

Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology

Eschatology, Liturgy, and Christology

Toward Recovering
an Eschatological Imagination

Thomas P. Rausch, SJ



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For

John D. McNulty, SJ

In Memoriam

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For occasional lapses from the use of inclusive language in speaking of God, especially in citing other authors or texts, I ask the reader's indulgence.

Thomas P. Rausch, SJ

Abbreviations

Documents of the Second Vatican Council

- GS *Gaudium et Spes* (Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World)
LG *Lumen Gentium* (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church)
SC *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy)

Other

- CDF Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith
DS Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum*, 33rd ed. (Freiburg: Herder, 1965)
FABC Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences

Introduction

What is our hope as Christians? To what do we look forward? Does God forget the countless victims of history? What about our beloved dead? What future does God have in store for us? Will it involve our beautiful earth? To raise these questions is to ask about eschatology, the end times, from the Greek *eschatos*, the “last” or “end.” We look forward to the *eschaton*, the coming of the age of salvation.

Eschatology should occupy a central place in our Christian faith; without it we have no hope. In Karl Barth’s words, “if Christianity be not altogether thoroughgoing eschatology, there remains in it no relationship whatever with Christ.”¹ A library catalogue search reveals multitudinous volumes dealing with eschatology. Many, written from a conservative evangelical perspective, speculate about the second coming of Christ, resulting in a proliferation of millennial theologies—premillennial, amillennial, postmillennial—rooted in Revelation 20, which anticipates a thousand-year period in which Satan will be confined in the abyss and the saved will reign with Christ.² Fundamentalists like Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins, authors of the popular *Left Behind* series, imagine the Rapture when Christ returns to take up the “saved” before the Tribulation (cf. 1 Thess 4:17), with Catholics among those left behind.³

On the theological left, eschatology is too often reduced to an empowering symbol or a utopian vision of justice and peace in this world. Those

1. Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans* (London: Oxford University Press, 1933), 314.

2. See Hans Schwarz, *Eschatology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000), 322–37.

3. See Carl E. Olson, *Will Catholics Be “Left Behind”? A Catholic Critique of the Rapture and Today’s Prophecy Preachers* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2003).

in the late Robert Funk's Jesus Seminar have tried to promote the idea of a noneschatological Jesus.⁴ Others doing theology today in the new context of religious pluralism have challenged traditional positions in the areas of Christology, soteriology, and the mission of the church. While much of their work has been fruitful for theology, at the same time there are methodological turns or conclusions that have significant implications for Christian eschatology and raise some troubling questions. Some are hesitant to affirm Jesus' divinity or his role in bringing the *eschaton*. He becomes one of a number of mediators of salvation, not the one who accomplishes our salvation. The church's mission becomes one of witnessing to the kingdom of God.⁵ Others like John Polkinghorne, theoretical physicist and Anglican priest, focus on eschatology in an effort to bring science and religion together.⁶

In systematic theology, eschatology does not always get the attention it deserves. Dermot Lane calls it "the missing link in much contemporary theology."⁷ Still less have those theologians who do stress eschatology been concerned with its relation to the Eucharist; nor have liturgists always been attentive to this relationship, as a review of the indexes of many books on liturgy indicates. Among those theologians and liturgists attentive to the eschatological dimensions of the Eucharist, I would include Dermot Lane, Johann Baptist Metz, Bruce Morrill, John Reumann, Don Saliers, Geoffrey Wainwright, and Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI. We will draw on their works.

At the heart of Christian eschatology is the idea of the resurrection of the dead, based on the resurrection of Jesus. The 2006 Faith Matters survey found that 70 percent of Americans believe in the afterlife,⁸ but for many of them, their idea of life beyond death is vague and undefined, more of a cultural idea about spiritual survival than something based

4. See, for example, Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus in Contemporary Scholarship* (Valley Forge, PA: Trinity Press International, 1994), 7–8.

5. Some of these are explored as early as 1976 in J. Peter Schineller, "Christ and Church: A Spectrum of Views," *Theological Studies* 37/4 (1976): 545–66.

6. John C. Polkinghorne, *The God of Hope and the End of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).

7. Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1996), 5; for a survey of eschatology in twentieth-century theology, see Schwartz, *Eschatology*, 107–72.

8. Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2010), 71.

on the biblical idea of the resurrection of the body and all its implications. Even many Christians think of the resurrection solely in personal terms. Salvation has been understood individualistically; we speak of “saving my soul,” “going to heaven,” or “being saved.”

Too often in our Western culture the hoped-for *eschaton* has been replaced by an almost exclusive emphasis on the *eschata*, the “four last things” each of us must one day face—death and judgment, heaven and hell. But eschatology cannot be reduced to the salvation of the individual or limited to the saved. Many have lost sight of what James Alison calls “the fullness of the density of the resurrection,”⁹ a wonderful way of suggesting how much is embraced by the mystery of our salvation, the proper object of the study of eschatology. They do not see how the earth itself might be included in God’s salvation. Jürgen Moltmann says that “if Christian hope is reduced to the salvation of the soul in a heaven beyond death, it loses its power to renew life and change the world, and its flame is quenched.”¹⁰

Karl Rahner argues that individual eschatology can be complete only if a collective eschatology is developed, one that includes the world and its history.¹¹ For the early Christians, God’s future was a radically social reality; God’s salvation was revealed in the resurrection of Jesus and already present initially in the gathering (*ekklesia*, “church”) of the saints, particularly in their worship. It meant the age of salvation, gathering all the elect into the new creation, had already begun. The expectant faith of the early Christians was evident especially when they celebrated the Eucharist, what Paul calls in 1 Corinthians 11:20 “the Lord’s supper,” proclaiming the final coming of the crucified Jesus, now raised and made Lord: “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26).

Thus, one cannot write about eschatology without also addressing issues involving Christology, soteriology, the mission of the church, and the liturgy. We will have to consider what eschatology suggests about our salvation, both now and in the world to come. In what sense can we say that salvation is already present within history rather than beyond

9. James Alison, *Raising Abel: The Recovery of the Eschatological Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 28.

10. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), xv.

11. See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 444–45.

it, *pace* Joseph Ratzinger / Pope Benedict XVI, and can salvation, symbolized by the kingdom of God, be so easily separated from the person of Jesus the Christ, as Roger Haight and others suggest? How should we understand the resurrection of the body and a related concept, the immortality of the soul? Can the soul exist without the body? What is the relation between eschatology and creation? Can we say that Jesus is the cause of salvation? And can the mission of the church be reduced to witnessing to the kingdom of God without abandoning the Christian confession that Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life (cf. John 14:6)? We will explore some of these questions in this book.

Taking our point of departure from the testimony of the Scriptures and the faith of the church, we will rely on contemporary authors to help us imagine and better understand the mystery of God's future, disclosed or suggested by the story of Jesus and his preaching of the kingdom of God. Methodologically, our approach could be described as "postcritical," after the example of Avery Dulles.¹² We will attempt to navigate between a rationalism that limits knowledge to what science or a post-modern mentality finds acceptable and a biblical literalism that confuses the symbol with the intelligibility it seeks to express.

Finally, I want to call attention to an observation made by Russian Orthodox theologian Sergius Bulgakov. He points out that apart from the Nicene Creed's confession of belief in Christ's coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead, the resurrection of the body, and the life of the world to come, eschatological theology remains open to inquiry. Cautioning against the Roman Catholic tendency toward what he calls a dogmatic maximalism, he reminds us that "there are mysteries of the future age, unfathomable destinies and untraceable paths of God (Rom 11:33), that are perhaps not destined to be fully revealed in this age."¹³ With this caution in mind, we will explore the images, symbols, and concepts used in the Christian tradition to convey the fullness of our salvation.

Interlocutors

Several recent works on eschatology have been most helpful in preparing this book. Their authors will be our principal interlocutors. Joseph

12. See Patrick W. Carey, "Cardinal Avery Dulles, S.J., among the Theologians: A Memorial Reflection," *Theological Studies* 71 (2010): 775–78.

13. Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb*, trans. Boris Jakim (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2002) 380–82 at 382.

Ratzinger's *Eschatology* is one of his best, most systematic works.¹⁴ Ratzinger's strength is his vast knowledge of Scripture and the Christian tradition, both philosophical and theological. His emphasis on the need for an "eschatological realism" should be taken seriously.¹⁵ Dermot Lane's *Keeping Hope Alive* is also a very fine, comprehensive work.¹⁶ Lane engages a broad spectrum of contemporary authors and theologies; he is concerned to reclaim an eschatological vision in a culture that would rather ignore death and dying, and he also wants to reclaim an apocalyptic eschatology with its social dimensions. Significantly, he also emphasizes the connection between eschatology and liturgy. Brian Robinette's *Grammars of Resurrection* focuses on the resurrection as the "grammar" of the New Testament; once grasped in faith, it opens up the believer to the eschatological "irruption" into our world.¹⁷ He also deals with how retrieving an apocalyptic imagination can be transformative, touching on issues of embodiment, justice, violence, and forgiveness.

