THE PLACE OF THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN
IN LIGHT OF APOCALYPTIC ISSUES REFLECTED IN
OTHER NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to place the apocalypse in relation to apocalyptic issues which were of concern to early Christian communities. These issues are focused mainly on the Parousia, its time and the impact of its expectation on Church life. Primitive Christianity experienced difficulties resulting from the expectation of an imminent Parousia. Similarly, its non-occurrence became the source for a different set of issues. The Church also experienced problems which were caused by inherited apocalyptic traditions.

The Book of Revelation lies within the matrix of apocalyptic tradition represented by other writings of the New Testament. It addresses issues which arose because of the Church's awareness of a "delay" of the Parousia. A primary concern of the author is to reintroduce an eschatological motivation into the life of early Christian communities. The Book of Revelation reminds the Church of her eschatological significance, and therefore, reminds her members of the importance of following the Lamb.
RESUME

Cette étude cherche à mettre d'Apocalypse en rapport avec les préoccupations apocalyptiques de la communauté chrétienne primitive. Ces préoccupations intéressaient avant tout le moment où devant se produire la Parousie, et l'impact de son attente sur la vie de l'Eglise. Le Christianisme primitif connaissait des difficultés consécutives à l'attente de la Parousie imminente. Par ailleurs, le fait que cet événement ne s'est pas produit a créé d'autres préoccupations. L'Eglise a également connu des problèmes créés par ses traditions apocalyptiques.

L'Apocalypse Johannique se trouve dans la matrice de la tradition apocalyptique représentée par d'autres écrits du Nouveau Testament. Elle porte sur des problèmes qui ont surgi à cause de la conscience dans l'Eglise de la Parousie "retardée." Un souci fondamental de l'auteur est de réintroduire un mobile eschatologique dans la vie des communautés chrétiennes primitives. L'Apocalypse rappelle à l'Eglise sa signification eschatologique, et par conséquent, rappelle à ses membres combien il est important de suivre l'Agneau.
PREFACE

Quotations from scripture, except where otherwise noted, are from the Revised Standard Version (1971) of the Bible. When Greek has been used it follows the text of the third edition of The United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament (Nestle-Aland, Novum Testamentum Graece, ed. XXVI).

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INTRODUCTION

The object of this thesis is to help place the Book of Revelation in the life and teaching of the early Church. The focus of this study lies in placing the Apocalypse in relation to apocalyptic issues which confronted early Christian communities.

The role apocalyptic plays in the development of Christian eschatology is the subject of much debate in modern scholarship. At the turn of the century apocalyptic ideas were recognized as an important part of the eschatology of the early Church. With the advent of the "de-mythologizing" school and that of "realized eschatology" in the first half of the twentieth century, apocalyptic eschatology was considered a superficial by-product of a bygone era. As a result, the study of the Book of Revelation became much less of an imperative for many scholars. It is only


in the last decade that New Testament scholars have again inquired into the significance of apocalyptic thought during the first hundred years of the Church.

The Apocalypse of John has itself remained an enigma. Many of the conventional or standard methods which proved useful in interpreting New Testament writings have not yielded much fruit for understanding the Apocalypse. Its date is still debated, and so also its historical setting. This study seeks therefore to shed some light on these basic questions. Rather than responding to these questions by examining "internal" and "external" evidence, a novel approach has been attempted.

The method used here involves isolating the apocalyptic issues which were of concern to early Christian congregations. The course these issues took in the life of these communities, and in the teaching of the Church, provide a "framework" within which the Apocalypse can be placed. Once this "framework" is established by locating apocalyptic issues in the rest of the New Testament, the place of the Apocalypse can be discovered through an examination of its response, if any, to these issues.

The meaning of "apocalyptic" is controversial. A rather narrow definition of apocalyptic is adopted here; one that will help us recover the apocalyptic concerns of the first-century Church and also remain within the bounds of scholarly consensus. All passages which are generally agreed to be apocalyptic concern the Parousia or Day of the Lord. They refer to or describe a future reality for which history has not provided a precedent.

These references, therefore, make use of mythological imagery found in the Church’s inheritance from Judaism and from its Hellenistic environment. Apocalyptic is defined here as those expectations, ideas, or teaching which refers to the future consummation of the age. Issues are defined here as the problems or questions which arose in particular communities together with the response of particular Churches to these problems. Apocalyptic issues are the problems arising in Christian communities regarding the Parousia, or Day of the Lord, together with the resolutions of these problems by the Church as reflected in New Testament writings.

The New Testament testifies to the existence of apocalyptic issues in two ways. In some instances direct reference to the existence of such an issue may be made in a particular passage. The second way involves an indirect reference. An issue may be "reflected" in a particular passage; upon examination the passage is obviously a response to a problem of an apocalyptic nature within the community.

This study will not attempt a fresh examination of apocalyptic passages. Secondary literature will be used to establish, where possible, current scholarly "consensus" with regard to the issue behind a particular passage. Where no consensus is apparent, passages will be discussed in greater detail.

The first chapter of this thesis concerns problems arising from the Church’s expectation of an imminent Parousia. The second deals with issues

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... it is the eschatology which is truth and it is the myth which is the dress - but also ... it is the necessary dress. There can be no "entmythologisierung" ("de-mythologizing") of apocalyptic.
arising from the "delay" of the Parousia. The third chapter involves apocalyptic traditions inherited by the Church which proved problematic for early Christians. The last chapter attempts to place the Book of Revelation in terms of the issues discussed in the first three chapters. It is hoped that this thesis will be a positive step in the clarification of a profound and complex early Christian work.
CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE EXPECTATION OF AN IMMINENT PAROUSIA

The New Testament, in so far as it involves the writing down of oral tradition, reflects a time when the Church had become aware of "the delay of the Parousia." Much of the New Testament, therefore, reflects apocalyptic issues which concerned the Church during this period. Nevertheless, the gospels preserve traditions from an earlier period when the expectation of an imminent Parousia had caused different difficulties for the Church.

There are several possible reasons why the Church of a later period would preserve apocalyptic traditions from the past. One reason is the obvious desire to preserve the sayings and traditions attributed to Jesus and the Apostolic circle. Certain dominical sayings had by this time acquired a status which secured their preservation. A second possible reason is that the resolution of a problem caused by "imminent expectation" remained helpful to the later Church in answering perennial questions about the nature of the Parousia.

1 When the word "tradition" is used in this study, it carries the specific meaning of the Greek term δόγμα. It refers to the inherited, or received teaching of the Church. Cf. R. Bultmann, Theology of the New Testament, 2 vols. tr. by K. Grobel (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons 1951-55), vol. 2 (1955) p. 119f.
Three types of issues arose because of the Church's expectation of an imminent Parousia. They were (1) the fear of missing out on the Parousia, (2) the question of the status of those who had died before the Parousia, and (3) the question of an "interim ethic."

1. The Fear of Missing Out on the Parousia

The problems to be discussed here deal mainly with particular fears among some members of the first generation. Basically the fear was that some people, either because they were not in the right place or not among the right group, might miss out on the Parousia. Passages which counsel the Church not to be concerned about the time or place of the Parousia were probably once addressed to such fears. These traditions also point to false claims and mistaken notions about the Parousia as the source of these problems.

These fears can perhaps be expressed in terms of questions which apparently were on the minds of some of the earliest Christians. "Can the Parousia happen while I'm not aware of it?" "Will I recognize the Parousia for what it is?" "Where will the Parousia take place?" "Will the Lord return on the Mount of Olives, to Jerusalem, Galilee, or in the 'hills of Judea'?" "And if so, should we not be waiting where the Lord

Traditions which may have caused some to believe that the places listed were possible locations for the Parousia may have included: Zech. 14:4 for the Mount of Olives; Jerusalem was the site of resurrection appearances, and was also the seat of the Mother Church; W. Marxen, Mark the Evangelist, tr. by J. Boyce et. al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press 1969) pp. 75-92, argues that Mk. 14:28 and 16:7 calls the disciples to Galilee to await the Parousia; Mk. 13:14b for the "hills of Judea".
Questions like the ones posed above are reflected in sayings preserved in the synoptic gospels as Mark 13:21, Matthew 24:23-38, Luke 17:21-24, and 17:37. Among these are the complex of "Lo here, Lo there" sayings which include Mk.13:21, Mt.24:23,26, Lk.17:21,23. These sayings are addressed to a situation in which false claims are being made about the Parousia. The problem is presented concisely in Mark 13:21a:

And if any one says to you, "Look, here is the Christ!" or "Look, there he is!"...

and resolved by Mk.13:21b-22:

...don't believe it. False Christs and false prophets will arise and show signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect.

The resolution of the issue is simply an exhortation to the effect that the community is not to be misled by such false claims. The consolation offered to those who wonder about the existence of such claims is that they were predicted beforehand and as such are a fulfillment of prophecy.

3 It cannot be determined if these sayings are all from the same literary source, or whether they come down to their respective writers from different sources in the tradition. For our purposes, it need only be asserted that the sayings reflect the same kind of problem. False claims about the time or place of the Parousia were causing anxiety among believers.

4 It will be argued in Chp. III, that the "Lo here, Lo there" sayings in as much as they are part of the Marcan and Matthean versions of the eschatological discourse, are part of traditions which concerned the tumultuous events surrounding the fall of Jerusalem (66-70 A.D.). If so, the "Sitz im Leben" of these sayings is the messianic/apocalyptic enthusiasm stirred up by the Jewish war. The possibility that these sayings originated from some period of heightened enthusiasm before the war cannot be excluded; in this case the sayings were added to the discourse as further examples of mistaken Parousiac expectation.

Matthew and Luke both reflect the fact that the nature of the problem was not simply that false claims were being made about the identity of the returning Lord, but that there was also anxiety about the place and the recognition of the Parousia itself. Thus we read in Matthew 24:26:

So if they say to you, "Lo, he is in the wilderness," do not go out; if they say "Lo, he is in the inner rooms," do not believe it.

The question reflected in this verse is twofold. One aspect, to be discussed later, involves the general question about the place of the Parousia. Another, concerns whether the Parousia will be experienced only by a select few, or by all. Matthew 24:26 may reflect actual occurrences in the Matthean or earlier community, involving people who withdrew into the wilderness to wait for the Lord, or who waited in private conclaves.6

Luke indicates how the community became susceptible to these claims when one of the two versions of the "Lo here, Lo there" saying is prefaced with Lk.17:22:

The days are coming when you will desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and you will not see it.

6 The phrase "in the wilderness" may also be a reference to the several messianic pretenders who Josephus, Bellum Judaicum II.258-263 and VI.285-315, mentions as having arisen in the tumultuous period of the Jewish War. Because the phrase "inner rooms" is reminiscent of the room with the locked door in John 20, and maybe the "upper room" of Acts 1:13, this verse may be a reference to over-zealous believers seeking to recreate the experiences of the earliest Christians.
The phrase "days of the Son of Man" refers to the Parousia. It is the enthusiasm, the longing within the community that leads to questions and speculation about the Parousia. This same longing, if surrendered to, may cause one to believe that what one wants to happen is in fact happening, and as such lead to mistaken claims about the arrival of the Lord.

The solution offered by both Matthew and Luke to this problem is a saying about the universal impact of the Parousia. Matthew 24:27 reads:

For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

The saying informs the hearer that "the manifestation of the Messiah will not be reserved for a small company of initiates... the Parousia will be clear to all." It also stresses the fact that there will be no mistaking the occurrence of the Parousia "any more than one can

7 See I.H. Marshall, The Gospel of Luke (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1978) p. 659; E.E. Ellis, The Gospel of Luke, The New Century Bible, ed. M. Black (Greenwood: The Attic Press, 1977) p.211. The alternate view, that the phrase refers to the days of the historical Jesus, (e.g. Dodd, Parables p.82 n.2; H. Conzelmann, The Theology of St. Luke, tr. by G. Buswell, (London: Faber and Faber, 1960) p.105 n.3) may not be all that contradictory to the sense of the passage as it is being interpreted here. The running "here or there" may be a search for Jesus as He appeared during His life time, this then is contrasted to the looking forward to the consummation of the age.

8 Cf. Lk.21:8.

9 Par. Lk.17:24.

mistake the occurrence of lightning which is universally visible."\textsuperscript{11}

The third evangelist, who uses the "Lo here, Lo there" saying twice (Lk.17:21,23),\textsuperscript{12} thus also presents two ways in which the problem can be resolved. One way is the solution arrived at above with the use of Lk.17:24. The second way seeks to resolve the issues of false claims about the time of the Parousia. The passage which addresses this aspect of the issue is Lk.17:20-21:

Being asked by the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God was coming, he answered them, "The Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed (\textit{μετὰ θερίσεως}); nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold the Kingdom of God is in the midst of you."

