummated at the return of Christ.¹¹ The Kingdom of God is therefore really here. A promise has been fulfilled in actuality. It does not simply exist in the hearts of men. The special reign of God began with the arrival of the Messiah. He drove out devils to prove that the kingdom had come in history. Yet we await the time when the realm of God will be added to the reign of God.

When this definition is accepted, then the mission of the the Church is to preach not simply the imminent future but also the eschatological past. The kingdom is to be preached in its fulness. No one phase is stressed to the exclusion of another. The task is not simply to prepare people to immigrate to heaven when Jesus comes, but to accept citizenship of the kingdom in the here and now. There is reason for great rejoicing even in the present context because the groom is with us and nobody fasts in his presence. We have found a fantastic treasure in a field, it is ours. The treasure is the kingdom of God. It is here.

Virtually from its inception Seventh-day Adventism has been involved in a gargantuan struggle to find the harmony between its soteriology and its eschatology. This struggle is revealed in the writings of O.R.L. Crosier ¹² (1840's), J.H. Stephenson ¹³ (1850's), J.H. Waggoner ¹⁴ 1870's,

E. J. Waggoner ¹⁵ (1880's), A.G. Daniells ¹⁶ (1920's), M. L. Andreason ¹⁷ (1950's), and L. E. Froom ¹⁸ (1960's). Perhaps the book that most clearly reveals this theological distress is Question on Doctrine. Here our eschatology finds its most radical reinterpretation in an effort to make it match evangelical soteriology.

To a great extent the cause of this distress is due to the fact that Seventh-day Adventists have not taken the actual arrival of the Kingdom of God in the form of Messiah seriously enough. As a result the "final message" we preach is different from the "eternal verities",¹⁹ that have always been preached. Our mission has been determined by our view that eschatology began in 1798 and the judgment in 1844. We simply have not seen the glory of the kingdom that has already arrived. In short we have not understood the words, "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached for a witness unto all nations; then shall the end come (Mt 24:14).

According to this verse the final eschatological message that is to usher in the second advent already existed in the time of Jesus. It did not come into being in 1844. Christ calls it this gospel of the kingdom.

And what is the content to this gospel? It is nothing less than the things Jesus preached when he was on earth. Mark tells us that Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the kingdom (Mk 1:14,15). Most of his parables are prefaced with the remark, "And the kingdom of heaven is likened unto" But not only his words are the gospel of the kingdom. This gospel is found in his encounters with Nicodemus, the rich, young ruler, the thief on the cross etc. Invariably such encounters involve kingdom concepts. Moreover, his miracles and healings, especially those involving exorcism are kingdom signs. The cross, resurrection, ascension, and second coming are all the story of the Kingdom of God.

But we have taken a part and made it into the whole because of our futuristic eschatology. The greatest challenge facing Adventism today is to so expand its eschatology that an Adventist minister would feel that he was preaching the last final message when he was speaking on the parable of the unjust steward. A stress on the final end must remain but it must not remain alone. When Jesus himself is seen to be the eschatos the soteriological — eschatological discussion within Adventism will finally come to an exhausted resolution.

ETHICS

There is no question that the New Testament uses future events to encourage Christians to live responsible, positive, and good lives. Peter reminds us of the excellent sort of people we should be in view of the impending judgment (2 Pe 3:10-12). John declares that people filled with hope for the appearing of Jesus, try to purify themselves (1Jn 3:1-3). But this approach for motivating right behavior is by no means the only one the New Testament uses. Nor is it the predominant one.

The fundamental motivational force that excites the Christian to act in a positive way is the glorious realization that the Kingdom of God has come, that he already has citizenship in it. Fellowship with the Messiah in his kingdom is the greatest privilege that anyone can possibly have. Such privilege is the fountain of Christian ethical behavior.

When the apostle Paul writes to the Gentile believers in Rome, he reminds them of the incomprehensible ways of God which made citizenship in the kingdom possible for them (Rom 9 -11). He repeats the tragic story of how the kingdom was taken away from the Jews and given to another. He emphasizes that to them, the Gentiles, has come the magnificent honor of being grafted like an olive

branch onto the stump of God's people. They, incredibly, are citizens of the kingdom! Then comes the heartrending plea, "I beseech you therefore, brethren by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom 12:1). Doing good is utterly and totally reasonable in view of the privilege of citizenship.

The Gospels also take this approach. When a man finds the kingdom it is like finding a Robert Louis Stevenson treasure in a rented backyard — there it is: treasure chest, lock, coins, and jewels — the lot. This stroke of sheer fortune leads him to sell everything he has in order to buy the field and possess the treasure. Citizenship in God's Kingdom is like that treasure, a euphoric, motivational force for sacrifice (Mt 13:44-46). Therefore Jesus built the entire structure of his ethics on this concept of the kingdom that had come (Mt 5-7). The Church must build its ethical structure on the very same foundation.

When Christ, the end, came he established the Church which is the community of the kingdom. Here the kingdom-works of the ascended Lord continue. These works can be continued because at his ascension he gave to his community the great eschatological gifts of Pentecost. Her mission then is not only to preach the gospel of the kingdom but to act out its principles in the present age amongst her own members.

An illustration of how this should work out in practice is something like this. Christ showed us that illness and disease are against his principles and therefore against the principles of his kingdom. He stood against disease. The Church is to continue to uphold this principle. Therefore she will reject disease as abnormal to the kingdom that has come and seek to eliminate it. For the accomplishment of this task she has received the gift of healing. By means of the gifts, she is in the world to oppose all that is contrary to the kingdom. Ignorance

and foolishness must be confronted with the gifts of knowledge and wisdom. Misunderstanding must be faced down with the gift of interpretation. Then there are the communication and love gifts that counteract every form of disunity. For every problem there exists a last day gift to oppose it.

The ethical stance of the Church grows out of the fact that the Kingdom of God has come. She must therefore act not as if the kingdom has come, but because it has come. Racism, war, poverty, the destruction of the earth, and sin cannot be tolerated without compromising the principles of the kingdom. Because the Kingdom of God has come the Church must order its priorities accordingly. One stands in open mouthed amazement when the Church spends its energies on the micro-ethics of movies, foods and video games while virtually ignoring the macro-ethics involving such issues as abortion and racism. Surely the time has come to leave the mint and the cumin and embrace the weightier matters of the law.

Some will probably cry that this is simply the social gospel. But it is not. It is part of the gospel of the kingdom.. To be sure it is not the whole of the gospel but, nevertheless, it is a crucial part of it. This existence, not only the world to come, is important because the Kingdom of God has broken into history. This life is not merely a bus stop where we wait for a ride to heaven. The kingdom that has come must reveal its principles in the here and now. Of course we must preach the signs, and the judgment, and the glorious second advent. This is crucial to our task. But it is not the whole task. We must not fail to grasp the impact of Christ's words, THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS IN YOUR MIDST! (Lk 11:20 margin).

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