Terence Nichols's approach in his book *Death and Afterlife* is more apologetic; he seeks to respond to scientific and naturalistic challenges to resurrection faith.¹⁸ He considers the phenomenon of "near-death" experiences as one stream of evidence suggesting that the soul or mind can survive physical death, while his exploration of resurrection and eschatology introduces the theme of hope. Finally, Bruce Morrill's *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory* is very helpful in relating eschatology and liturgy. It is also a fine introduction to the work of Johann Baptist Metz.¹⁹

As I was finishing this work, the common statement of Round XI of the U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue appeared, entitled "The Hope of Eternal Life." Much of this common statement was taken up with contentious issues from the debates of the sixteenth century, among

14. Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed., trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 8; first published in German in 1977.

15. Pope Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times; A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), 180.

16. Dermot A. Lane, *Keeping Hope Alive: Stirrings in Christian Theology* (New York: Paulist, 1996).

17. Brian D. Robinette, *Grammars of Resurrection: A Christian Theology of Presence and Absence* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 23.

18. Terence Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010).

19. Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000).

them “continuity in the communion of saints, prayers for or about the dead, the meaning of death, purgation, an interim state between death and the final general judgment, and the promise of resurrection.”²⁰ At the end, both sides agreed that “prayer for the dead, considered within the framework of the communion of saints, need not be a church-dividing or communion-hindering issue for Lutherans and Catholics.”²¹ The book is a treasure trove of patristic texts, ecclesial documents, and theological writings on the subject of eschatology.

Outline

In chapter 1 we will look at the loss of the eschatological imagination, illustrating it with examples from the liturgy. We will also consider certain developments in contemporary theology touching on Christology, ecclesiology, and the mission of the church in the light of religious pluralism that bear on the question of eschatology. We will introduce three themes closely related to eschatology: creation, time, and memory.

Chapter 2 will consider the Israelite experience of God as a God in relationship to a people, a God of the covenant who remembers, and the emergence of the hope that this God, the God of the living, might also be a God who delivers the dead from Sheol and raises them to life. This will introduce the biblical categories of eschatology and apocalyptic.

Chapter 3 will seek to unpack the Johannine description of Jesus as “the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6). It will involve considering Jesus’ proclamation of the kingdom of God, the concept of discipleship, the paschal mystery, and what medieval theology called the imitation of Christ (*imitatio Christi*). We will also consider the emergence of modern individualism and how the kingdom of God is understood by a number of contemporary theologians.

Chapter 4 will move from the mystery of the resurrection to an exploration of what we might understand by the risen body. We will consider Paul’s language about a “spiritual body,” the different ways the risen body was imagined in the Middle Ages, and how we might ground our eschatological hope today. We will look at the social nature of the resurrection and the apocalyptic imagination.

20. U.S. Lutheran–Roman Catholic Dialogue, “The Hope of Eternal Life” (2010), preface.

21. *Ibid.*, 71; the Lutheran Church–Missouri Synod stated that more work remained to be done before the remaining differences could no longer constitute an obstacle to communion (*ibid.*, 315n).

Chapter 5 will investigate the *eschaton* and the *eschata*. It will begin with the more philosophical concept of the soul, rooted in the late Old Testament and Greek thought and long used in Christian tradition and the popular imagination to express faith in life beyond the grave. From there it will move to consider the *eschata*, popular symbols such as heaven, hell, judgment, the second coming, and purgatory, in the effort to grasp their fundamental intelligibility. Finally, it will address the difficult question of the *eschaton*, a corporate eschatology symbolized by the victory of justice and “a new heaven and a new earth.”

Chapter 6 will return to the relation between eschatology and liturgy. It will look at the relation between liturgical time and memory and will critique some aspects of contemporary liturgical piety and practice. It will also consider the relation between liturgy and social justice and suggest ways to retrieve the eschatological imagination, so prominent in the liturgical experience of the early Christians.

Chapter 7 will offer some concluding reflections. First, it will return to the relationship between image and meaning, raised in this introduction. Then it will try to draw together some of the questions in Christology, soteriology, and ecclesiology running through this book in a way that is both appreciative and critical of contemporary theological works. It will ask whether eschatology and the doctrine of salvation can be separated from the person of Jesus and how the mission of the church should be addressed in the situation of religious pluralism.

1

The Eschatological Imagination

When the early Christians celebrated the Eucharist, their eschatological imagination was much in evidence. Their faith was understood communally. They saw themselves as “the saints” or “holy ones,” the community of the redeemed, sharing in the divine life of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They gathered on Sunday, the first day of the week, to commemorate the resurrection of Jesus. The Eucharist itself symbolized the great messianic banquet in the kingdom, and their liturgies expressed in prayer and posture their hope for the Lord’s Parousia or Second Coming. The church at Corinth proclaimed the Lord’s death “until he comes” (1 Cor 11:26). The *Didache* offers a eucharistic prayer with strong eschatological overtones, praying that the church “be brought together from the ends of the earth” into the kingdom God has prepared (*Didache* 9:4; 10:5).¹ Their liturgical texts included the Aramaic prayer *Maranatha* (1 Cor 16:22; Rev 22:20; *Didache* 10:6) for Christ’s coming. Not easily translated, *Maranatha* can mean both a petition, “Come, Lord Jesus,” and also the statement that indeed “the Lord has come.” Most scholars today see it as having both a present and a future reference; the congregation proclaims that the Lord has come in the Eucharist and will come again.²

1. Brian E. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church: A Handbook of Patristic Eschatology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 12.

2. Geoffrey Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 69–70; Joseph Ratzinger, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 2nd ed., trans. Michael Waldstein (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 6–7.

As they gathered for liturgy, these early Christians prayed facing east toward the rising sun, the symbol of the risen Christ, now reigning and who would return to establish the kingdom of God in the world.³ The Syrian document called *The Teaching of the Apostles* or sometimes the *Canons of the Apostles* included the following instruction:

Pray ye towards the east: because, "as the lightning which lighteneth from the east and is seen even to the west, so shall the coming of the Son of man be"—that by this we might know and understand that He will appear from the east suddenly.⁴

The Lord's Prayer, included in these early gatherings of the church, also includes a present and future reference. Those assembled prayed for the coming of the kingdom and expressed their belief that the great feast of the end times had already begun in their Eucharist. Gordon Lathrop says that the prayer "breathes a sense of eschatology," filled with petitions for the coming Day of God together with some fears for the terrors expected in the last times; but there are "also two strong indications that the expected, longed-for Day has already dawned in the life of the community itself" in the petition about the "bread of the feast before your face."⁵ Thus the assembly celebrated Christ's presence sacramentally and looked forward to his triumphant return to judge the living and the dead and to establish the kingdom in its fullness.

Fairly early, in both the Western church and the classical Eastern liturgies, with the exception of the Egyptian tradition, *Maranatha* was replaced by the phrase "blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord," following the *Sanctus*. An ambiguous phrase, Geoffrey Wainwright suggests that it referred to "the present coming of the one who has come and who is still to come" and was thus a suitable replacement of *Maranatha*.⁶

Wainwright gives numerous examples of how the classical liturgies of both East and West saw the eucharistic meal as sign, pledge, and anticipation of the meal of the eternal kingdom to come.

3. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 6–8.

4. *Syrian Documents Attributed to the First Three Centuries*, trans. B. P. Pratten (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871) 38, in *Ante-Nicene Christian Library*, vol. XX, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1871).

5. Gordon W. Lathrop, *Holy People: A Liturgical Ecclesiology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 33–34.

6. Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 71–72; first attested by Caesarius of Arles (d. 542), note 223.

One frequent and simple way of expressing the relation, especially in the West, is to attach the epithet “heavenly” to various items or aspects of the eucharistic celebration. The eucharistic table is the heavenly table (*mensa caelestis*) at which is enjoyed the heavenly banquet (*convivium caeleste*) of the heavenly gifts (*dona caelestia*) of the heavenly bread (*panis caelestis*) and the heavenly cup (*poculum caeleste*), the whole being a heavenly mystery (*mysterium caeleste*). In some Eastern traditions the eucharistic table is called the royal table, which suggests both the king and his kingdom.⁷

Wainwright also gives numerous examples of liturgies that mention Christ’s return or “second advent” and final judgment at the end of the institution narrative and in the anamnesis, most of them from the East. In the Greek tradition, the bringing forward of the gifts to the altar by the deacons at the Great Entry, dating from the sixth century, was greeted by the celebrant with “Blessed is he that cometh in the name of the Lord,” preparing for the response “Let us stand in prayer before the holy table of God and find the grace of mercy in the day of his appearing and at the second coming our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” The anamnesis of the Mozarabic liturgy, the Byzantine liturgies of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom, and the Armenian liturgy all mention in various forms the Second Coming. The Syrian liturgy of Addai and Mari, the Maronite liturgy, and the liturgies of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom pray for pardon on the Day of Judgment.