These verses serve as an introduction to what follows.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore they should not be interpreted in isolation, but should be interpreted in light of the problem regarding false claims made about the Parousia.\textsuperscript{14}

The saying resolves this problem by giving the reader a clear picture of the exact nature of the false claims. The phrase "\textit{μετὰ θερίσεως}" indicates that the problem stems from people trying to calculate the time of the end. The evangelist does not negate the

\textsuperscript{11} Marshall, p.660.


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., p.103.

\textsuperscript{14} The Pharisees would then become foils representing those who hold incorrect views regarding the time of the Parousia.
value of signs, but he does condemn a certain attitude about the predictability of the Parousia. Therefore, it can be assumed that the "signs of the times," probably the events of A.D. 66-70 and the presence of false Messiahs, had caused some members of the primitive community to believe that the arrival of the Lord can be predicted or that it could come secretly.

Luke 17:20-37 is the evangelist's teaching on the Parousia. It is made up of sayings which may originally have dealt with problems caused by "imminent expectation." The section taken as a whole, however, addresses the evangelist's time; that is, problems caused by the "delay." Luke 17:20-21, is a good example of a solution reached in an earlier period which proved helpful in later times by answering perennial questions such as those concerning the time of the Parousia. The resolution of the issue with Lk.17:21b, "ἰδον γὰρ ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν τοῖς ὑιῶν τοῦν," can for the evangelist's time be interpreted as an exhortation on the sudden manifestation of the Parousia. This in itself addresses the problem of moral laxity which arose because of the delay of the Parousia.

The resolution of the issue both as a problem caused by "imminent expectation" for the primitive community and one brought on by the

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15 The word σημείον does not appear in this verse; Cf. Lk.12: 54-56, 21:7-36, especially vv.29-31.
16 Lk.12:56.
17 See note 4 on the Sitz im Leben of the "Lo here, Lo there" sayings.
18 See Chp. II, sec. 2 below.
"delay of the Parousia" for the Church at the time of the evangelist was the same. When the Parousia occurs it will be present "in your midst." There will be no mistaking it. The time for "watchfulness" will be over (Lk.21:36), so there will be no signs (Lk.21:10-31). The Kingdom of God is itself the reality to which the signs pointed (Lk. 21:31). Thus when the Kingdom of God has come there will be no need to go "here" or "there" to look for it. Kümmel reads Lk.17:20-21 in this way:

The Kingdom of God will not come according to calculations made in advance, nor will any search have to be made for it; for lo, the kingdom of God is present in our midst.19

The false claims, "Lo here, Lo there," respond not only to confusion regarding the time of the Parousia, or to questions of exclusivism, but also to anxiety regarding its location. The saying which resolves the issue, "as lightning flashes from east to west . . . .," betrays this other aspect of the problem. The saying teaches that the Parousia will be universal and omnipresent. Matthew, addressing the


That there is much debate concerning the present tense and the meaning of the phrase "in your midst" (Cf. Kümmel, Promise pp.32-35; also Marshall, pp.654-656.) need not concern us. It is enough to note that for the evangelist the Kingdom of God is integrally related to the person of Jesus, whether present in the person of the historical Jesus (c. A.D.30) or in the future. Kümmel, Promise p.154 states:

The approaching eschatological consummation will allow the Kingdom of that God to become a reality who has already allowed His redemptive purpose to be realized in Jesus.
issue further, adds 24:28 to the "Lo here, Lo there" saying. This same verse is used in Luke 17:37 where it is a response to a specific question:

And they said to him, "Where, Lord?" He said to them, "Where the body is, there the eagles (οἱ ἄγριοι ) will be gathered together."

The question presumably means "Where will the Parousia be?" or "Where will we be gathered together for it?" The third evangelist has used the saying as the conclusion to his discourse on the Parousia. This may point to the importance the question of locality had for the primitive community. To those who wonder where they should be, and how they should gather, the evangelists respond, just as eagles, or vultures, are gathered around a carrion, so too believers will be gathered for the Parousia. It is not something to be worried about; it will be a natural process like the gathering of birds.

By the time of the evangelists the universality of the Parousia is a well established teaching in the tradition. This is reflected in the use of Daniel 7:13 as teaching regarding the Day of the Lord. If the use of Daniel 7:13, as teaching on the Parousia, in Mark 13:26,

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory,

\[20\] Cf. Mk.13:27/Mt.24:31, and II Thess.2:1. Marshall, p.669, notes that the saying as found in Luke follows more easily the line of thought left off in 17:23. This is precisely where the saying is found in Matthew. It is a response to the "Lo here, Lo there" problem.

\[21\] Alternate interpretations of the verse stress the visibility of the Parousia. Men cannot miss seeing the Parousia any more than vultures can miss seeing a carrion (Marshall, p.669), or the Parousia will be as clearly indicated as the presence of a carrion is indicated by the presence of vultures (Hill, p.322).
is ambiguous with reference to the universal visibility of the coming of the Son of Man, its combination with Zechariah 12:10 in Matthew 24:30 is not. Matthew 24:30 reads:

... then will appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven, and all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds, with great power and glory.

This tradition could not have been known in communities which were anxious about missing the Parousia. It seems reasonable to conclude that Mt. 24:30 was compiled either in response to this issue, or after it was resolved.

Another example of a problem caused by false claims is found in II Thessalonians 2:1-2. The passage reads:

Now concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our assembling to meet him, we beg you, brethren, not to be quickly shaken in mind or excited (σωλευθήσασθε ἵνα ἐπιστῇμεν μὴ γι' ἐπιστασίᾳ), either by spirit or by word, or by letter purporting to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come (ὡς εἶστι ἐνεστηκέν ἡμέρα τοῦ κυρίου).

The problem is that some information about the Parousia could cause a "continuous state of nervous excitement and anxiety." It is not clear whether the Thessalonians are already in such a state, or if the author anticipates the situation. Either case, the situation must have been

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22 The question of Pauline authorship has little bearing on the argument which is to follow. If the letter were not written by Paul, it was still written by someone who felt that particular issues needed to be addressed. The letter still bears witness to difficulties which confronted early Christian communities.

familiar to the author. The problem is caused by the claim that the Day of the Lord has come. The belief of those who could hold to this notion is unclear. The perfect voice of the verb in the phrase "ἐστι ἡ ἡμέρα Του κυρίου" indicates that the belief involves an occurrence in the past which is now present. Many scholars have interpreted this to mean that the Parousia has been somehow internalized by these claimants. This is the usual explanation, because interpreters find it hard to understand how any one who read Paul's description of the Parousia in I Thessalonians 4:16-17, or who had come into contact with any Jewish or Jewish Christian teaching on the Day of the Lord, could possibly think that the Day of the Lord had already come. It therefore had to be thought of as a personal, or spiritual experience. The problem with any "internalization of the Parousia" interpretation of II Thess. 2:2 is that, if this was the case, the author would not have argued against it as he does in 2:3-9.

The author argues that certain things must still happen before the Day of the Lord can come. If the problem arose because people were internalizing the Parousia, he would have taught them the correct understanding of the Parousia itself (that it is an all encompassing event, something that cannot be missed by anybody). Instead, he tells them not to be "shaken" because the "rebellion" must still occur, and


25 Best, p.276f..
furthermore "the man of lawlessness" must be "revealed" and must "take his seat in the Temple of God."

Whether the Thessalonians are already shaken, or the author of the epistle is warning them not to be when they hear false-claims, the passage may indicate that false claims to the effect that the Lord has descended somewhere with His angels were being made by some people somewhere. Rumours to this effect may have been rife in times of "imminent expectation." If so, the Thessalonians either were, or would be anxious about failing to see this event. They may, furthermore, be caught up in a state of anxious anticipation at the thought that the consummation of the age is about to take place. What does one do? Where would one assemble to meet the Lord? (II Thess. 2:1) These and similar questions could be at stake in this passage.

The author's concern is that the community might be deceived about the time of the Parousia. He, therefore, informs the Thessalonians that they ought not to be deceived. Certain things have yet to be revealed before the Parousia can occur (II Thess. 2:3-9). Claims made to the effect that it has already come are premature.

The idea that Christians will be gathered together for the Parousia, which is expressed in II Thess. 2:1 is also found in Mark 13:27 and Matthew 24:31. The emphasis in the gospel verses is on the fact that God, or the Son of Man and His angels, will do the gathering. As such these passages reflect the traditional Jewish apocalyptic hope in

26 If the letter is Pauline, the Thessalonians were told in I Thess. 4:16 to await this type of event. They may not be aware that this event is to be universal.
the reconstitution of Israel, the gathering of the exiles on the Day of the Lord.\textsuperscript{27} In II Thess. 2:1 it is unclear whether the emphasis is on the act of assembly by the community or an act of gathering by God.\textsuperscript{28} The former is more probable because it is reasonable to assume that false claims of the sort discussed above would not cause anxiety in communities which were familiar with these Jewish traditions. These false claims would only be a problem for Gentile Churches which had not yet assimilated the Church's Jewish heritage from the primitive community. Jewish Christians and communities in which sayings like Mk.13:27/Mt.24:31 were known would not be confused by such false claims. It is because these kinds of problems occurred in early Gentile communities, and probably still occurred for new converts later in the first century, that traditions about the universality of the Parousia became useful teaching to be included in the gospels. These traditions also satisfied second and third generation curiosity about the Parousia even though problems arising from "imminent expectation" were no longer the dominant issue facing the Church.

2. The Question of the Status of Those Who Had Died Before the Parousia

Another issue that arose in the first generation was the question of the status of those who had died before the return of the Lord.


\textsuperscript{28} Best, p.275.
This problem is reflected only in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

The problem in Thessalonica was that some members of the community were grieving. This problem arose after Paul had left the newly founded community. Paul felt that the Church would be comforted if it were given some further information or teaching about the Parousia.

1 Thess. 4:13 reads:

But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others who have no hope.

The problem does not concern the status of loved ones who have died before they had heard the Gospel. This is indicated by Paul's reference to the "dead in Christ" in 1 Thess.4:16b.29 It is not exactly clear what new teaching Paul expects will assuage the grief of the Thessalonians. What is clear, is that the Thessalonians were familiar with the death and resurrection of Jesus (1 Thess.4:14). It is also clear that Paul expects what he tells them about the Parousia and the general resurrection in 4:14-17 to console them (4:18), and to resolve the problem. The fact that the Thessalonians were grieving...

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29 The "dead in Christ" cannot refer to vicariously baptized loved ones, even though this seems to have been a practice in Corinth (1 Cor.15:29). If it were, the problem would have already arisen and would have been resolved with this notion of vicarious baptism.

The problem in Corinth was most probably anguish over the status of those who died before hearing the Gospel; vicarious baptism seems to be the solution arrived at for this particular problem. See H. Conzelmann, A Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians, tr. by J.W. Leitch, ed. by G.W. MacRae, Hermeneia - A Critical and Historical Commentary on the Bible, ed. by H. Koester et. al. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press 1975) pp.275-276.

The New Testament, it must be noted, does not seem to address the issue of those who have died before the coming Christ, except perhaps in 1 Pet.3:19. The salvation of Old Testament Saints, for example, seems to be assumed: Mk.12:26-27 & par.; Jn.8:56; Heb.11f. This issue was probably resolved among the earliest believers, and was therefore not a burning issue by the time most of the New Testament was written.
as "others do who have no hope" militates against the idea that they
had heard anything about the general resurrection of the dead.\(^{30}\)
Why
Paul would not have told them about the general resurrection while he
was with them is also not clear. Given the apocalyptic setting in
which he preached, with its expectation of an imminent Parousia,\(^{31}\)
and coupled with the fact that Paul was in Thessalonica only for a short
time (2:17), he simply may have found no occasion to bring up this
topic, though he certainly had spoken about the Parousia itself (5:1ff.).
The Thessalonians, who believed with Paul that they would be alive for
the Parousia (4:15), were probably not grieving for themselves. They
were grieving for their loved ones. Part of this grief is surely,
therefore, disappointment that the Parousia did not come before their
friends had died.\(^{32}\)

Paul, perhaps using a primitive credal formula,\(^ {33} \) establishes

\(^{30}\)In I Corinthians 15:18-19, Paul tells those who do not believe
in the general resurrection that without this hope they are to be
"pitiéd". It is implied in what follows that the doctrine of the
general resurrection and the transformation of the living at the Par-
ousia constitutes the hope of the Church. Cf. pp. 73-75 below:

\(^ {31}\)Cf. I Cor.7:29; Ro.13:11-12.