The *Sursum corda*, the call to “Lift up your hearts” occurring in the opening dialogue of all classical eucharistic prayers, Wainwright suggests is a call to prepare to meet the Lord coming either in the cult itself or eschatologically. Theodore of Mopsuestia (350–428) connected the Eucharist with the coming of Christ to raise the dead, represented symbolically. John of Damascus (676–749) explained the reasons for facing east during worship to include expectation of Christ’s return from the east. The Eastern churches especially looked forward liturgically to Christ’s return. However, Wainwright notes that in the eucharistic texts in the West, there is practically never any reference to the second coming of Christ. Instead, more emphasis was placed on the remission of sins through the offering of the sacrifice.⁸

7. Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 51.

8. *Ibid.*, 72–88. On the development of the notion of the sacrifice of the Mass, see Robert J. Daly, *Sacrifice Unveiled: The True Meaning of Christian Sacrifice* (London and New York: T. & T. Clark, 2009), 14–24 .

Thus, “the early Christian Supper always stood in a horizon of eschatological hope, that is, of future fulfillment as well as present experience.”⁹ The age of salvation was associated with the fullness of the kingdom. Later theologians would refer to it as the *eschaton*, though at its heart is the root metaphor of the kingdom or reign of God. Originating in the preaching of Jesus, the fullness of the kingdom was described by the New Testament authors as good news for the poor, liberty for captives, justice, and peace (Luke 4:18; Rom 14:17); as a new creation (2 Cor 5:17); and as a new heaven and a new earth (2 Pet 3:13).

From Easter Hope to Fear of Judgment

Unfortunately, this vivid sense for Christ’s coming to bring the blessings of the kingdom no longer informs our liturgical celebrations as it once did. “The history of actual Eucharistic theology (its practice and theory) demonstrates . . . the extent to which both the genuine remembering and anticipatory aspects of anamnesis have been obscured in the East as well as West.”¹⁰ From the seventh century on, confidence in God’s mercy for those who had died began to give way to the fear of judgment. Brian Daley attributes the darkening of Christian expectation to Gregory the Great (540–604), who saw the chaos caused by the Lombard invasion of Italy as a sign the Parousia and judgment were near.¹¹ Increasingly, emphasis was placed on the purifying prayer of the church to free souls from the fires of purgation, soon to be known as purgatory. One has only to contrast the joyful exclamation of the primitive church, “Come, Lord Jesus,” with the *Dies Irae*, the thirteenth-century hymn once used as the sequence at the Roman Catholic Requiem or funeral Mass. Full of the fear of judgment, it looks toward that “day of wrath and day of mourning” when Christ who so suffered on the cross comes in judgment, a day when “even the just are mercy needing.” Hardly a message of hope.

9. John Reumann, *The Supper of the Lord* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 25. “At every eucharist the church is in fact praying that the parousia may take place at that very moment, and if the Father ‘merely’ sends His Son in the sacramental mode we have at least a taste of that future which God reserves for Himself to give one day.” Wainwright, *Eucharist and Eschatology*, 67.

10. Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), 200.

11. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 211.

Joseph Jungmann has traced the different developments in the theology and liturgy of the West. The early church's worship was essentially corporate, dominated by the Easter motif that celebrated our victory over death assured for us by Christ's resurrection. The emphasis was on the divinity of Jesus, now reigning in glory. But by the ninth and tenth centuries a shift of focus becomes evident. The image of the glorified Christ began to fade, overshadowed by the image of the crucified Lord in biblical illustrations and on the panels of church doors. By the eleventh century it had become customary to place a crucifix on the altar, and a century later the crucifix or a crucifixion group became the dominant subject on the wall behind the altar. As the theme of the Last Judgment became more prominent, an increasing emphasis was placed on the individual—on human action, subjectivity, and moral accomplishment.¹² Pope Benedict XVI makes the same point in his 2007 encyclical *Spe Salvi*: "In the modern era, the idea of the Last Judgement has faded into the background: Christian faith has been individualized and primarily oriented towards the salvation of the believer's own soul" (no. 42).

As Christ's divinity was absorbed into his union with the Father, the notion of the church as the Body of Christ gradually faded. The church was described as the mother of all the faithful or as the Bride of Christ. The language of the liturgy was no longer understood by the faithful, the altar was moved farther away from the people into the apse of the church, and only the priest could enter the sanctuary. The church began to be represented by the clergy, who acted on behalf of the faithful, with the result that the "corporate character of public worship, so meaningful to early Christianity, [began] to crumble at the foundations."¹³

While Western theology became increasingly focused on the transformation of the elements, the liturgy of the East was more successful at preserving the ancient sense that to celebrate the Eucharist means to ascend to the heavenly sanctuary, to the table of Christ in his kingdom. For Russian Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemmann, the Eucharist is the symbol of the kingdom par excellence. Still, he laments what he calls the gradual narrowing, if not radical metamorphosis, of Christian eschatology. He argues that the church's worship was born and took shape "primarily as a *symbol of the kingdom*, of the Church's ascent to it";

12. Joseph Jungmann, *Pastoral Liturgy* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), 1–8.

13. *Ibid.*, 58–60 at 60.

the Eucharist is the symbol of the kingdom par excellence.¹⁴ The symbolic direction of the Eastern liturgy was one of *ascent*, while in the West it is more one of Christ *descending* onto the altar.¹⁵

Johann Baptist Metz also calls attention to a loss of eschatological anticipation in the liturgy. He asks, what is God waiting for? In spite of the response “until you come again in glory” that stands at the center of the eucharistic ritual, he questions whether the celebration is still a feast of expectation. Christianity has “detemporalized” its ideas of imminent expectation and the Second Coming. What is lost is the sense of awaiting, “while eschatology has been transformed into ethics.”¹⁶ The God of the biblical tradition is not bounded by historical time, Metz argues, but rather is to be described in terms of surprise, expectation, acceptance, and confrontation with the new.¹⁷

The Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council (1962–65) took significant steps toward renewing both church and liturgy in its Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (*Lumen Gentium*) and its Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*). Using biblical metaphors rather than the scholastic and juridical language of Vatican I (1869–70), *Lumen Gentium* describes the church as the People of God (chap. 2), the Body of Christ (LG 7), and Temple of the Spirit (LG 4). Thus its framework for its theological understanding of church is not narrowly christological but pneumatological and trinitarian. Its opening chapter speaks of the church as a mystery in which God calls all men and women to share in the life of the Trinity (LG 4), and it relates the church to the kingdom of God, already begun with the coming of Christ. Distinguishing clearly between the kingdom of God and the church, *Lumen Gentium* sees the church as the initial budding forth of the kingdom, revealed in the word, the work, and the presence of Christ and especially in his death and resurrection, while it looks toward its consummation when the church will be united

14. Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom*, trans. Paul Kachur (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1998), 43.

15. *Ibid.*, 60.

16. Johann Baptist Metz, *A Passion for God: The Mystical-Political Dimension of Christianity*, trans. J. Matthew Ashley (New York: Paulist, 1998), 85.

17. *Ibid.*, 86–87.

with her king in glory (LG 5). Thus, the eschatological dimension is not absent, and it has a social dimension.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*) describes the liturgy as an act of Christ the priest and of his body the church, manifesting by signs the sanctification of his people (SC 7). Echoing the language of the churches of the East, it speaks of the earthly liturgy as a foretaste of the heavenly liturgy celebrated in the holy city of Jerusalem where Christ sits at the right hand of God (SC 8). Calling for the “full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy” (SC 14), the council fathers sought to retrieve the theology of the assembly. The liturgy is not the work of the priest alone; it is the prayer of the entire assembly (SC 33). This was to become clearer in postconciliar documents. The General Instruction for the revised Roman Missal (1970) returned to this theology of the assembly, as did the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Under the subheading “The celebrants of the sacramental liturgy,” the Catechism states, “It is the whole *community*, the Body of Christ united with its Head, that celebrates” (no. 1140). To better express this theology of the assembly, the constitution stresses the importance of a diversity of liturgical ministries (SC 28, 29). It also calls for a simplification of the rites (SC 34) and, though somewhat hesitantly, for greater inculturation of the liturgy, a move that was to lead to the introduction of vernacular languages (SC 36).

The council’s reform of the liturgy represented the most dramatic change for Catholics. Within a few years, that Latin of the liturgy had given way to vernacular translations. The rites were revised, needless repetitions and ritual gestures were removed, the presider now faced the people, and lay men and women proclaimed the readings and helped distribute the Body and Blood of Christ to the congregation as “extraordinary ministers of the Eucharist.” Liturgical spaces were reconfigured, removing communion rails and the high altars, and new church buildings replaced the traditional long naves with designs that gathered the assembly closer to the altar and to each other.

Postconciliar Developments

While the council was largely successful in reclaiming a corporate sense for liturgy with its retrieval of the theology of the assembly, it is less clear that it brought about a recovery of the vivid eschatological imagination that so characterized the primitive church. At the same time, a number

of postconciliar developments were to lead to some very different challenges. They included a growing indifference toward religion, a more informal, culturally-shaped liturgy, a new emphasis on the historical Jesus in Christology, and a new direction in theology brought about by engagement with religious pluralism. The secular, postmodern ethos, so strong in contemporary Western culture, has contributed to the decline in religious affiliation charted by a number of recent surveys.¹⁸ It has also led to a suspicion of universal truth claims and biblical metanarratives.

Religious Indifference

Building on his earlier study of teenagers, *Soul Searching*, Christian Smith together with Patricia Snell in *Souls in Transition* profiles emerging adults, those between eighteen and twenty nine years of age (though the book studied only the first half of this group). Most are largely indifferent toward religion, though they see it as having a useful function, at least for children, in that it helps them to be good and to make good choices. Religious beliefs themselves do not seem to be important; emerging adults are content to determine for themselves what is right, worthy, and important on the basis of their feelings and inclinations. Since no one really knows what is true or right or good, it is best to remain tentative and keep one's options open.¹⁹

There are some negatives in the skepticism of many young adults that leads them to decide religious questions on the basis of feelings or personal preference. Smith characterizes this attitude as the "cultural triumph of liberal Protestantism." Even though mainline Protestant churches have been hemorrhaging members, he maintains that these liberal Protestants have actually won at the cultural level, with an emphasis on "individual autonomy, unbounded tolerance, freedom from authorities, the affirmation of pluralism, the centrality of human self-consciousness, the practical value of moral religion, epistemological skepticism, and an instinctive aversion to anything 'dogmatic' or committed to particulars." He sums it up by saying that many emerging adults would be quite comfortable with the kind of liberal faith described

18. See Pew Forum, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," <http://religions.pewforum.org/reports>.

19. Christian Smith with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of Emerging Adults* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 286–87; see also Christian Smith and Melinda Lundquist Denton, *Soul Searching: The Religious and Spiritual Lives of American Teenagers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).

in 1937 by H. Richard Niebuhr as being about “a God without wrath [who] brought men without sin into a kingdom without judgment through the ministrations of a Christ without a Cross.”²⁰

From an eschatological perspective, one of the beliefs that has been diminished or jettisoned is the sense that each of us must one day give an account of ourselves on the day of judgment (cf. Matt 25:31-46). According to Edward Schillebeeckx, contemporary “preaching is silent about hell, eternal damnation and judgment; they can no longer be heard from the pulpit.”²¹ Terence Nichols makes the same point in his book on death and the afterlife. He remarks that in spite of its being found throughout Scripture, today we do not hear much about God’s coming judgment; instead, the emphasis is on self-esteem and feeling good about ourselves.²² Pope Benedict XVI observes that our preaching is “one-sided,” directed toward the creation of a better world rather than “the other, truly better world.”²³

A Culturally Shaped Liturgy

Postmodern culture, with its insecurity and sense of isolation, has also left its mark on the contemporary liturgy, often reshaping it in terms of its own forms and values. Commentators or cantors often welcome all before the priest processes in. Presiders too often adopt an informal style, starting with a joke or story or sometimes a ball score, welcoming all, often asking guests to introduce themselves. The talk is of welcome, celebration, ministry, and community. On the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the council’s constitution on the liturgy, a 1988 Georgetown colloquium on liturgical renewal by the name of The Awakening Church focused on fifteen middle-class US parishes. Its contributors raised a number of questions about the relation between religion and society, liturgy and daily life. Aidan Kavanagh found the “gathering rites” of hospitality and inviting people into community that had

20. Christian Smith with Patricia Snell, *Souls in Transition*, 287–88; such a liberal faith is close to what he and Melinda Lundquist Denton described in *Soul Searching* as “moralistic therapeutic deism,” though set within a wider range of alternatives (ibid., 155). See *Soul Searching*, 162–63.

21. Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 136.

22. Terence Nichols, *Death and Afterlife: A Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos, 2010), 161; evangelicals constitute an exception here.

23. Pope Benedict XVI, *Light of the World: The Pope, the Church, and the Signs of the Times; A Conversation with Peter Seewald* (San Francisco: Ignatius, 2010), 179.

developed in many parishes to be more reflective of middle-class culture and a “therapeutic” ecclesiology. “There is no prayer or Godward direction in this new ‘rite of gathering’; it is a set of activities not ritually very different from the same procedures used when persons of middle-class society gather for any purpose.” He found little that was countercultural in the parishes included in the study, little sense of the assembly’s transcendent solidarity before God in Christ.²⁴

Monika Hellwig made similar observations. While more positive about the laity’s ecclesial sense in the gathering rites and welcoming of others, she questioned whether the liturgy communicated a sense of service to society beyond the church, suggesting that what was needed was “a more political understanding of the redemptive and ecclesial task” that might “pit them against prevailing national and cultural values.”²⁵ John Baldovin commented on the emphasis on intimacy and community, with the result that “people are tempted to look to liturgy for immediate gratification, noting that when communal identity is accentuated to such a degree, the element of mission is underemphasized” and worshipers are inhibited “from experiencing sacramental action as God’s gift rather than their own creation.”²⁶ He sees the challenge as one of helping those in the assembly realize that “the Eucharist is an anticipatory sign of the coming kingdom of God’s justice and peace,” with the implications of living out that witness on a daily basis.²⁷ If this sense of the coming kingdom has been lost, then the eschatological imagination has been severely diminished.

Joseph Ratzinger had been speaking out against what he calls the “negative sides of the liturgical renewal movement” long before he became pope.²⁸ In his 2007 postsynodal apostolic exhortation on the Eucharist, *Sacramentum Caritatis*, he spoke of the *ars celebrandi*, empha-

24. Aidan Kavanagh, “Reflections on the Study from the Viewpoint of Liturgical History,” in *The Awakening Church: 25 Years of Liturgical Renewal*, ed. Lawrence J. Madden (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1992), 87–89 at 87.

25. Monika K. Hellwig, “Twenty-Five Years of a Wakening Church: Liturgy and Ecclesiology,” in *The Awakening Church*, 58, 67.

26. John F. Baldovin, “Pastoral Liturgical Reflections on the Study,” in *The Awakening Church*, 104–5. In a later work he notes that “the talk show host approach” to Catholic worship is subversive of the liturgy’s intent. *Reforming the Liturgy* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008), 152.

27. Baldovin, “Pastoral Liturgical Reflections on the Study,” 106.

28. Joseph Ratzinger, *Milestones: Memoirs 1927–1977* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1998), 57.

sizing the grace and dignity with which the liturgy should be celebrated: "The simplicity of its gestures and the sobriety of its orderly sequence of signs communicate and inspire more than any contrived and inappropriate additions. Attentiveness and fidelity to the specific structure of the rite express both a recognition of the nature of Eucharist as a gift and, on the part of the minister, a docile openness to receiving this ineffable gift" (no. 40). His relaxing restrictions on the use of the Latin "Tridentine Mass" in his *motu proprio Summorum Pontificum* (2007) is part of an effort toward bringing about greater reverence in liturgical celebrations.

Shift to the Historical Jesus

In Christology, the focus has shifted from the Jesus of the gospels and the Christian tradition to the historical Jesus. In the hands of careful and balanced scholars—for example, John P. Meier, Raymond E. Brown, Walter Kasper, Elizabeth Johnson, and Terrence Tilley, to name just a few—historical Jesus research has contributed much to a greater appreciation of Jesus and his ministry, particularly to a recovery of the centrality of the metaphor of the kingdom of God in his preaching. Others, however, have used it to reconstruct the historical Jesus according to their own preconceptions. For example, the members of the late Robert Funk's Jesus Seminar claim to have discovered the "real" Jesus, hidden behind the theology of the evangelists and the dogma of the church. Funk takes the religious establishment to task for not allowing "the intelligence of high scholarship to pass through pastors and priests to a hungry laity."²⁹ While the Seminar's reconstructed Jesus, shorn of eschatology and the miraculous, has drawn a lot of headlines, the work of the Seminar has had little impact on mainstream scholarship.