\(^{32}\)Other interpretations of this passage include: A.L. Moore, The
by W.C. Van Unnik et. al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1966) pp.108-109,
argues that "the cause of their sorrow is clearly not disappointment
over the non-arrival of the Parousia. . . it is anxiety over whether
(and how) Christian dead would experience the first festive phase of
the Parousia." Best, p.181 similarly feels that the single phrase "the
dead shall rise" "is insufficient as a first introduction" to the doctrine
of the general resurrection. He argues, therefore, that Paul would al-
ready have told them something about the resurrection of the dead.
"What he apparently did not do was to give a chronological position to
the resurrection in relation to the Parousia and so the Thessalonians
thought the dead were going to miss the later. . . ."

\(^ {33}\)"Jesus died and rose", Best, p.187.
the Thessalonians' understanding of the general resurrection in their
confessed faith. I Thess.4:14 reads:

For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again,
even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him
those who have fallen asleep.

Paul then informs the community about the general resurrection, and its
relationship to the Parousia in I Thess.4:15-18:

For this we declare to you by word of the Lord, that
we who are alive, who are left until the coming of
the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep: For the Lord himself will descend from
heaven with a cry of command, with the archangel's
call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God.
And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we
who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up
together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord
in the air; and so we shall always be with the
Lord. Therefore, comfort one another with these
words.

The cursory reference to the "highlights" of the traditional picture of
the Day of the Lord, the cry of command, the archangel, and the sound
of the trumpet, indicates that these things were probably already known
to the Thessalonian community. Paul is therefore placing the new in-
formation about the resurrection of the dead into the picture of the
Parousia already held by the Thessalonian community. He does this with
the words "first" and "then" in 4:16b-17a.34

34 It is interesting to note that Mark omits any mention of a
trumpet in its version of the eschatological discourse, even though
Matthew mentions it in a parallel passage, to Mk.13:27. Neither
evangelist associates the gathering of the elect with the resurrection,
unless Matthew implies this with the trumpet call. Luke also omits
any reference to the sound of the trumpet.

The call of the trumpet is associated with the return from the
exile in Is.27:13. Hill, p.323, believes this is the context in which
Part of the consolation Paul offers is the comforting notion that at the consummation of the age believers will all be brought together. The dead and the living, together, neither "preceding" the other will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord. The Parousia among other things is an answer to the pain of separation.

It is unlikely that the problem as discussed above was felt the same way in any of the Jewish Christian Churches. They were already familiar with the doctrine of the general resurrection. They would not grieve as "those who have no hope."

3. The Question of an "Interim Ethic"

The expectation of an imminent end of the world radically changed the believer's attitude to the world, and therefore to the things of this world. This world for the believer is "passing away" (I Cor.7:31b). However, since the Kingdom of God was at hand, but not yet fully manifest, the primitive community developed an "interim ethic," a way

Matthew's reference to the trumpet in 24:31 should be interpreted. Beest, p.197, argues that the trumpet call is associated with theophanies of YHWH in Ex.19:13,16,19, and 20:18. It is associated with the Day of the Lord in Zech.9:14, and appears again in the Pauline corpus in I Cor. 15:52. Here it is directly associated with the resurrection of the dead. Conzelmann, Corinthians, p.291, states that its use here is a "standard apocalyptic requisite;" he cites 4 Ezra 6:23 and Syb.4:173. These references concern the end-time in general and do not specifically mention the resurrection of the dead. In the Book of Revelation there are many trumpet calls, though they are all sounded in the context of the end; none are directly tied to the resurrection of the dead. It is possible therefore, that it is Paul who has associated the sound of the trumpet, which originally was meant to announce the presence of YHWH, and the return from the exile, with the resurrection of the dead expected at the consummation of the age.
of life appropriate to and in preparation for the imminent crises and
consummation of the age.\textsuperscript{35} In the earliest stages of the Christian
community this ethic apparently took the form of a radical rejection of
all worldly attachments.\textsuperscript{36} As the community realized that there might
be an extended sojourn in this world, many aspects of this ethic of
radical rejection had to be modified. The Church had to adjust to a
possible long wait for the Parousia.

The synoptic gospels were written at a time when the realization
of the "delay" had already made itself felt in the life of the Church.
The gospels as whole reflect this time when the Church realized that
it had to be prepared for an extended stay in the world, while at the
same time it had to be prepared for the consummation of the age. The
synoptic gospels do, however, preserve traditions in the form of
sayings and parables of Jesus which reflect a time when the radical
rejection of worldly attachments was the norm. The Pauline epistles
reflect situations which are similar to those reflected in these
synoptic traditions, but they also reflect a transition from the
"radical rejection" ethic to a "delay" ethic in which some compromise
with the world is deemed necessary.

\textsuperscript{35} On the nature of the relationship between this ethic and the

\textsuperscript{36} See M. Hengel, \textit{Property and Riches in the Early Church}, tr. by
J. Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1974); J.G. Gager, \textit{Kingdom and Community},
Prentice-Hall Studies in Religion Series, ed. by J.P. Reeder and J.F.
Wilson (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc. 1965) pp.19-57; G. Theissen,
\textit{The First Followers of Jesus}, tr. by J. Bowman, (London: SCM Press,
\textit{The Proclamation of Jesus}, tr. by J. Bowden (New York: Charles
At one time preparation for the Parousia meant a radical rejection of worldly ties: material, familial, and perhaps political. Need for the rejection of material possessions is attested in many passages. Luke 12:33-34 reads:

Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Chapter twelve of the Gospel of Luke is the part of the evangelist's teaching on the proper preparation for the coming eschatological crises. Luke 12:25 teaches that "man's life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." Luke 12:16-21 includes "The Parable of the Rich Fool" which teaches the transitory nature of wealth in the face of death, and Lk.12:22-31 gives assurances to the faithful that those who have given up all their wealth and property need not be anxious because God will provide for them as He does for "the birds" and the "lilies." Luke 12:33-34 then follows with the imperative "πωλήσατε" (sell) adding the note of urgency. The reason for this urgency, which is also the reason for the rejection of material possessions, is made clear in what follows. Luke 12:35-40 teaches the believer to be prepared for the Parousia. In these verses it is made clear that the radical rejection of the world is a way of preparing oneself. Those who are caught unprepared will not find the Parousia a blessing, but

37 See Marshall, pp.508-509.
will find in it unexpected distress like the coming of "a thief in the night." 38

The radical rejection of material possessions indicated in the passage discussed above is also reflected in passages such as the "Story of the Rich Young Man" and subsequent discussion on the meaning of discipleship (Mk.10:17-22 and par.). "The Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man" (Lk.16:19-31) illustrates the hazards of wealth, while the value of selling or giving up everything one owns for the Kingdom of God is taught in the "Parables of the Hidden Treasure and the Pearl" (Mt.13:44-46). The latter parables are couched between two other parables dealing with the Last Judgment, and so they are presented in an eschatological context. Whether or not they originally belong in such a context, these passages still reflect the attitude of the primitive community towards possessions and their proper place in view of the Kingdom of God. As such they are best explained as having arisen in a milieu in which this world and its wealth are seen as transitory. The rejection of material ties to the world was seen as necessary preparation for the world to come. 39

This same expectation of the imminent end of the world is probably also responsible for the situation addressed in II Thessalonians 3:6-13. Some members of the Thessalonian community had stopped working. In view of the fact that elsewhere in the letter difficulties arising

38 See pp.35-59 below, for further discussion on the use of the "thief in the night" simile in this passage.

from "imminent expectation" are being addressed, it is more than likely that those who have stopped working have done so in view of the imminent end, which makes work irrelevant. 40

The radical rejection of the world by the primitive community is also reflected in passages regarding family ties and marriage. Matthew 10:37 reads:

He who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. . . .

and Luke 14:26:

If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes even his own life cannot be my disciple.

This same attitude with respect to family ties is also found in passages like Lk.9:58-62/Mt.8:20-22, Mk.10:28-30 among others. 41 These passages reflect the belief that all worldly relationships are qualified by the imminent Parousia. 42 Matthew 12:46-50 teaches that true bonds are grounded in the service of God:

Here are my mother and my brothers! For whosoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.

Similarly, Jesus' answer to the Sadducees concerning the resurrection of the dead at the end of the age shows that marriage ties were

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41 See Theissen, pp.10-11, 31-32; Jeremias, Theology, pp.223-227.

42 Cf. Gager, pp.32-34; Hengel, p.29.
considered relevant only in this world and not in the next (Mk.12:18-27 and par.). I Corinthians 7, furthermore, attests that in view of the imminent end some Corinthians, perhaps following Paul's example, were refraining from marriage. These attitudes towards marriage may perhaps reflect a desire on the part of the primitive community to anticipate the Kingdom of God in this world.

The passages mentioned above all reflect an ethic of the earliest enthusiastic Christian communities in which the Parousia was expected momentarily. This situation, specifically with regard to the Jerusalem community in its earliest period, is recalled in Acts 4:32-37:

Now the company of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one said that any of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had everything in common. . . There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were possessors of land or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid them at the Apostles' feet; and distribution was made to each as any had need.

In what follows Barnabas is cited as "a concrete example of the spirit of sacrifice." It is not hard to visualize the financial difficulties that would arise from such a radical rejection of the world. Haenchen points out,

43 Cf. Gager, p. 34.
44 See Michael Barre, "To Marry or to Burn: Πυρόφοβας in I Cor. 7:9", The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 36 (1974) pp. 198-199.
45 Gager, p. 34.
for example, that the Galilian Christians\(^47\) who were separated in Jerusalem from their means of livelihood must have become along with the widows (Acts 6:1-6) a drain on the resources of the community.\(^48\)

Since some income was necessary to support the community, a system must have developed rather quickly whereby the Apostles decided who would sell off their property and who would not. "Cash" would be needed to support those who had no means of support, but houses were also needed for Christians to gather in (Acts 12:12). To enable the primitive community to function in the world an ethic of accommodation to the world had also to be developed alongside of an ethic which called for the radical rejection of the world.

This "ethic of accommodation" could also be called a "delay ethic" in the sense that it was the result of the obvious fact that though the Parousia was thought to be near, the Church could not ignore the material demands which existence in this world imposed upon it. The "delay ethic" need not always have been in direct confrontation with an "ethic of radical rejection," but it did mean the community—had to adjust to some degree of compromise with the world.

This moderating or compromising aspect of the developing "delay ethic" is evident in the New Testament as early as Paul's letters. There is no directive in any of Paul's letters asking members of his Churches to hand over all their property to the Apostles, as is claimed


\(^{48}\) Haenchen, p.234; See also Hengel, pp.33-34.
for the primitive community in Jerusalem by the author of Acts (4:32-5:11). Paul, furthermore, continued working at his trade in order to support his mission work (Acts 18:3, II Thess.3:7-8). Responding to the problem in Thessalonica, where some had stopped working, the author of II Thessalonians, either Paul or another, tells the community not to support those who can support themselves (II Thess.3:10).

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, we find examples of how a "delay ethic" was being integrated into the ethic which rejects the world in view of the fast approaching end. Paul tells the Corinthians who wonder whether they should remain married or not that in view of the "impending distress" (entifulo y avayly) it is better not to change one's worldly affiliations because soon these things will no longer matter (I Cor.7:26f.). With this teaching Paul modifies the call for a radical rejection of worldly ties and allows them to remain in place as long as this world is present. However, in Paul's teaching to the Corinthians, the radical rejection of the world is not condemned but to some degree internalized. In I Cor.7:29-31, Paul states that though worldly ties exist one must act in such a way that these ties become incidental in their importance for the believer:

I mean, brethren, the appointed time has grown very short; from now on, let those who have wives live as though they have none, and let those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and let those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and let those who buy as though they had no goods, and let those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the form of this world is passing away.

Paul thus moderates the ethic which demands the radical selling of everything one has, or the breaking of all worldly ties. In doing so
Paul maintains the importance of the rejection of the world as a means of preparation for the one to come, but he also recognizes the necessity of dealing with the world in the interim. He has, therefore, redefined the rejection of worldly ties to mean an attitude on the part of the believer.49

Paul's teaching in I Corinthians 7 represents one way the Church accommodated the delay into its conversation with the world. The internalization of the call for a radical rejection of the world was fully developed in the Johannine community by the time I John was written. In I John 2:15-17 we read:

Do not love the world or the things of this world. If any one loves this world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and eyes and the pride of life, is not of the Father but of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever.