Recently some scholars have begun to question an overemphasis on the historical Jesus. John P. Meier and Luke Timothy Johnson argue that what gets lost is the "real Jesus" or the "living Jesus." For Meier, "the historical Jesus is not the real Jesus, and the real Jesus is not the historical Jesus."³⁰ Given the paucity of sources and the fact that the evangelists were not able to record all or most of his words and deeds, the real Jesus is simply not available to historical-critical methods. The historical Jesus, while useful for theology, is a modern abstraction and construct, open to many

29. Robert Funk, "The Issue of Jesus," *Forum* 1/1 (1985): 8.

30. John P. Meier, "The Historical Jesus: Rethinking Some Concepts," *Theological Studies* 51/1 (1990): 14.

interpretations: social or political revolutionary, magician, proto-Pharisee, apocalyptic seer, wisdom teacher, or gay man.³¹ Such a reconstruction cannot be the object of Christian faith. "The object of Christian faith is a living person, Jesus Christ, who fully entered into a true human existence on earth in the first century A.D., but who now lives risen and glorified, forever in the Father's presence." Access to this Jesus is given only through faith.³²

Though his language is less measured, Luke Timothy Johnson's argument is similar. He argues that history cannot deliver a solid version of Jesus other than that presented by the gospels, that efforts of reconstruction lead to distortions of the methods belonging to serious historiography, and that the alternative Jesus offered usually mirrors the ideal images of the scholars themselves. "To concentrate on 'the historical Jesus,' as though the ministry of Jesus as reconstructed by scholarship were of ultimate importance for the life of discipleship, is to forget the most important truth about Jesus—namely, that he lives now as Lord in the full presence and power of God and presses upon us at every moment not as a memory of the past but as a presence that defines our present."³³ Pope Benedict XVI also is concerned that an overemphasis on the "historical Jesus" as reconstructed by historical-critical scholarship with its ever-finer distinctions of the layers of tradition has lost sight of the figure of Jesus himself. Though he accepts the historical-critical method as indispensable for reading historical texts, the starting point must remain the conviction of faith.³⁴

A Revised Christology

Certainly the recent emphasis on the historical Jesus and the centrality of the kingdom of God in his ministry has been significant for Christian life as well as for Christian theology. God's salvation is far more than the promise of eternal life for the individual; the social dimension of Jesus' preaching is evident in the Beatitudes, the parables, the Lord's Prayer, and his concern for the poor. He preached about caring for the poor and abandoned (Luke 16:19-31), declared peacemakers blessed (Matt 5:9), and said that we would be judged on the basis of whether or

31. See Daniel J. Harrington, "The Jewishness of Jesus," *Bible Review* 3/1 (1987): 33-41.

32. Meier, "The Historical Jesus," 15-23 at 23.

33. Luke Timothy Johnson, "The Jesus Controversy: The Limits of Historical Scholarship," *America* 203/3 (August 2010): 12-13 at 13.

34. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), xii-xxiii.

not we fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and visited those in prison (Matt 25:1-45). In this way Jesus gave expression to the messianic themes of justice, peace, and reconciliation so important to the prophets.

The recovery of the historical Jesus is also important, *pace* Luke Timothy Johnson, if the church's historical christological faith is to be defended from the frequently heard accusation that later generations of Christians transformed the simple rabbi from Nazareth into a god, whether through the triumph of Paul's theology, or because of a hellenization of Christology, or simply through a mythologization. This was the point of Ernst Käsemann's famous 1953 Marburg lecture, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," calling for a new quest in order to keep Christian faith and preaching firmly tied to the Jesus of history.³⁵

But when combined with the current emphasis on religious pluralism, made more critical in an age of globalization, the new emphasis on the historical Jesus has frequently resulted in a significant revision of traditional Christology. For Edward Schillebeeckx and Roger Haight, Jesus is no longer the efficient cause of salvation, but rather its revealer or exemplary cause.³⁶ While acknowledging a certain tension between the historical and doctrinal aspects of Christology, Haight insists that Christology must begin "from below," with Jesus of Nazareth. The object of Christology is the historical Jesus.³⁷ From the perspective of soteriology or the doctrine of salvation, the story of Jesus is increasingly seen not as something Jesus accomplished, bringing about reconciliation and communion between God and humankind as in traditional soteriology, making him constitutive of our salvation, but as an example or model, showing us the way to God by his obedience to the Father and life of generous service. Haight writes,

How did Jesus save? As revealer Jesus preached and actually mediated in his ministry the kingdom of God. This means that Jesus is an invitation to look for this process going on within the whole of

35. Ernst Käsemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," in *Essays on New Testament Themes* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1982), 15-47.

36. Edward Schillebeeckx, "The Religious and the Human Ecumene," in *The Future of Liberation Theology: Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez*, ed. Marc H. Ellis and Otto Maduro (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 183-85; Roger Haight, *The Future of Christology* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 70.

37. Haight, *The Future of Christology*, 29-39.

human life and history. Movements aimed at advancing justice, reconciliation, and peace in the world, at resisting social suffering, have a sacrality marked with religious depth.³⁸

Paul Lakeland is sympathetic to those who see Jesus more as the way to God than as redeeming us through some kind of metaphysical act. Salvation is about the quality and character of human life; too often it has been presented as “the blood sacrifice of a somewhat sadistic God, in which the death of Jesus ransoms human beings from their sins.”³⁹

If God’s saving grace can be mediated through the story of Jesus, it can also be mediated through other religious figures and traditions. Jesus is seen as a unique but particular manifestation of God’s salvation. He is no longer the universal savior, even if he is the normative one for Christians. In Roger Haight’s words, “one must expect incarnations of God in other religious mediations analogous to what occurred in Jesus.”⁴⁰

Haight goes further to speak of an “uncentering” or “repositioning” of the resurrection in the structure of Christian faith. Without implying any minimization of belief in the resurrection, he argues that the central position of the resurrection, and thus of eschatology in Christian faith, makes it seem that Jesus in his earthly teachings and actions as a whole was not in himself a revelation of God: “Jesus’ message is true, and his life a revelation of God, even if, contrary to fact, there had been no explicit experience of resurrection. Jesus’ life, what he said and did, is the center of faith.”⁴¹

While it is true of course that Jesus’ entire life was a revelation of God, this “uncentering” or repositioning of the resurrection at least raises the question of whether or not the resurrection reveals not just our own ultimate destiny, the raising and transformation of our bodies, but also the transformation of creation itself (cf. Rom. 8:21). Has this revised Christology, in which the risen Jesus becomes one among other mediators of salvation, deprived him of his eschatological role of bringing the *eschaton*? Can we still affirm the incarnation of the Word as a unique event of God entering into an embodied relationship with creation through the person of Christ? Or is the Logos theology of John to be reduced to poetry, stripped of its trinitarian and cosmic implications?

38. *Ibid.*, 71.

39. Paul Lakeland, *Church: Living Communion*, Engaging Theology: Catholic Perspectives (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 55.

40. Haight, *Future of Christology*, 162.

41. Roger Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999), 149–50 at 150.

Theology and Religious Pluralism

Since Vatican II, Catholic theology has been increasingly concerned to rearticulate Christian faith in the context of religious pluralism. This has been due at least in part to the council itself. Vatican II moved Catholicism beyond the old axiom of “no salvation outside the church” to teach the universal availability of God’s grace (LG 16), and it brought Catholics to a new respect for the great world religions, teaching that the church rejects nothing that is true and holy in them; indeed, they often reflect a ray of that truth that enlightens all peoples (*Nostra Aetate* 2). The council’s steps in this direction have been significant. A theological emphasis on religious pluralism has strengthened Catholicism for the task of inter-religious dialogue, so important in the twenty-first century. Catholic scholars can enter into dialogue with a genuine respect for the religious Other, which makes dialogue a genuinely religious undertaking, open to the divine truth that may be reflected there. Without it, one attempts to dialogue with the presupposition that those who follow different religious traditions walk in darkness and error and cannot be saved.

The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences (FABC) has developed an understanding of the church’s mission in Asia as one of dialogue in the context of religious pluralism, and it has placed witness to the kingdom at the heart of its mission. In the FABC documents, religious diversity is seen not as something regrettable but as a positive value that represents a richness and strength, for God’s spirit is at work in all religious traditions, and all represent visions of the divine mystery. The proclamation of Jesus Christ in an Asian context means first of all witness to the values of the kingdom; this is the first call of the churches in Asia.⁴² The 1990 Fifth Plenary Assembly of the FABC pointed out that the challenge in Asia is “to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God: to promote the values of the Kingdom such as justice, peace, love, compassion, equality and brotherhood in these Asian realities. In short, it is to make the Kingdom of God a reality.”⁴³

When the FABC met in Rome in 1998 for the Synod of Bishops for Asia, many of the bishops objected to the Roman-drafted *Lineamenta* or

42. Jonathan Y. Tan, “*Missio inter Gentes: Towards a New Paradigm in the Mission Theology of the Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences (FABC)*,” *Mission Studies* 21:1 (2004): 71–74; <http://www.jonathantan.org/essays/Missio%20Inter%20Gentes.pdf>.

43. Cited by Tan, “*Missio inter Gentes*,” 81; see FABC V, art. 1.7 in Gaudencio B. Rosales and Catalino G. Arévalo, eds., *For All the Peoples of Asia: Federation of Asian Bishops’ Conferences Documents from 1970 to 1991* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1992), 275.

outline for the synod as being too Western in its approach. While the *Lineamenta* took as its theme “Jesus Christ as unique Savior of Asia,”⁴⁴ many of the bishops objected that this was not a good starting point in an Asian context, with its religious diversity. They pointed out that the Roman document ignored the experience of their conferences in regard to evangelization. Their concern was *how* Christ was proclaimed, and they spoke of a “triple dialogue” with other religions, with culture, and with the poor.

Theologians such as Johann Baptist Metz, Jon Sobrino, Roger Haight, Elizabeth Johnson, Peter Phan, and Terrence Tilley have also placed witnessing to or “enacting”⁴⁵ the kingdom at the center of the church’s mission. Though Peter Phan’s missiological vision is always explicitly trinitarian, he argues that the mission of the church should not be seen as “ecclesiocentric,” working to implant the church where it has not yet taken root, but as “regnocentric,” witnessing to the kingdom of God, spreading gospel values—God’s presence in Jesus bringing forgiveness and reconciliation, justice and peace throughout the world. In such a kingdom-centered ecclesiology, “no longer is the church considered the pinnacle or the very center of the Christian life. Rather it is moved from the center to the periphery and from the top to the bottom.”⁴⁶ Like John the Baptist before Jesus, the church should say “the reign of God must increase, and I must decrease.”⁴⁷

For Haight and Terrence Tilley, the Christian mission is neither ecclesiocentric nor Christocentric, but theocentric; the goal is always God and God’s reign.⁴⁸ For Paul Lakeland, the church’s mission is oriented toward the humanization of society.⁴⁹ Such a regnocentric approach empowers the church to work not just with other Christians but with other religions

44. Thomas C. Fox, *Pentecost in Asia: A New Way of Being Church* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2002), 155.

45. Thus Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 54.

46. Peter C. Phan, “A New Way of Being Church: Perspectives from Asia,” in *Governance, Accountability, and the Future of the Catholic Church*, ed. Francis Oakley and Bruce Russett (New York: Continuum, 2004), 183.

47. Peter C. Phan, *In Our Own Tongues: Perspectives from Asia on Mission and Inculturation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2003), 37.

48. Terrence W. Tilley, *The Disciples’ Jesus: Christology as Reconciling Practice* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008), 260; Haight, *Future of Christology*, 161; see also Schillebeeckx, “The Religious and the Human Ecumene,” 186–87.

49. Lakeland, *Church: Living Communion*, 14.

as well. The church does not compete with other world religions for members, for God's grace is operative among all people of good will.⁵⁰ Seeing the church's mission this way also brings new clarity to our understanding of Christian discipleship.

The Vatican's reaction to these theologies of religious pluralism has not been slow in coming. The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF) has investigated the works of Haight, Phan, Sobrino, and Jacques Dupuis. Its 2000 declaration *Dominus Iesus* was drafted largely in response to Asian theology and its approach to evangelization. The declaration insists both on "the unicity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ" (no. 13) and on the inseparability of kingdom of God from Christ or from the church (no. 18). Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, under whose CDF presidency *Dominus Iesus* was issued, from the days of his study of Bonaventure has been strongly against what he sees as any effort to "immanentize" the eschaton, to use a term of Eric Vögelin.⁵¹ That would mean for him, making salvation something *within* history, rather than *beyond* it, and reducing the church to a church of the poor, with a mission primarily social rather than one based on hierarchical mediation.⁵² Ratzinger specifically rejects regnocentrism, an interpretation of the kingdom as a world of peace, justice, and respect for creation that can unite the different religions in a joint effort toward a common task. From this perspective, salvation becomes the work of human beings, a utopian messianism, not the work of God.⁵³

Looking Ahead

These liturgical, christological, soteriological, and ecclesiological questions are all entailed in the doctrine of eschatology, the fullness of salvation revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. They cannot be separated or easily disentangled. The early Christians' confidence in God's salvation breaking into space and time and human history came strongly to expression when they gathered to celebrate the Eucharist. Jesus was the

50. Haight, *Future of Christology*, 142.

51. See Eric Vögelin, *The New Science of Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1952), 120.

52. See Thomas P. Rausch, *Pope Benedict XVI: An Introduction to His Theological Vision* (New York: Paulist, 2009), 53–54.

53. Pope Benedict XVI, *Jesus of Nazareth* (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 53–54.

“firstfruits” of the resurrection of the dead (1 Cor 15:20), promising a new creation. But God’s salvation is inseparable from the person of Jesus (2 Pet 3:8-10). These questions will resurface in the pages ahead. But first, we need to consider three concepts that are central to any consideration of eschatology: creation, time, and memory.

Creation

The current tendency in Old Testament scholarship is to see creation as the horizon of Israel’s faith in Yahweh who creates by word, by wisdom, and by spirit.⁵⁴ In the Genesis narrative of creation, placed by the postexilic Priestly editors at the beginning of the Bible, an all-powerful God brings order out of the primeval chaos, effortlessly creating the earth and its creatures, including man and woman created in the divine image and likeness, through the power of the divine Word (Gen 1:1–2:4a; cf. Ps 33:6, 9) and rests on the seventh day. This Genesis narrative still retains traces of the ancient Mesopotamian and Canaanite creation myths from which it borrowed.⁵⁵

The older, second creation story (Genesis 2:4b to 3:24), which includes the Fall, links the human person (*hā ādm*) and the earth (*hā ādāmā*) in God’s work of creation. Shaped “out of the clay” (*hā ādāmā*) of the ground (Gen 2:7), then differentiated as male and female (Gen 2:22), the man and woman are equal. They enjoy complete harmony with each other and with nature, as well as an intimacy with God. These gifts are lost through the temptation of the serpent to become “like gods” themselves. The earth is cursed and no longer freely offers its fruits, their nakedness becomes an embarrassment, the woman becomes subject to her husband, and they must leave the garden, no longer to enjoy God’s presence there.

God’s Wisdom and God’s spirit are both strongly associated with a theology of creation, one that sees God’s creative work as ongoing rather than as being something in the past like the Genesis creation narrative. The prophet Jeremiah attributes Yahweh’s creative work to Wisdom (Jer 10:12), a theme developed further in the later Wisdom literature. Wisdom, begotten before the world was created (Prov 8:22-23), is present at creation (Wis 7:22; 9:9), “penetrates and pervades all things” (Wis 7:24), and

54. Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1997), 162–63.

55. John L. McKenzie, *A Theology of the Old Testament* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday 1976), 194–96; see Alexander Heidel, *The Babylonian Genesis: The Story of Creation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).

“governs all things well” (Wis 8:1). Proverbs describes Wisdom as playing in God’s presence while God fashioned the world:

Before the mountains were settled into place,
before the hills, I was brought forth;
While as yet the earth and the fields were not made,
nor the first clods of the world,
“When he established the heavens I was there,
when he marked out the vault over the race of the deep;
When he made firm the skies above,
when he fixed fast the foundations of the earth;
When he set for the sea its limit,
so that the waters should not transgress his command;
Then was I beside him as his craftsman,
and I was his delight day by day,
Playing before him all the while,
playing on the surface of his earth;
and I found delight in the sons of men. (Prov 8:25-31)

This Wisdom theology suggests that God’s creative work is ongoing, not something that took place long ago. Furthermore, creation is for a purpose: that God might enter into relationship with humankind. Creation is the ground for covenant.

God’s wind or spirit (*rûah*) is also involved in God’s creative work (Gen 1:2), creating and sustaining life, for example in Psalm 104:29-30, a psalm that Brueggemann says is “perhaps the fullest rendition of creation faith in the Old Testament,”⁵⁶ a faith that cannot separate or keep distinct either Israel or creation in the future to be given by Yahweh.⁵⁷ The future promised will bring a new creation, an end of tears, and peace for all on God’s holy mountain (Isa 65:17-25), a theme that will be taken up again in the New Testament.