The author implies that if one is attached to the world, if one has the "lust of it," as it "passes away" one will pass away with it. The author wants to stress that the members of his community should not love the things of this world, which is a particular attitude with respect to one's life in the world.50

The Church's accommodation to the delay also took another direction. In time the Church simply rejected an ethic which demanded

49 Conzelmann, Corinthians p.133, notes that Paul's advice "is not to withdraw into the safe and unrestricted realms of the inner life, but to maintain freedom in the midst of involvement"; thus "eschatology really determines the conduct of life" and not the ways of the world.

complete abstinence from worldly activity. This turn of events is clearly reflected in the parables of "The Unjust Steward" and "The Ten Maidens."

"The Parable of the Unjust Steward" (Lk.16:1-13) is used by the evangelist as a response to the crises caused by the delay of the Parousia. More precisely, in view of the delay the parable was used as a corrective for those who in their enthusiastic expectation of the Parousia found no reason to deal with money. This parable can perhaps best be understood against a background similar to that proposed for II Thess.3:6-13. People caught up in an eschatological fervor express their "imminent expectation" by not working or dealing with money.

The tone of Lk.16:8 reveal the apocalyptic context for the parable. Here the "sons of this age" are compared with the "sons of light":

The master commended the dishonest steward for his shrewdness; for the sons of this world (οἱ ὑόι οὖν άλαγοι Τῶν Τῶν) are more shrewd in dealing with their own generation than the sons of light. The use of such phrases indicates a sense of imminence with regard to the end of the age. In light of the contrast drawn between the "sons of light" and the "sons of this age," the next verse counsels the believing community (the "sons of light") on how to behave while one is in this world. The understanding that the "sons of light" are not of

52 See p.25 above.
this age and therefore of the ways of mammon is presupposed. Not being involved in the ways of mammon would also have to have been recognized as a virtue; otherwise, no counsel would have been necessary. The imperative of the parable is clarified in Lk.16:10-11. In view of the delay, the proper use of money is to be applauded as an indication of responsibility. However, one can use it but not serve it; one is to be faithful to God in one's use of "unrighteous mammon" (Lk.16:13).

Let us conclude this section with reference to "The Parable of the Ten Maidens" (Mt.25:1-13) which vividly contrasts two attitudes towards the expectation of the end of the age. The "foolish maidens," apparently believing the bridegroom would arrive momentarily, take no extra oil with them for their lamps (Mt.25:3). The "wise maidens" had prepared for the possibility of a delay by taking extra flasks of oil (Mt.25:4). The bridegroom is delayed, and all the maidens fall asleep. When the bridegroom finally does arrive, the foolish maidens do not have enough oil for the wedding. The parable does not condemn those who fall asleep, as does "The Parable of the Householder" (Mt.24:42-44/ Lk.12:39) or "The Parable of the Doorkeeper" (Mk.13:34-36). They all fall asleep. Those who are not prepared for the possibility of a delay are condemned; they will not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. The five "foolish maidens" are left outside the wedding, behind a shut door with no recognition from the Lord. The Parable clearly teaches that the allowance for the possibility of lengthy wait is proper preparation for the Parousia. The parable concludes with a word of warning to those who presume to know that the hour of the Parousia is near:

Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour!
CHAPTER TWO

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY THE DELAY OF THE PAROUSIA

Time passed and the Parousia did not occur. Thus questions arose with respect to the Church's expectation of the early arrival of the Lord. These questions needed some sort of resolution. The primitive community thought of itself as an "eschatological congregation." The earliest Christians believed that they were the people who would experience the fulfillment of Jewish prophecy concerning the coming of the Kingdom of God. They not only believed that they were living in the "last times," but that they were the people of the end-time, "the chosen," "the elect," and "the saints." Since this eschatological expectation, or hope, was basic to the self-definition of the primitive community, resolution of this issue became vital to the life of the Church.

The "delay" of the Parousia is discussed here only in so far as it is an apocalyptic issue, that is only as it concerns the Church's expectation of the Parousia and its effect on the moral life of the community. Problems of this nature fall into two basic categories:

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1 See Bultmann, Theology vol.1, pp.37-42.

2 Ibid., p.38.

3 The Christological, and theological implications of the "delay," for example, will not be discussed here.
(1) Questions regarding the time of the Parousia; (2) The danger of moral laxity.

1. Questions Regarding the Time of the Parousia

Questions regarding the time of the Parousia probably arose under a variety of circumstances. Since the primitive community believed that they were the people of the end-time, the longer the congregation had to wait for the Parousia, the more questions regarding its time would become acute. In the earliest days the answer "soon" would suffice. However, as the Parousia failed to occur, some people may have found reason to question their faith; this in turn would cause a crisis in the teaching and practice of the Church. Answers were needed to questions such as: "Why hasn't the Parousia occurred yet?", and "When will the Lord arrive?"

The time of the Day of the Lord has been a perennial problem for those who hold an apocalyptic world-view. These same kinds of questions had been addressed by most apocalyptic writers of the Inter-Testamental period.\(^4\) The result of reflection upon this issue was the idea of a divine plan.\(^5\) The apocalyptists of the Inter-testamental period "interpreted the whole of history - past, present, and future - in

\(^4\) Russell, p.96ff.

terms of God's unifying purpose. Their idea of God's purpose did not only include Israel, but all peoples, nations, and the material universe itself. All creation took part in the drama of history. The apocalyptic perspective also perceived creation to be "directed to a single goal - the establishment of the Kingdom of God - in which the divine purpose will be vindicated once and for all." The early Church inherited the belief in such a plan from apocalyptic Judaism.

The apocalyptic perspective on history is evident in the New Testament in such passages as Galatians 4:4, where Paul speaks of Jesus' birth.

... when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of woman...

... and in the eschatological discourse (Mk.13 and par.). The eschatological discourse, like other passages which either presuppose or refer to a divine plan, seeks to place the situation of the Church in the context of the plan. The discourse need not, however, be read as

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6 Russell, p.218.

7 Charles, Eschatology p.183. In the course of distinguishing between apocalyptic and prophetic eschatology Charles, p.183 observes: Apocalyptic not prophecy was the first to grasp the great idea that all history, alike human, cosmological, and spiritual, is a unity - a unity following naturally as a corollary of the unity of God preached by the prophets.

8 Russell, p.223.

9 Ibid., p.218.
a Christian version of a timetable for the end. Rather, it is the evangelist's assurance to his community of its place in the plan, and that despite appearances nothing has gone wrong. Furthermore, scholars have argued that the authors of the gospels of Matthew and Luke present the Gospel in terms of a "salvation-history." By means of this concept these synoptic writers have attempted to account for the "delay" by placing the Christian community in greater historical perspective. This perspective carries with it the meaning that the Church will have a specific redemptive function to fulfill before the Parousia. In these gospels, the Church is presented as instrumental in the salvation of the world. In so far as the activity of the Church

There is little agreement as to whether the systematization of history into "times and seasons" in books like I Enoch, Jubilees or Daniel is actually to be read as timetables. References to various "times" or time sequences may, with the use of sacred numbers, have been only meant to be indications of certain kinds of time, or ages, rather than actual years. L. Hartmann, "The Function of Some So-called Apocalyptic Timetables," New Testament Studies 22 (1976) p.8, argues: What function does a timetable have, i.e. the presentation of Jewish history until the author's days and on into the consummation? ... it is not a theoretical-informative one in the sense that it forms a calendar at the disposal of the informed reader, nor is it a chronicle of the future from which the privileged reader may gain enlightenment. But it assures the man of faith that he is not out of God's sight, that the evil of his own time is foreseen, that God will annihilate the present injustice, and that he will do so in the consummation of times, which is near.

Cf. Mk.13:23, and pp. 96-100 below.

is set into the context of history as a unified whole, this understanding is a development and transformation of the Jewish apocalyptic concept of a divine plan. This idea, the people of the Messiah as a part of a redemptive history directed by God, probably prevailed throughout the early Church. Thus we read in Ephesians 1:9-10:

For he has made known to us in all wisdom and insight the mystery of his will, according to his purpose which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fulness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.\(^{13}\)

This inherited perspective, or view of history, shaped the Church's understanding of both the problem of the non-occurrence of the Parousia and its solution. It was because the members of the Church believed there was a plan, that the Parousia could be understood as being late, delayed, or on time, that is according to plan. The resolution of the problem by the early Church reflects her understanding of the plan. The Church either taught that the Parousia, when the plan is better understood, is still on time, or that the Parousia should have occurred but God has changed the plan thus delaying the Lord's return. Only in this latter sense is the Parousia properly delayed. In the former case the Parousia only seems delayed from the perspective of some members of the community.

The early Church tended to resolve problems caused by the non-occurrence of the Parousia in basically three ways. The first two involved teaching that there is actually no "delay." One way was to

teach that certain signs had yet to be revealed, or that certain prophecies had yet to be fulfilled, before the Lord would return. A second way involved teaching that the time of the Parousia is not known by the Church. The third solution involves the teaching that God has delayed the Parousia; it was supposed to have come, but God has held back the coming of the end until His redemptive purposes are accomplished.

The first way of resolving the problem was integrally tied to the early Church's expectation of the "messianic woes." This expectation is part of the Church's inheritance from Jewish apocalyptic. The notion of the "messianic woes" is presented in the New Testament without much introduction. The earliest readers are expected to be familiar with the idea.¹⁴

The "messianic woes" are the tribulations that were expected to occur before the Day of the Lord. These woes would be due to a last attempt by the powers of evil to overthrow the powers of good.¹⁵ The idea goes back at least as far as Daniel 12:1f., and Zechariah 14:13. This time of cosmic travail is also mentioned in books such as I Enoch (91:5-9; 80:1-8), and Jubilees (23:13-15) in the Inter-testamental era. In New Testament times, the "messianic woes" are often described by means of the birth process in which new life can emerge through pain. A very early use of this metaphor, as an illustration of the calamity before the messianic age, is found in one of the Thanksgiving

¹⁴For example, the "woes" are alluded to with the metaphor of labor and child-birth in I Thess.5:3, and Mk.13:8. If the readers of these passages had no prior understanding of the "woes," and no familiarity with the metaphor, these passages would make little sense.

¹⁵Russell, p.234f.
Psalms from Qumran (1QH i 6-10):

I am in distress like a woman in travail with her first born, when her pangs come, and grievous pains on her birth stool, causing torture in the crucible of the pregnant one; for sons have come to waves of death, and she who conceives a man suffers in her pains; for in waves of death she gives birth to a man-child; with the pains of Sheol he bursts forth from the crucible of the pregnant one, a wonderful counselor with his power; yes a man comes forth from the waves.

II Thessalonians 2:1-12 is a good example of the Church's teaching that certain signs have yet to be revealed and certain prophecies fulfilled before the Lord will come. The problem in Thessalonica was due to the expectation of an imminent Parousia by members of the community; in this passage the author is addressing those who believe, or who may believe, that the "day of the Lord has come." His teaching to those who may hold to this belief, however, reflects the awareness of the "delay," or non-occurrence of the Parousia on the part of the Church. In effect his resolution of the issue deals with the question of why the Parousia had not come. In II Thess. 2:3 the author tells the community:

Let no one deceive you in any way; for that day will not come, unless the rebellion (διαστασία) comes first, and the man of lawlessness (ὁ ἀνωτάτους υπὸ ἀνομίας) is revealed, the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God proclaiming himself to be God.


17 See pp.14-16 above.
The Church still awaits the "rebellion" and the manifestation of the "man of lawlessness." Furthermore, it awaits the fulfillment of the prophecy that the "man of lawlessness" will take his seat in the Temple of God. 18

The term ἀναστασία probably refers to the Jewish apocalyptic belief that the final consummation will be preceded by a great turning away from God in Israel (Jub.23:14ff.; I QHab 2:1ff.; 4 Ezra 5:1ff.; also Mt.24:10-12; I Tim.4:1; II Tim.3:1-9). 19 The term "man of lawlessness" refers to the tradition of the eschatological adversary. In Inter-testamental Jewish writings there are references to a figure who will oppose God at the end of the age. The adversary appears in two forms. On the one hand, he can be a mythological figure, an evil

18 This prophecy is probably based on Dan.11:36ff., and was reinforced by Caligula’s threat to set up his statue in the Temple around 40 A.D. (See D.E.H. Whiteley, Thessalonians, New Clarendon Bible ed. by H.P.D. Sparks (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) p.100) A literal reading of II Thess.2:4 lends support to a pre-70 A.D. date for the writing of the letter. The verse would refer to the Temple still standing. "Τὸν Βασίλειον Τοῦ Θεοῦ" was understood to be a reference to the Jerusalem Temple late in the second century by Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses V. 30:4. G. Milligan, St. Paul’s Epistles to the Thessalonians, (London: Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1908) p.100, argues:

... the nature of the context, the use of such a local term as καβίσκα, and the twice-repeated def. art. (Τὸν Βασίλειον Τοῦ Θεοῦ) all point to a literal reference in the present instance, a conclusion in which we are confirmed when we keep in view the dependence of the whole passage upon the description of Antiochus Epiphanes in Dan.11:36f.

However, some scholars interpret the phrase metaphorically to mean the heavenly temple, e.g. W. Neil, The Epistle of Paul to the Thessalonians, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary ed. by J. Moffatt, (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1950) p.164f.

archetype such as Satan, or Beliar. On the other hand, the adversary can be a figure which is generally recognized to have a human referent, such as the Adversary in Daniel who is generally recognized to be Antiochus Epiphanes.

In II Thessalonians 2:9-10 we read:

The coming of the lawless one by the activity of Satan will be with all power and with pretended signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are to perish, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved.

The description of the Adversary found in II Thessalonians appears to be a unique combination of traditional motifs which are found in Jewish apocalyptic literature. Most scholars agree that the "man of lawlessness" is not a human figure. II Thess.2:9, however, also distinguishes him from Satan. The eschatological adversary pictured here seems to be a combination of both the traditional characteristics of a

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20 E.g. see Assumption of Moses 10:1ff.; I Enoch 54:1-6; also the figure of Beliar in the "War Rule" found at Qumran.

21 Antiochus Epiphanes is recognized in Dan.7:8,25,11:36f. by N.W. Porteous, Daniel, Old Testament Library, ed. by G.E. Wright et. al. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965) pp.107,112f., and 156ff., for example. According to Russell, p.277, Antiochus or Herod the great may be the referent of Assumption of Moses 8:1ff.; he also argues that the Dragon in the Psalms of Solomon may be a reference to the Roman general Pompey.

22 Cf. Best, p.289.

23 See Moore, Parousia, pp.111-113; Best, p.288ff.; also Whiteley, p.100; Milligan, p.98; Neil, p.164; against this view J.E. Frame, A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistles of St. Paul to the Thessalonians, The International Critical Commentary, ed. C.A. Briggs et. al. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1912) p.233f., argues that the adversary is a human tool of Satan.
mythological evil archetype, and the human adversaries of the people of God. The eschatological adversary in II Thessalonians

1) usurps the prerogatives of divinity (2:4),
2) is empowered by Satan (2:9a),
3) comes with power and false signs and wonders (2:9b),
4) deceives (2:10b),
5) causes those who refuse to love the truth to perish (2:10a).  

II Thessalonians teaches that the Parousia will involve the defeat of the eschatological adversary. This final combat has still to take place. II Thessalonians 2:8 reads:

And then the lawless one will be revealed and the Lord Jesus will slay him with the breath of his mouth and destroy him by his appearing and his coming.

II Thessalonians thus gives evidence that the Church, or some in the Church, taught those who asked "When?", or "Why not now?", that there are still signs to be revealed and prophecies to be fulfilled before the advent of the Lord.

The synoptic eschatological discourse (Mk.13 and par.) also bears witness to the presence of this kind of teaching. Mark 13:7 warns the community not to misread certain signs, thinking that they herald the Day of the Lord itself:

And when you hear of wars and rumours of wars, do not be alarmed; this must take place, but the end is not yet.

24 Further identification of the Thessalonian adversary may be impossible. Best, p.288, argues:
There are . . . many difficulties in the identification of the rebel and our lack of information on Paul's original oral teaching (to the Thessalonians) prevents us from solving them.
Other passages in the discourse indicate that at some point the Church believed it must fulfill its mission before the Parousia. Mark 13:10 reads:

And the gospel must first be preached to all the nations.25

The second way of resolving the problem of the non-occurrence of the Parousia was to teach that the time is unknown. To those who feel that something has gone wrong because the expected time for the Parousia has passed, the Church teaches that the expectation of the Parousia at a particular time is unfounded. The time cannot be predicted, and so one should not be shaken when expected dates for the Parousia are found to be false. These instances are not examples of divine promises which have been broken but human inability to predict the time of the Day of the Lord.

This way of resolving the issue is found mainly in the synoptic versions of the eschatological discourse. The Marcan and Matthean versions of the discourse teach that all the signs which have been prophesied, or made known by the traditions of the Church, have been fulfilled by the time of the writing of the Gospels.26 The Church, therefore, only awaits the Parousia itself. No more signs are expected; "he is near, at the very gates" (Mk.13:29). There is therefore

25 Cf. Mt.24:14; Lk.21:24. According to E. Küsemann, Commentary on Romans, tr. by G.W. Bromiley, (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1980), pp.306ff. and 312, Paul's belief that he must preach the gospel to the world before the Parousia may be related to these passages.

26 This interpretation of Mark 13 is argued more completely in Chap. III, sec.2 (B) below.
no reason not to expect the Parousia at any time. The time of the end, however, is left unanswered, and so indefinite (Mk.13:32, Mt. 24:36). In view of the fact that the evangelists felt there was time for gospels to be written, read, and used by the Church, they allowed for the possibility that this indefinite period could be lengthy.

The third evangelist reworks the Marcan version of the discourse in order to make explicit the possibility of a lengthy wait for the Parousia. The apocalyptic prophecies in Lk.21:8-23, like their Marcan parallels, have by the time of the evangelist been fulfilled. The third evangelist, therefore, before he relates his version of the prophecies concerning the end itself, inserts 21:24: "... until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled." The fulfillment of this prophecy must precede the cosmic cataclysm (21:25-26) which heralds the coming of the Son of Man. In making this insertion, the evangelist prepares the reader for a possibly extended period of time before the Parousia. Since this prophecy is not delimited, the Parousia could still come at any moment. The emphasis of the passage, highlighted by the plural "times," is on a long indefinite period.

The teaching that the time of the Parousia is unknown best illustrates the belief that God's plan is still in effect. Nothing has gone wrong. Doubts raised by questions about the time of the Parousia are not addressed with reference to various elements of the divine plan,

but are resolved with statements about the limitation of our ability to predict God's will with regard to the time of the end. This teaching is exemplified in Mark 13:32:

But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father.

Scholars generally agree that this saying stems from very early in the tradition. Some hold that the saying is a creation of the early Church, while others believe that it may be an authentic saying of Jesus. Kümmel, responding to those who argue the former position, states "there is no reason to create an even greater difficulty by ascribing to Jesus ignorance of the final date in order to remove the difficulty of the delay of the Parousia." What is established by this verse is that Jesus did not give his followers an exact account of the day or hour of the end. This saying may have been used in the early years to stress the unknown hour of the Parousia while still keeping alive the Church's expectation of its imminence. The point of the verse in Mark 13 is to emphasize the certainty of the Parousia, or

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30 Kümmel, Promise p.42.
the reality of the day of the Lord, in the face of the Church's ignorance of the time. If Jesus did not know the hour of the end in order to carry out His work of salvation, then the members of His Church do not need to know the exact time of the Parousia in order to carry out their assorted tasks in this world. Mark 13 thus bears witness that the Lord taught the Church that no-one except the Father knows the time, not even angels can speculate on the matter. The same teaching is found in Acts 1:7. Here it is presented as a saying of the Risen Lord:

"It is not for you to know the times or seasons which the Father has fixed by His own authority." Acts 1:8 counsels members of the Church to bear witness to the Gospel, "to the ends of the earth," even in the face of this uncertainty about the time. This solution to the issue of the time of the Parousia is, therefore, itself an exhortation. It counsels the Church not to be

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31 Matthew adopts Mark's version of this saying (Mt.24:36). Luke omits it. E. Franklin, Christ the Lord: A Study in the Purpose of Luke-Acts, (London: S.P.C.K., 1975) p.14, thinks that this is because the evangelist wanted to avoid the "note of uncertainty" inherent in the verse; he thus replaces the verse with 21:34-36 stressing preparedness for the Day of the Lord. Conzelmann, Theology, p.131, who stresses a continuity between Jesus and the resurrected Christ in Luke's theology, feels the omission of Mk.13:32 indicates that for "Luke" "the Son" did know the hour. He also interprets Acts 1:7 together with the omission of Mk.13:32 to mean that the evangelist has to explain why Jesus taught so much about the last day and nothing about its time; since this is a problem for the early Church, he places his version of the saying in Acts, which as far as the community is concerned has the same practical information as Mk.13:32 but here does not compromise the evangelist's Christology (p.179).

32 Haenchen, p.143, believes that this is the same saying which is found in the gospels as Mk.13:32. The third evangelist omitted it from his gospel saving it for Acts where it directly answers the question of the delay for the early Church.
preoccupied with calculating the time of the end. The correct manner for the Church to prepare for the return of the Lord is to "Watch!" (Mk.13:37, Lk.21:36).

The third kind of solution to the problem of the non-occurrence of the Parousia is the teaching that there is indeed a delay. The Church may correctly have expected the Parousia, but God has altered His plan and delayed the Parousia according to His own purposes. This resolution of the issue stems from a particularly Biblical, or Hebrew, conception of God. God actively participates in history. He is in dialogue with His people. He can proclaim His will, and, He can change it when He feels the circumstances require it.

The eschatological material in II Thessalonians 2 possibly provides us with an example of this kind of resolution for the problem. II Thess.2:6-7 reads:

And you know what is restraining him now (καὶ νῦν ὁ Καισάρ ὁ ἁγιός αὐτοῦ ἵνα οὐκ ἔστησης ἐκ τῆς ἡσυχίας τῆς σαρκός) that he may be revealed in his time. For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only he who now restrains it will do so until he is out of the way (μόνον ὁ Καισάρ ὁ ἁγιός αὐτοῦ ἕως ἐκ τῆς ἡσυχίας τῆς σαρκός).


34 YHWH's relationship with Saul the first King of Israel is a good example of this dialogue. YHWH makes Saul King, but when Saul does not respond properly to the commandments of God and His prophet YHWH "repents of having made Saul King" (1 Sam.15:11). Cf. H.W. Hertzberg, I & II Samuel: A Commentary, Old Testament Library, ed. by G.E. Wright et. al. (London: SCM Press, 1964) p.126. A further example is to be found in the Book of Jonah. God proclaims the destruction of the city Nineveh (3:1-5). When the people of the city repent, God repents of having wanted to destroy the city (3:10). Cf. Ex.32:14; Amos 7:3; Jeremiah 18:7-8.

The author of the epistle tells the Thessalonian community that something is restraining, or holding back, the revealing of the eschatological adversary. Whatever this "restraint," or "restrainer" is, it will continue to be in effect until the proper time.

The explanation of the non-occurrence of the Parousia as a delay may also be alluded to in the gospels. Hints of this teaching are present in many of the Parousia parables. In "The Parable of the Wicked and Faithful Servants" (Lk.12:41-48; Mt.24:45-49) the wicked servant begins to act in a morally reprehensible manner after declaring "my master is delayed" (Lk.12:45; Mt.24:48). "The Parable of the Door-keeper" (Mk.13:35-37) teaches that "the master" could come "in the evening, at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning," likewise "The Parable of the Waiting Servants" (Lk.12:35-38) teaches the Church to be watchful even if the Lord arrives "in the second or third watch." "The

36 Many scholars have tried to understand what the author is referring to with the use of the term "κατακτών" or "Κατάκτωρ." The κατακτών has been interpreted by Tertullian, De Resurrectione Carnis XXIV, and subsequently by most classical interpreters of the passage as a reference to the Roman Empire. In recent times the κατακτών has been interpreted to mean both a good or an evil force. O. Cullmann, Christ and Time, tr. by F.V. Filson (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1950) pp.164ff., followed by Moore, Parousia pp.113-114, influenced by Mk.13:10 believe that the author is referring to the Gospel or the Gospel preacher. The end is restrained by the preacher, or the power of the Gospel until those who are to be saved have a chance to hear the Word. Best, p.301, and Whiteley, p.101, agree that it is unlikely the author is referring to an essentially good force like the Gospel. Whiteley, p.101-102, remarks that the phrase "until he is out of the way" in Greek as well as in English is an expression better suited to an enemy of God's purpose than to a man who was to play an important role in carrying it out. The confession of St. Augustine 1500 years ago in De civitate Dei 20:19 (tr. by M. Dods) is still appropriate today:

we who have not their (the Thessalonians) knowledge wish and are not able to even with pains understand what the Apostle referred to . . . . I frankly confess I do not know what he means.
Parable of the Ten Maidens" (Mt.25:1-13), furthermore, pronounces the maidens who prepare for the delay of the bridegroom (25:5) to be the wise ones. These parables, at least as they are presented by the evangelists, all presuppose an awareness of a delay because they are lessons on how the Church should act in the face of a delay.