For many more conservative Christians, Darwin’s theory of evolution was seen as challenging the biblical theology of creation, and some have continued to wage war against it, rejecting it entirely or insisting on pseudoscientific theories such as “creation science” or “intelligent design” to “save” the biblical account, making it a source of scientific knowledge. At the same time, a great many scientists are nonbelievers, ninety percent of the 1,800 members of the National Academy of Science,

56. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 155.

57. *Ibid.*, 547.

according to John Haught. Both are guilty of a kind of literalism, refusing to recognize that the book of nature can be read at different levels, both scientific and religious.⁵⁸

There is nothing about the theory of evolution that would necessarily rule out God's creative presence. Evolution and Christian faith in a creative deity are not incompatible. One is a scientific hypothesis, well supported with empirical evidence, describing how the diversity of living things came about. It is primarily descriptive. It cannot address the philosophical and theological issues of ultimate causality. The other, Christian faith, is rooted in biblical revelation. Pope John Paul II acknowledged in 1996 that evolution is "more than a hypothesis."⁵⁹ Ilia Delio notes that "a conference on evolution sponsored by the Vatican did not include supporters of creationism and intelligent design."⁶⁰

Three further observations on the theology of creation are in order. First, we have a tendency to separate creation and eschatology, pushing both to opposite margins, to the beginning and end of time, thus losing sight of their essential connectedness. Linking the two is suggested by the Old Testament, which begins the story of God's saving work on behalf of Israel with the story of creation as the story of a God who saves, bringing the earth and its creatures, including men and women, out of the primeval chaos. The Yahweh who promises renewal and restoration to Israel from exile will also bring about a new creation. Similarly, in the New Testament St. Paul includes creation in the freedom from corruption that is the gift of Christ's salvation in its fullness (Rom 8:19-22). Thus, eschatology is creation completed or fulfilled—the return of all things in Christ to the Creator.

Second, creation is not some once-for-all event in the past. This represents Deist theology, which posits a divine architect or "watchmaker" who creates the universe and then lets it run according to its own laws; this is not Christian. Creation is ongoing, a *creatio continua*; without God's sustaining embrace, holding us in his hands in this very instant, we would simply cease to exist. Psalm 104 celebrates God's creative work, sustaining all creatures and providing for their needs:

58. John F. Haught, *Deeper than Darwin* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2003), 13–15 at 15.

59. John Paul II, "Theories of Evolution," *Origins* (December 5, 1996).

60. Ilia Delio, *The Emergent Christ: Exploring the Meaning of Christ in an Evolutionary Universe* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011), 23.

When you hide your face, they are lost.
 When you take away their breath, they perish
 and return to the dust from which they came.
 When you send forth your breath, they are created,
 and you renew the face of the earth. (Ps 104:29-30)

The resurrection of Jesus marks a “new creation” (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 6:15); for Paul, the risen Jesus is the “last Adam” or “the second man” (1 Cor 15:45, 47). The book of Revelation sees God as preparing a new heaven and a new earth (Rev 21:1-5; cf. 2 Pet 3:13). These New Testament passages suggest a God whose creative power is actively at work.

Perhaps the greatest achievement of Thomas Aquinas was his doctrine of contingency. He described God as pure existence, self-subsisting Being, the only necessary being. God’s essence is simply *to be*; it is pure existence. All else, all created beings have being only by participation; they are contingent, radically dependent on God, unable to account for their own existence.⁶¹ Aquinas saw God working in all things as their first cause: “Since the form of a thing is within the thing . . . and because in all things God Himself is properly the cause of universal being which is innermost in all things; it follows that in all things God works intimately.”⁶² That is why God can never be discovered in creation; God is not an object to be observed and measured but a transcendent presence to be encountered.

Ignatius of Loyola also saw God working in all things. In the final meditation in his *Spiritual Exercises*, the “Contemplation for Obtaining Love,” he invites the retreatant “to consider how God works and labors for me in all things created on the face of the earth—that is, behaves like one who labors—as in the heavens, elements, plants, fruits, cattle, etc., giving them being, preserving them, giving them vegetation and sensation, etc.”⁶³

Third, would a God who creates out of love abandon creation, including those creatures created in the divine image and likeness, allowing all to return to chaos or slide into nothingness, whether through sin or entropy? Classical theology has too easily separated creation and redemption, making the incarnation a “second step” to a creation gone

61. *Summa Theologiae*, I, q. 44, a. 1.

62. *Ibid.*, I, q. 105, a. 5.

63. Ignatius of Loyola, *The Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius*, ed. Louis J. Puhl (Chicago: Loyola Press, 1951), no. 236.

awry. A classic example is Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, which argues that Adam's sin was an infinite offense, as it was a sin against an infinite being, and so the order of creation could only be restored by an infinite being making satisfaction. In Anselm's words, "God will not do it, because he has no debt to pay; and man will not do it, because he cannot. Therefore, in order that the God-man may perform this, it is necessary that the same being should be perfect God and perfect man, in order to make this atonement."⁶⁴ For Anselm, this is why God became man.

Such a conception is flawed from a number of perspectives. It reduces creation to an originating moment, focuses narrowly on Christ's death rather than on his whole life, ministry, and resurrection, and makes redemption depend on a transaction between humankind and God in the person of Christ. According to Gabriel Daly, "the doctrines of creation and redemption should be developed together and in a way which recognizes the feedback of one into the other. Salvation is not an after-thought; it is implicit in the creation of a truly free being."⁶⁵ Rahner's insight is correct: creation and incarnation are not two different acts but one, only conceptually distinct.

We are entirely justified in understanding creation and Incarnation not as two disparate and juxtaposed acts of God "outwards" which have their origins in two separate initiatives of God. Rather in the world as it actually is we can understand creation and Incarnation as two moments and two phases of the *one* process of God's self-giving and self-expression, although it is an intrinsically differentiated process.

Rahner here is returning to a very old Christocentric tradition in which the creative Word of God establishes the world as the environment for his own materiality.⁶⁶

Time

Eschatology is intrinsically connected with the concept of time. Because of the trinitarian nature of the divine mystery, God is both beyond

64. Anselm, *Cur Deus Homo* bk. 2, VII, in *St. Anselm: Basic Writings*, trans. Sidney Norton Deane (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1951), 246.

65. Gabriel Daly, *Creation and Redemption* (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1989), 54.

66. Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 197.

time and fully involved in it. As William Stoeger says, "while God in God's self transcends time and space, God in God's Word and Spirit fully enters temporal and spatial reality, first constituting it and then uniting God's self with it."⁶⁷

But what is time? Poets tell us that time flows like a river, from the past into the future. The ancient Greeks had two words for time: *kronos*, referring to quantitative time, the chronological flow of events, and *kairos*, qualitative time, the opportune, decisive, or graced moment. Philosophers define time as the measure of motion. Modern science recognizes that time has no meaning apart from the material world; it cannot be completely separated from space and is dependent on the observer. Scientists prefer to speak of space-time; both are relative to material reality. Neither is absolute, nor are they ontologically prior.

For most ancient peoples, time was cyclic, a cycle of repeating ages or the revolving of the great cosmic wheel. The linear idea of time, that time has a beginning (creation) and looks forward to an end (eschatology), has its origin within the Judeo-Christian tradition. For the ancient Israelites, God's salvation was something that had happened in the past, in the great event of the exodus when God delivered the children of Israel out of oppression and slavery in Egypt and led them into a land of promise, commemorated in the Passover Supper (Exod 12:1-20). As Brevard Childs observes, Israel's cult, which replaced myth with history, set her apart from the general pattern in the Near East: "For Israel the structure of reality was historical in character, not mythical."⁶⁸

Under the influence of several centuries of prophetic preaching, calling them to repentance, warning them of God's coming judgment, but also promising that God would not abandon them, Israel began looking forward to a new intervention of God in their life, for a messianic age, the day of Yahweh, and even the resurrection of the dead. Thus the religious imagination of Israel shifted to the future (Isa 43:18-19). For Christians, the age of salvation had already dawned with the resurrection of Jesus, and they looked, particularly in the Eucharist, for his coming at the end of time to bring the fullness of salvation and a new creation.

67. William R. Stoeger, "Faith Reflects on the Evolving Universe," in *Finding God in All Things: Essays in Honor of Michael Buckley*, ed. Michael J. Himes and Stephen J. Pope (New York: Crossroad, 1996), 177.

68. Brevard S. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel* (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1962), 80.