St. Augustine 37 sees a possible relationship between "The Parable of the Binding of the Strongman" (Mk.3:27), the II Thessalonian "
Τωτεξύν," and the Church's awareness of the delay of the Parousia. According to St. Augustine "the strongman," Satan, is bound so that "the thief," Jesus, can enter his house and steal his "goods," that is the elect. 38 Since it was part of Jewish apocalyptic speculation, that in the last days evil powers were bound or thrown into prison, 39 it is possible that a Christian community which considered itself to be living in the last times would interpret the present as a time in which the forces of evil were being bound or restrained. Thus the consummate battle between good and evil was being delayed.

This belief could then result in two differing perspectives in which the delay would be perceived by early Christians. For those to whom the delay meant frustrated hopes and suffering (see II Thess.1:5-10) the delay could be seen as a result of evil forces. It is because

37 See also Kümmel, Promise, p.109.
38 De civitates Dei 20:7; Cf. Taylor, p.241.
Satan is still bound, or because the "man of lawlessness" is prevented from being revealed, that his defeat at the hands of the returning Lord cannot take place. Hence, this may account for the association of the "restraint," or "\textit{katapet\'asis}," in II Thess. 2:6-7 with the "son of perdition" and the "mystery of lawlessness." The \textit{katapet\'asis} in this case may be understood as the forces of rebellion which are being held at bay. The fact that this consummate evil is being held in check prevents its defeat at the end of the age.

On the other hand, this evil which is being restrained, or bound up, may also account for the status of those who have not yet heard, or who have rejected the Word of Salvation. These people, including those who have heard the Word and yet have fallen back into their sins, are bound up with and in evil; they are in "Satan's house." They will be lost, or destroyed with Satan if he is destroyed. Therefore, for those who are concerned about people who are bound up with Satan, either themselves, other members of the Church, or those who have not heard the Gospel, the delay affords precious time necessary for salvation. Such passages as Mark 13:10, or Romans 11:25 are good representations of this view. The delay is time necessary for preaching the Gospel, and so it is a mark of God's compassion. He delays His final judgment of evil; He will not defeat Satan until His elect are freed from Satan's clutches. Satan will not be defeated until his "goods" have been plundered. The elect must first be separated from Satan, lest the wheat perish with the tares (Mt. 13:29).
The delay of the Parousia was therefore understood in the early Church as both an indication of God's compassion, and as an indication of the evil in the world. It is because there is so much evil, that more time is needed to free God's people from Satan's ways.

By the second century, the view that the delay was a mark of God's compassion seems to have dominated the teaching of the Church. The writer of II Peter responds to the question of the delay in II Pet.3:9 as follows:

The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forebearing towards you, not wishing any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

2. The Danger of Moral Laxity

The delay of the Parousia was a threat to the moral life of the early Church. The expectation of an imminent Parousia was a powerful motivating force behind the high moral standards held by the primitive community. The "ethic of radical rejection," which called for a renunciation of worldly ties and activity, and the "developing delay ethic," which stressed non-attachment to the ways of the world, were both meaningful in the life of the community specifically in view of "the impending distress," or "the passing away of the form of this

40 At the end of the second century, Tertullian, Apologeticus 39:2, tr. by S. Thelwall, from The Ante-Nicene Christian Library ed. by A. Roberts and J. Donaldson, defending the practices of the Church before Roman authorities states:

We pray, too . . . for the welfare of the world, the prevalence of peace, for the delay of the final consummation.
world" (I Cor. 7:26,31). When this motivating force was called into question by the fact that the Day of the Lord had not come when expected, there arose the danger that some members of the Church would again be caught up in the workings and cares of this world. Involvement in buying, selling, and other social responsibilities might conflict with or take precedence over the demands of discipleship. More importantly, some people might again revert to a former way of life which the Church held to be immoral and damaging to the believers' relationship with the Lord.

This issue is reflected in several sayings, exhortations, and parables which teach the certainty and sudden manifestation of the Parousia. These passages are predominantly calls for "wakefulness," "sobriety," and "watchfulness."

Calls for "watchfulness" and "sobriety" in the gospels as well as in some Pauline epistles, emphasize the moral implications of preparing for the Parousia. They address problems of moral laxity, and in doing so the gospels along with some Pauline epistles reflect the presence of this particular problem in various Churches.

For Paul, moral laxity is only an issue during the "short" interim before the consummation of the age.\footnote{E.g. Romans 13:11f.} It is a problem for those people who are not aware that the time for the final consummation is near. The calls for "watchfulness" in the gospels may also have originally been used to teach the awareness of, and proper preparation for, the
fast approaching eschatological crises. These sayings, exhortations, and parables, however, have been reformulated by the evangelists to address the problem of preparedness in the face of the delay of the Parousia. For the evangelists the issue arises specifically because of the Church's growing awareness of a possibly extended delay.

The passages in question make use of certain metaphors to achieve their exhortatory purpose. These are the dual metaphors of sleep/wakefulness, and drunkenness/sobriety. These metaphors correspond to the dual metaphor of day/night which has a much broader use in the New Testament. All these metaphors have their roots in Old and Inter­testamental Judaism.

Paul was aware of the problems which could arise when the coming of the Parousia is doubted. Though the situation in Thessalonica, as reflected in I Thessalonians, was not one of doubt, but enthusiasm, problems caused by the delay were foreseen by Paul as a possibility. This awareness on Paul's part is reflected in I Thess.5:1-11. The main issue in Thessalonica was one which had arisen because of the community's "imminent expectation." The community was grieving over the loss of some friends, and was concerned about their status at the Parousia.

42 See Dodd, Parables, pp.122-139; Jeremias, Parables, pp.38-52, 124-126, 126-139; Theology, pp.108, 127-141,244.

43 On the parables in question, see Jeremias, Parables, pp.38-52; also Dodd, Parables, pp.122-139.


45 See pp.18-21 above.
Paul, after having instructed the community on the general resurrection hoping to assuage their grief, consents them further regarding the suddenness of the Parousia. I Thess.5:1-5 reads:

But as to the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need to have anything written to you. For you yourselves know well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. When people say "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as travail comes upon a woman with child, and there will be no escape. But you are not in darkness, brethren, for that day to surprise you like a thief. For you are all sons of light and sons of the day; we are not of the night or of the darkness.

I Thess.5:1 addresses a problem caused by the non-occurrence of the Parousia; it addresses questions about the time. Since the main issue in Thessalonica involves "imminent expectation," Paul is here anticipating a problem which may arise in Thessalonica if grief turns into disappointment of the fact that the Parousia did not occur before members of the community had died. Paul's counsel both re-affirms their belief, that the Parousia will come, and reassures them that they are prepared and will not be surprised when it does come.

Paul counsels the Thessalonians with the use of two metaphors for the Parousia "which bring out its unexpectedness, unpredictability, and yet its inevitability." He tells them that the "day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night" (5:2), which implies the distress

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46 Cf. Best, p.203.
47 Ibid.
48 The thief in the night image also occurs in the Q-passage Lk.12:39/Mt.24:43. Best, p.205, states that "either the Pauline expression could have been expanded into the Q parable or the Q parable could have been summarized in the Pauline phrase." Lovestam, p.86, thinks the image goes back to Jesus; he states, p.96, that "the use of the thief
associated with a robbery as well as the unexpected arrival of a robber. Paul goes on to say that the distress the Day of the Lord brings is as inevitable as the travail of a pregnant woman (5:3b). The distress of that Day will come when people do not expect it, "when they say there is peace and security." Yet its very inevitability is expected. This implied in the metaphor of birth: one may not know the exact time of the birth, but there can be no uncertainty that a pregnant woman will suffer labor pains and give birth.

Paul, who is trained in the rabbinic tradition, makes full use of all the rich implications of the metaphor of light and dark which are found in the Jewish tradition. In Jewish literature "day" has a twofold meaning. It refers to the age to come, as in "The Day of the Lord." It also refers to that "light" which enables Israel to walk, or conduct herself, in a manner which will preserve Israel for the Day of Judgment, that is the Torah. "The night," similarly, is both the darkness which envelopes the lives of those who do not have the light of the Torah to guide them, and it refers to this present age, when the "Children of light," Israel, are at the mercy of those in darkness, the Gentiles.

simile . . . lacks correspondence . . . in the eschatological imagery of the Judaism of that time." The question it seems must be left open.

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49 Løvestam, pp. 86-87.
50 See Løvestam, pp. 8-24.
In 1 Thess. 5:2, the *Day* of the Lord is set in contrast to the 

*night* in which the thief comes. The night refers both to the evil 
deeds of unbelievers, works of darkness, and also this present age 
when these works are being accomplished. The day/night contrast is 
inherent in the idea of the Day of Judgment. Just as things which 
are hidden by the cover of darkness are made visible by daylight, evil 
deeds will be made plain when the Day of Judgment dawns upon this dark 
age. Judgment will descend upon those whose works are evil, since the 
Day of the Lord will bring evil works to light. Judgment descends on 
darkness. It is, therefore, only to those "in the night" that the 
Day will dawn with judgment, that is with the distress associated with 
a thief.

Paul tells the Thessalonians that they are "sons of the day," and 
therefore need not be surprised, or overtaken, (καταλέπτω) when the Day 
of the Lord arrives (I Thess. 5:4). As "sons of the day" they are "in-
heritors of" and "destined for the eschatological day to come."51 
Since they are of the day, that is since their deeds are not those of 
people who are in darkness,52 they will not be distressed when the Day 
of the Lord comes. Their deeds and activity in this world are, and 
should be, those which prepare them for, and which are guided by the 
eschatological day to come. The *Day* of the Lord comes as a thief to 
those in the night, not to those in (of) the day.

51 Ibid., p.49.

52 Cf. 1 Thess. 5:11b.
To the Thessalonians the exhortation remains: "Be sober," and "Keep awake." They are to do so because they are "sons of the day."

I Thess. 5:6-9 reads:

So then let us not sleep, as others do, but let us keep awake and be sober. For those who sleep sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night. But, since we belong to the day, let us be sober, and put on the breastplate of faith and love, and for a helmet the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.

"Sleep" and "drunkenness," which correspond to the activities of the night-time, refer here to a moral way of life which is not enlightened by the way, or hope, of salvation. Being "awake" and "sober," which are activities proper to the day-time, correspond to a way of life which is guided by the light of salvation, and so prepares the believer for the approaching Day of the Lord. It is because the present age is characterized by the evil deeds of the unbelievers that it is called "the night." These deeds will, however, be brought to light by the Day and will be judged. In the interim, "the sons of light," here the Thessalonians, are living in this age of darkness. It is because they are living in this age, that the "sons of the day" need the armor of faith, love, and hope to protect them from the darkness, or evil character of this age. These terms refer to a dynamic way

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53 Cf. Eph. 5:14ff.

54 See Lövestam, p. 22f.

of living, especially in terms of how one relates to other people as well as to God.\textsuperscript{56} Faith, love and hope protect the believer; as one lives a life of faith, active in love, and filled with hope, one's conduct in this world is preparation for the next.

The exhortations to be watchful, sober, and awake, recur periodically in Paul's epistles.\textsuperscript{57} They are ethical exhortations, calls for right living. In Romans 13:11-14, Paul spells out clearly the meaning of being asleep, and what constitutes the "works of darkness." To be "asleep" is to be involved in reveling, drunkenness, debauchery, licentiousness, quarreling, and jealousy (these things surely among many others). The teaching Paul gives his Church in Thessalonica is this: Be certain the Parousia is coming; as long as our conduct does not exhibit the qualities of "the night," or "darkness," then, the Day of the Lord will not dawn upon us with the distress and surprise associated with the coming of a thief. The Thessalonians were certain that the Parousia was coming and were living accordingly (1 Thèss.5:4, 11). Paul knows, however, how tenuous this certainty is in the face of great disappointment and grief, and so in 1 Thess.5:1-11 he seeks to re-enforce the Thessalonians in their hope.

\textsuperscript{56}Cf. I Cor.13.

\textsuperscript{57}Cf. I Cor.16:13; Ro.13:11-14; Also Eph.5:14-20.
By the time the evangelists wrote their gospels, moral laxity in the face of the delay became a major issue. There are repeated calls to watchfulness in the gospels. In Luke 12:35-40, as in 1 Thess.5:1-11, the simile of "the thief in the night" is used to highlight the difference between those who are prepared for the Parousia and those who are not. The evangelist presents his reader with two contrasting situations involving the return of someone to a household. He begins with 12:35 exhorting the reader to: "Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning. . . ." Then the reader is told to "be like" servants "whom the master finds awake when he comes" (12:37a). If he finds them awake, whether he comes "in the second watch, or the third" (12:38), he will "gird himself and have them sit at table," and will "come and serve them" (12:37b). The evangelist then warns the reader in 12:39-40:

But know this, if the householder had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have left his house to be broken into. You also must be ready; for the Son of Man is coming at an unknown hour.

Each of the two situations described above; "The Parable of the Waiting Servants" and the reference to the "Unprepared Householder," by themselves may be understood solely as exhortations on preparedness for the Day of the Lord. Their use in conjunction with one another reflects the need to teach preparedness in the face of the delay (12:38a) which has caused some to become morally lax. This passage

as it stands in the gospel reflects a need to contrast the lot of the prepared with the lot of those who are not.

To be prepared is to keep one's "loins girded" and one's "lamp burning" (12:35). The "lamp" which symbolized the Torah for Israel, here symbolizes "the light of faith in Jesus Christ;" keeping one's "loins girded" means "active preparedness."59 One is prepared by living the life revealed by the light of the burning lamp. To the unprepared (the householder) the Son of Man comes like a thief causing the distress of a robbery; to the "waiting servants" who are awake, he comes "to sit at table," and to serve. The concluding verse (12:40), highlights the reason for the comparison. It expresses a shift in emphasis; the stress is on the certainty of the Parousia rather than on its nearness. This shift addresses doubt with regard to the coming of the Lord. The certainty of the Parousia, in spite of the unknown hour, is implicit in the contrast delineated by the two parables. Either way the Lord comes, to those awake as a fellow servant or brother, but to those asleep as a thief. The certainty of the Parousia is stressed; ignorance of the hour becomes not a reason for doubt but reason all the more for vigilance.60

It is particularly important that this passage is followed by Peter's question in Lk.12:41: "Lord are you telling this parable for

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59 Lövestam, p. 94.

us or for all?" The parable which follows, in answer to Peter's ques-
tion, condemns both those who know the correct conduct for this life,
but use the delay as an excuse for immoral activity (12:45), and also
those who are unprepared for the Judgment due to ignorance of the
correct way of life. The latter are, however, judged with less severity.

Luke 12:47-48 reads:

And that servant who knew his master's will, but did not
make ready or act according to his will, shall receive a
severe beating. But he who did not know, and did what
deserved a beating, shall receive a light beating. Every
one to whom much is given, of him much will be required;
and of him to whom men commit much they will demand the
more.

Peter's question underlines the reason for the inclusion of this teach-
ing in the gospel. The evangelist stresses that the Church, which
both has been told that the Lord is coming, and which knows the way of
life that is proper preparation for His advent, has no excuse when it
lapses into the excesses of the unbelievers.

The problem of moral laxity in the face of the non-occurrence of
the Parousia is also reflected in the three versions of the eschato-
logical discourse found in the synoptic gospels. These versions are
each compiled from various traditions, with Matthew and Luke using
Mark 13 as well as traditions of their own. 61 These traditions, within
the discourse, each address particular problems regarding the Church's

61 For a brief statement on the general scholarly consensus re-
garding the eschatological discourse, see J.D.G. Dunn, Unity and
p.328ff.
expectation of the Parousia. These problems concern such things as
persecution and witness (Mk.13:9-13 and par.), false teachers (Mk.13:
5-6,21-22; Mt.24:11,23-26; Lk.21:8), the dispersion of the Church
(Mk.13:27; Mt.24:31), the destruction of the temple (Mk.13:14f.; Mt.
24:15f.; Lk.21:20f.), and questions about the time of the Parousia
(Mk.13:28-37 and par.) among other things. All these issues needed
some sort of resolution because they could cause doubt concerning the
teaching of the Church with regard to the end-time, and this in turn
causes moral laxity.

The eschatological discourse, though it is made up of these var-
ious traditions, each addressing particular questions about the end-
time, has been compiled by the evangelists in order to address the
greater issue of doubt caused by the delay of the Parousia.62 It is
to this issue, directly, that the concluding verses of each version
of the discourse are addressed (Mk.13:33-37; Mt.24:36-25:46; Lk.21:36).

The purpose of the Marcan version of the discourse is to teach
the Church that nothing prophesied for the end has been left un-
accomplished or unfulfilled, save the end itself.63 The Parousia can
be expected at any time. In the face of this certainty the Church is
exhorted to "Watch" (Mk.13:33,37). This exhortation is punctuated
with a parable which teaches vigilance: "The Parable of the Doorkeep-
er" (Mk.13:35-37). In this parable a servant, a doorkeeper, is left

62 The evangelists were probably addressing in this instance, the
doubt caused by the non-occurrence of the Parousia in conjunction with
the destruction of the Temple; see Chp. III, sec. 2 (B).

63 See Chp. III sec. 2 (B).
waiting at nighttime; it is a time in which people are inclined to fall asleep. The metaphor of wakefulness is used here to illustrate the meaning of vigilance. The Church has been left watchful, or awake, in the night of this present age. It is to be vigilant and live the life proper to those who are awake and not asleep. Mark 13:35-37 reads:

Watch therefore - for you do not know when the master of the house will come, in the evening or at midnight, or at cockcrow, or in the morning - lest he come suddenly and find you asleep. And what I say to you I say to all: Watch.

The evangelist proclaims the certainty of the master's return in spite of the fact that it will be at an unknown hour. The delay is no excuse for sleeping, because the Parousia of the Lord is still expected. 64

The Lucan discourse (Lk.21:5-38) adds emphasis to the fact that the present is a time for the Church to fillfill its mission in the world, with the inclusion of 21:24. Though the Parousia is near, the third evangelist believes the Parousia will not occur until the Gentile mission is accomplished. 65 Rather than include "The Parable of the Doorkeeper," which stresses the sudden, unexpected coming of the Son of Man upon those who are "asleep," the third evangelist concludes his version of the discourse with a group of sayings which expresses in detail the meaning of being found "asleep" at the Parousia. In 21:34, he explicitly calls for vigilance with regard to the cares of this life:

But take heed to yourselves lest your hearts be weighed down with the dissipation and drunkenness and cares of

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this life, and that day come upon you suddenly like a snare;... 

In what follows, the metaphors of "watchfulness" and "sobriety" further address the issue of moral laxity. The evangelist exhorts the Church to "watch" and "pray" it has the strength to escape the disasters of the Last Judgment (21:36). It is implied that one can escape if one is not "weighed down the the dissipation and drunkenness and cares of this life."

"The problem of laxity, especially in doing the will of God, is of particular importance to The Gospel of Matthew. Its version of the eschatological discourse, which for the most part follows Mark 13, includes a great deal of material (60 verses) which expand the Marcan conclusion and add to it. This material deals specifically with the proper way the Church ought to conduct itself during the delay. This in itself reflects the need to reaffirm the fact that the delay of the Parousia does not abrogate the ethics and way of life established in view of the expected consummation of the age.

The Marcan passage on "watchfulness" (Mk.13:33-37) is expanded in Matthew as follows: Mt.24:37-39 compares the present to "the days of Noah," when people lived not knowing the flood would come and sweep them all away; Mt.24:40-44 informs the Church that distinctions with regard to salvation will be made when the Son of Man comes; Mt.24:45-49, which sets up a contrast between "the faithful and wise servant"

66 Cf. Mt. 7:21; Bornkamm, pp.15-24; Carlston, p.46.
and "the wicked servant," teaches that the delay of the Parousia is no excuse for abandoning the correct way of life necessary for enduring the Last Judgment. The "wicked servant" is he who

... says to himself, "My master is delayed, and begins to beat his fellow servants, and eats and drinks with the drunken ... .

In contradistinction to the blessedness awaiting "the faithful and wise servant," "the master" of "the wicked servant"

... will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he does not know, and will punish him, and put him with the hypocrites; there men will weep and gnash their teeth.

The Matthean version of the discourse includes, moreover, a long composite of traditions (25:1-46) which continue his teaching for a Church faced with a possible long wait. After having established the certainty of Judgment for those who are unprepared (24:37-49), the evangelist counsels the Church on the meaning of proper preparation for the Parousia in the face of the delay. Matthew 25 is an example of the evangelist's fully developed "delay ethic." "The Parable of the Ten Maidens" (25:1-13) stresses the need for the preparation of an extended stay in this world. "The Parable of the Buried Talent" (25:14-46) condemns irresponsibility and inactivity during the time allotted the Church before the Parousia. What follows is a discourse/parable on the Last Judgment (25:31-46). Here the evangelist teaches precisely what criteria will be used by the Lord to judge the world when He arrives. The members of the Church will be judged on the basis of whether or not their love for the Lord was made manifest in the world.
The righteous are those who love God by loving humanity, those who show compassion for others.\(^{67}\) This passage, which makes up the conclusion to the Matthean version of the discourse, reflects foremost that there was a need felt by the evangelist to teach members of the Church that their position at the last judgment will depend on how they act in the possibly extended interim before the Parousia.\(^{68}\)

The great emphasis in Matthew on proper living in view of the expected judgment, reflects the degree to which in the eyes of the evangelist the activity of the Church continues to condition its position at the Parousia. The Parousia is certain; its impact as the dawn of judgment or blessing depends on the way the Church conducts herself in the interim. The delay is not a time for irresponsible enthusiasm or moral laxity. The delay is a time for "watchfulness" (24:37-51), preparation (25:1-13), growth (25:14-30), and good works (25:31-46).

As the delay of the Parousia became an issue in Christian communities, the teachers of the Church reaffirmed the certainty of the Parousia, and called for "watchfulness." This is a call for high moral standards. Implicit in this call is the belief that the conduct

\(^{67}\) Against L. Cope, "Matthew 25:31-46 'The Sheep and the goats' Reinterpreted," Novum Testamentum 11 (1969) pp.32-44, who believes that the passage is not intended for the Church; the evangelist, he argues, teaches that the nations will be judged on the basis of their treatment of Jesus' disciples.

of the believer in this world conditions the manner in which the Lord will be received by the believer upon His return. If the believer is "asleep," the Lord will return "like a thief in the night," that is with judgment. If the believer is "awake" when He comes, Jesus will come with blessings "to sit at table" and serve with His servants.

The sayings and parables which call for "watchfulness" were probably used early in the life of the community to focus attention on the approaching crisis. The evangelists have used these same traditions to focus the attention of the community on the proper way of life. The purposes of both the earlier and later use of these traditions are still to some degree the same: preparation for the Day of the Lord.

The evangelists have, however, taken into account the possibility of an extended stay in this world. The possibility that the Parousia may still lie far in the future, perhaps beyond the life-times of some of the readers of the gospels, has caused the evangelists to redefine imminence. There is, at least in Luke and Matthew, a shift in emphasis with regard to the subject of imminence in the calls for "watchfulness." Rather than proclaim the nearness of the Day of the Lord chronologically, these calls stress the need to live a life in view of the certainty of the Day of Judgment. The Parousia is the reality which should provide the context for one's actions. Moral activity is proper to those who belong to the Day which will dawn at the coming of the Lord. Phrases expressing the chronological closeness of that day are used by the evangelists to express the close interrelationship
between one's activity in this world and one's status in the next. Imminence is thus redefined to suit a time when the delay was all too real. To be "awake" and "sober" is to be aware of the immediacy within which one's actions are tied to the judgment. The believer is to be aware of, and live with, the certainty that the Lord is coming and brings with Himself proper recompense. To be "awake" is to be certain that the Parousia is imminent in spite of the delay; it is imminent in so far as the believer's action in the present conditions his or her position at the Parousia. Actions in the present, be they motivated by sin or righteousness, be they acts of repentance, prayer, or the breaking of God's commandments, all have the quality of determining the impact of the Day of the Lord. "Wakefulness" is the awareness that life in this world determines whether the Parousia of the Lord will be the advent of Judgment or blessing.
CHAPTER THREE

PROBLEMS CAUSED BY TRADITIONS INHERITED
BY THE EARLY CHURCH

The early Church inherited many apocalyptic traditions from both ancient Jewish sources and from the primitive community. This inherited teaching, or Ἡ ἡμέρα τῶν ἀπωλειών, comprises part of the Church's revelation of the Day of the Lord.