Like the other Abrahamic religions, Islam looks forward to the resurrection of the dead and a final judgment, leading to eternal reward or lasting punishment. Modern Judaism does not have a single eschatology. Orthodox Jews look forward to a personal messiah in the Davidic line who will usher in a messianic age that will culminate in the resurrection of the dead. Conservative Judaism also hopes for a messianic age, though not always a personal messiah. As with Reform Judaism, some Conservative Jews see the messianic age as ultimately the responsibility of every human person. Buddhism does not really have an eschatology. With its unique view of time, without beginning or end and without a creator God, there can be no beginning in terms of creation and no end in terms of last judgment. If the word "eschatology" is used at all, it would be a completely realized eschatology because in the self-emptying and wisdom of Sunyata each "now" moment is realized as the eternal, and time is overcome.⁶⁹

Modern science eventually accepted the originally Judeo-Christian religious notion that the universe, and thus time, has a beginning and an end. The theoretical physicist Stephen Hawking attributes this to Hubble's 1929 discovery of the expanding universe, leading to the big bang theory of its beginnings.⁷⁰ While most scientists accept this view, they remain divided on the ultimate destiny of the universe, though many accept that according to the second law of thermodynamics there is something irreversible about nature; the universe will eventually "run down," resulting in an eventual "heat death" or maximum entropy, a loss of the energy necessary to sustain motion or life.

Using a term originating with Arthur Eddington, Hawking distinguishes three "arrows of time." The thermodynamic arrow is the direction in which entropy or "disorder" increases; the psychological arrow refers to our subjective experience of time, remembering the past but not the future; the cosmological arrow is the direction in which the universe expands rather than contracts.⁷¹ Thus, even if time is relative to the observer, it has a direction.

69. Masao Abe, "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata," in *The Emptying God: A Buddhist-Jewish-Christian Conversation*, ed. John B. Cobb, Jr. and Christopher Ives (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), 59–61.

70. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time*, updated and expanded tenth anniversary edition (New York: Bantam, 1996), 9.

71. *Ibid.*, 149.

So too for the Christian community time has a direction; it is eschatological. As Don Saliers writes, Christianity “inherited from Jewish liturgy the rhythm of feasts and seasons in which God’s mighty acts and the covenant promises of God for the future were commemorated.” In the Christian Pasch or paschal mystery of Christ’s passing from death to life, commemorated in the liturgy, we look forward to the fulfillment of God’s promises.⁷²

Memory

Memory brings time to mind and in recalling the past tells us who we are. Amnesia means the loss of memory, and with it, the loss of identity. Memory under various forms plays an important role in the biblical tradition. First of all, Israel continually remembered or reread its history in light of God’s saving action in the exodus; this memory became, in Walter Brueggemann’s words, the lens through which it retold all of its experience. In this way, God’s powerful action on Israel’s behalf was seen as entering into new situations.⁷³ In the same way, the earliest Christians, most of them Jews, reread their tradition in their preaching and texts to interpret the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They proclaimed him as Messiah, Lord, Son of God, Servant of Yahweh, as Word of God or Wisdom of God. Tradition itself became the living memory of the community, rooted in its originating experience of God’s life revealed and made accessible in Jesus.

Most important is the concept of memorial, which gives an active sense to memory. From the Hebrew root *zkr*, to remember, or *zikkārôn* in the nominal form, “memorial” appears as the Greek *anamnēsis* in the Septuagint and later in the New Testament. What was remembered for the Israelites was the covenant between God and the people; to remember the covenant “was to allow the covenant to lay claim on their present reality. . . . Remembrance meant becoming aware of present obligations to remain faithful to God.”⁷⁴ Religious festivals facilitated this process of remembering. Brevard Childs says that scholars today are agreed that “the chief function of the cult was to actualize the tradition.”⁷⁵ For

72. Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 53.

73. Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 177.

74. Richard Gaillardetz, *Teaching with Authority* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1997), 80.

75. Childs, *Memory and Tradition in Israel*, 75.

example, the Israelites were told to memorialize in the Passover Supper God's deliverance of the people from slavery and oppression, expressing it through narrative and ritual (Exod 12:14). At the same time, asking God to remember was to invoke his saving relationship with the people; asking him to remember his mercy or his covenant was "to expect him to apply it to things now."⁷⁶

In the New Testament, *anamnēsis* was used in a similar sense in relation to the Christian Eucharist. The disciples were told to share the bread and the cup "in memory of me" (*eis tēn emēn anamnēsin*; Luke 22:19; cf. 1 Cor 11:24), that is, to remember Christ's sacrifice, "given for you" (Luke 22:19). Xavier Léon Dufour emphasizes that in comparison to the Passover, the event being remembered was now identified with a person.⁷⁷ Nils Dahl argues that in the early church the commemoration of Jesus' death and resurrection took place not in the subjective memory of the individual believers but in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. "The celebration itself . . . was a commemoration, an *anamnēsis* of the death and resurrection of Jesus where the history of salvation was re-presented by the sacramental commemoration."⁷⁸ For Edward Kilmartin, the members of the community join their own self-offering to that of Christ on the cross by participating in the celebration of the Eucharist, the corporate act of the ecclesiastical community.⁷⁹ Johann Baptist Metz refers to this as the "dangerous memory" of Christ's passion, death, and resurrection, which reminds us that his kingdom is coming; this is a challenging memory that calls us to conversion, inviting us into the mystery of his cross and resurrection.⁸⁰

In a beautiful homily given for a woman killed in an automobile accident who had been on the team that looked after the papal apartments, Pope Benedict XVI noted the relationship between liturgy and memory. He spoke of the paradox of singing the Alleluia at a funeral Mass: "This

76. Reumann, *The Supper of the Lord*, 289.

77. Xavier Léon Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The Witness of the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1987), 112.

78. Nils Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976), 21.

79. Edward J. Kilmartin, *The Eucharist in the West* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998), 360.

80. Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Seabury, 1980), 90–91; see Bruce Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory*, 139–88.

is audacious! We feel above all the pain of the loss, we feel above all the absence, the past, but the liturgy knows that we are in the Body itself of Christ and that we live from the memory of God, which is our memory. In this intertwining of his memory and of our memory we are together, we are living."⁸¹

What the Pope suggests in his reflection here is that through memory and liturgy we are linked with those who have gone before us with the assurance of faith that their story is not over and done but goes on in that future that God has prepared for us. And this is indeed "Good News," Gospel (*euangelion*) for the countless victims of history, the millions whose deaths were often unwitnessed and unmourned. When we reflect on the twentieth century with all its bloodshed, its two world wars, its succession of genocides, it was a century of tears.

Conclusion

We have seen that the eschatological hope of the early Christians found strong expression when they celebrated the Eucharist; in fact, as Joseph Ratzinger argues, it is "inseparable from the experience of the presence of the final reality in the eucharistic feast."⁸² But as the Easter motif lost its centrality and the church became less the Body of Christ and more the domain of the clergy, Christians began to focus increasingly on the Last Judgment, particularly in the West, and on the sacramental presence of Christ in the elements.

We need, however, to keep in mind Brian Daley's caution. The development of the church's eschatological faith was complex and somewhat cyclical: "Eschatological emphases in the early Church varied, apocalyptic hopes died and were revived, and individual or cosmic or ecclesiological or mystical perspectives succeeded one another not so much in a direct line of development as in response to the social and ecclesial challenges met by Christian communities in each generation."⁸³ But overall, the emphasis in the religious imagination of the faithful and their liturgical celebration shifted from the coming of the kingdom in its fullness, the *eschaton*, to the *eschata*, a more individualistic concept of death and judgment, heaven and hell.

81. Zenit, www.zenit.org/rssenglish-31144.

82. Ratzinger, *Eschatology*, 8.

83. Daley, *The Hope of the Early Church*, 3.

The Second Vatican Council made significant progress in renewing the church's liturgical life, but the postconciliar period witnessed a growing indifference toward religion and a tendency to introduce middle-class values into the liturgy at the expense of a sense of mission. At the same time, some new directions in theology have been both helpful and problematic. A new emphasis in theology on the historical Jesus has reclaimed his proclamation of the coming of the kingdom of God, and with it, the importance of eschatology not just for the salvation of the individual but for the coming of God's salvation in its fullness.

More problematically, the new context of religious pluralism has frequently led to a revised Christology in which Jesus appears more as exemplar than as universal savior, as well as to a new ecclesiology and understanding of the church's mission as one of witnessing to the kingdom, along with the other world religions, with the effect of separating the kingdom from Christ and his salvific work. While this regnocentric approach to mission has facilitated interreligious dialogue and offered a common purpose, uniting Christians with those from other religions, it also risks making the kingdom the work of human beings, reducing salvation to something within history rather than beyond it. It has also led to a new understanding of the church's mission, even to a decentering of the church itself.

Can the mission of the church simply be reduced to witnessing to God's reign, especially to the disadvantaged, without falling into the perennial temptation of liberal theology of reducing Christianity to ethics? And is Christ's eschatological role in bringing the *eschaton* at risk of being lost, as social betterment becomes the primary focus? We will return to these themes at the end of this book.