It is evident upon study of the New Testament that some of these apocalyptic traditions created difficulties for the early Church. These issues accordingly fall into two categories: (1) Problems caused by traditions inherited from pre-Christian sources; (2) Problems caused by traditions inherited from the primitive community.

1. Problems Caused by Traditions Inherited from Pre-Christian Sources

This section examines two issues. The first involves the difficulty which Jewish traditions concerning the general resurrection of the dead posed for Gentile converts. The second issue involves the difficulty which the rejection of the Gospel by most Jews posed for a particular Jewish Christian, Paul. The latter, as an apocalyptic
issue, is concerned specifically with the status of the Jews at the Parousia in light of the promises God made to the people Israel in the days of the Patriarchs and the Prophets.

(A) The Problem of the General Resurrection of the Dead

The doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead is deeply rooted in Jewish tradition by the time the New Testament was written. This teaching probably developed in post-exilic Judaism as a way to account for God's justice in an unjust age. The particulars of the general resurrection vary from text to text. In some Inter-testamental texts only the righteous are resurrected, but most follow Daniel 12

1Charles, Eschatology, p.130f., argues that there arose at some time a need to hope for the redemption of the individual as well as for the reconstitution of the nation. Even so, as the righteous were increasingly oppressed by various captors during the exilic and post-exilic periods, a doctrine which held that the righteous, even if they had been killed, still inherit a share in the coming Messianic Kingdom, would help to resolve questions concerning the righteousness and justice of YHWH. A doctrine of the general resurrection would also be helpful if, as argued by P.D. Hanson, The Dawn of Apocalyptic (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 2nd ed. 1979), apocalyptic thought originated out of a situation of strife within the nation of Israel: if those who were considered righteous had been killed at the hands of Hebrew oppressors, this doctrine would help maintain the belief in God's righteousness in spite of the seeming injustice of such actions. As things stand, however, Russel, p.367, is probably correct in stating that "the historical occasion marking the development of this belief is obscure."

2Russell, p.367f., interprets Is.26:19, following the Syriac and the Targum, as the first reference to the general resurrection in Hebrew literature. Here the reference is only to the righteous. The notion of the resurrection may be implied in Zech.14:5, but it is not explicitly stated until it appears in Daniel 12:2-3.

3E.g. Song of Solomon 3:13; II Enoch 8:5, 65:10.
in which all are brought to life in order to face divine judgment. 4

The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs include both strains of thought: according to the Testament of Judah 25:1-2, the Patriarchs will arise first, then, according to 25:3-5, those "who died in grief" and "who were put to death for the Lord's sake," in the Testament of Benjamin 10:6 the Patriarchs rise first "on the right hand in gladness," and then according to 10:7-8 all people will rise and "be changed, some into glory and some into shame." Like the Book of Revelation (20:4-15) the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs knows of a double resurrection, one for the Patriarchs and Holy Martyrs, then one for the last judgment of all people.

Paul, who was a Pharisee before his conversion (Phil. 3:5), and according to Acts 22:3 was a student of Gamaliel, must have been familiar with much that Jewish apocalyptic had to offer about the doctrine of the general resurrection. 5 Although Paul reinterpreted his beliefs in light of his conversion experience, much of what he preached was rooted in Jewish thought. He taught his Gentile converts some things which may have been "traditional" teaching for the Jews. Even though the "God fearers" in his Greek congregations may have had some previous contact with Jewish apocalyptic speculation, familiarity with ideas stemming from apocalyptic traditions were probably not the rule.

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5 In I Corinthians 2:7, for example, Paul speaks about imparting a "secret and hidden wisdom" to the "mature. Conzelmann, Corinthians, p.62, believes that this is a reference to esoteric rabbinical speculation which involved both apocalyptic and wisdom traditions "which pass into each other."
In Corinth some members of the congregation had difficulty with the doctrine of the general resurrection of the dead. I Corinthians 15:12b reads: "... how can some of you say there is no resurrection of the dead?" The situation in Corinth was one of doubt; the reality of the general resurrection at the end of the age was being questioned. This doubt was the result of scepticism among Greeks in the face of an unfamiliar Jewish belief. The tone throughout the chapter is "gentle;" the "Apostle is anxious not to give offense." Paul is therefore not opposing anyone who is teaching a "heretical" doctrine, but helping

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There is still a great deal of debate regarding the precise nature of the problem in Corinth; see J.H. Wilson, "The Corinthians Who Say There Is No Resurrection of the Dead;" Zeitschrift Fur Die Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft 59 (1968), pp.90-107, for a summary of the present state of the question. Bultmann, Theology vol.1 p.169, believes the problem involves a "gnosticizing party" who denies a bodily resurrection; see also W. Schmithals, Gnosticism in Corinth, tr. by J.E. Steely, (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1971) pp.155-159; and J. Moffatt, The First Epistle to the Corinthians, The Moffatt New Testament Commentaries ed. by J. Moffatt (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 1938) p.240, who believes the problem involves "mystical enthusiasts." Paul's discussion in I Cor.15 does not address mystical or gnostic enthusiasts. Bultmann, who is followed by Conzelmann, Corinthians p.260, recognizes this, and both scholars argue therefore that Paul has misunderstood the problem; thinking that the doctrine of the resurrection has been denied in total, he proceeds to deal with the issue as such.

The argument that some Corinthians found the doctrine of the general resurrection too fantastic has a lot to recommend itself. The view that Paul is misinformed leaves open the question of how he could be so well informed about the Corinthian situation so as to deal with it properly in the rest of the epistle and yet misunderstand the problem behind I Cor.15. Furthermore, once one starts to posit misunderstanding on Paul's part, there can be no limit to exegetical speculation.

7 Robertson and Plummer, p.329.
the Corinthians in their unbelief. Acts 17:32 bears witness to the fact that scepticism among Paul's Gentile listeners when confronted with the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead was not unique to Corinth. 8 I Cor.15:33-34 bears evidence that doubt about the doctrine of the resurrection had weakened the faith of some Corinthians. This was probably the result of debate with fellow Greeks. This doubt had caused some to fall away from the moral way of life which Paul had taught them. I Cor.15:33-34 reads:

Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals." Be sober as one ought, and sin no more. For some have no knowledge of God. I say this to your shame. 9

Paul resolves the issue by tying the general resurrection to the resurrection of Jesus, which is part of the Corinthians confessed faith. Paul asserts the historical bodily resurrection of Jesus by recounting the Apostolic witness upon which the Christian confession is based (I Cor.15:3-11). 10 He then informs the Corinthians that this resurrection of Jesus, to which the Apostles bear witness, is the same kind of resurrection he preaches with regard to the rest of humanity at the final consummation. In I Cor.15:13, Paul flatly states that a rejection of the doctrine of the general resurrection is a rejection of the

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9 The underlined phrase, "ἐκκαταλήξας ἕθες," is translated differently here than in the RSV. The term "ἐκκαταλήξας" when translated "Be sober" better highlights the lapse in morals implied in this passage.

resurrection of Christ:

But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ could not have been raised ...

If this is the case, the whole of Paul's preaching, and therefore the redemption he preached to the Corinthians is meaningless (15:14).

Paul informs the doubters that the resurrection on the Day of the Lord constitutes the hope of the believing community. Without this hope Christian faith is to be pitied, because those who hold to it hold to something which perishes with this life. I Cor.15:17-19 reads:

If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If for this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied.

To some degree the sacrifices the believer makes in this world only make sense if there is a belief in the resurrection and an after-life. These sacrifices make up a large part of Christian life. Why should one put his or her life in danger for others, or abstain from taking part in the revelling and excesses which are the pastime of so many people in this world? I Cor.15:30,32:

Why am I in peril every hour!... What do I gain if, humanly speaking, I fought beasts in Ephesus? If the dead are not raised, "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."

The believer's faith is not futile. God has given the believer a promise in the form of the resurrection of Jesus that death is vanquished. Jesus has been raised as the "first fruits" of the general resurrection. Jesus' victory over death in His resurrection is God's promise of victory over death at the consummation of the age.
The relationship between the general resurrection and Jesus' is made clear with Paul's use of the term "first fruits." The term implies both a promise made by God and the means by which that promise will be fulfilled. I Cor.15:20-23 reads:

But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ.

Adam and Christ are the archetypes which determine the status of human-kind. The assumption is "in Adam" all die - the Gospel which Paul preaches to the doubters in Corinth is that in Christ's resurrection all shall "be made alive." Christ's resurrection and the general resurrection are integrally related in Paul's eyes. As the "first fruits" of the general resurrection, Jesus is not only the first to be resurrected, but His resurrection is also the first installment, or "deposit on a purchase" which God makes on behalf of the general resurrection. Furthermore, "first fruits" "implies a community of nature." It also refers to the Hebrew understanding of the significance of offering the "first fruits" of the harvest to YHWH. When the first fruits of the harvest were offered up to YHWH in the Temple, the whole harvest in a sense was offered up to YHWH, and thus sanctified.

As the "first fruits" of the general resurrection, Jesus' resurrection

11 Conzelmann, Corinthians, p.268.

12 Käsemann, p.237, interpreting Romans 8:23.

13 Robertson and Plummer, p.351.

14 Ibid., pp.351-352.
"embodies all those who are to be resurrected in Him. "Those who belong to Christ" will be made alive, because they have already been sanctified in His resurrection. If the Corinthians, therefore, hold to their faith in Christ as preached to them by Paul, the doctrine of the general resurrection should in no way be a stumbling block for their faith. The resurrection, both Jesus' and that awaiting humanity at the final consummation, constitutes the hope of the believing community.

In I Corinthians 15:35, Paul anticipates questions which were probably asked whenever Paul first spoke about the general resurrection with Gentile converts:

But someone will ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?"

Paul answers these questions by assuring the community that there will be a miraculous transformation of the earthly body into the "spiritual body." He does not explain the mechanics of this transformation, but uses an analogy to help the Corinthians become accustomed to the doctrine. Just as a "dead" seed when planted into the ground is miraculously transformed into a new living plant, the earthly body will also be transformed through death. 15 I Cor. 15:35 reads:

... it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body.

15 This may support Robinson and Plummer's p.366, translation of the phrase "νοσ ἐπιφώμα το ὑμώι" as a rhetorical question "Is it possible for the dead to be raised?", which would not require an explanation of the resurrection process.

body. If there is a physical body, there is also a spiritual body.

Paul refers explicitly to different bodies each proper to its own circumstances (15:39-41,53). The Spiritual body is the body proper to the resurrection. Paul does not teach the immortality of the soul; he does, however, draw a clear distinction between the earthly body and the spiritual one. I Cor.15:50 reads:

I tell you this brethren: flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable.

This statement highlights the degree to which the doctrine of the general resurrection is tied in Paul's thought to his understanding of salvation. The gulf which separates the earthly body from the spiritual also separates people from the Kingdom of God. This separation is overcome by God in a transformation through death (15:36,43-44). It is, furthermore, a transformation accomplished through the death of Christ: He whose death and resurrection are the archetype for the death and resurrection of those who live and die "in Christ" (I Cor.15:20-21; Rom.6:4-9). I Cor.15:36 and 42 reads:

. . . What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.
. . . So it is with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown perishable is raised imperishable.

Paul evidently considers "dying with Christ" (R.6:8) to be the real transforming death. In I Cor.15:51, he says, "not all will sleep," but those who don't sleep "will be changed also." At the Parousia

17 Robertson and Plummer, p.365; Conzelmann, Corinthians, p.281
those who are dead will be raised in their new bodies, while those who are alive will be transformed "in the twinkling of an eye" at the sound of the last trumpet.

According to II Corinthians 5:1-2, this new body is already being kept for the believer in heaven:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here indeed we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling... 18

In the verses that follow Paul again refers to the bodily transformation he expects at the Parousia. Here he expresses his wish that he won't "be unclothed" and "found naked," but "further clothed so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life (II Cor.5:3-4). Paul is referring here, with the metaphor of clothing, to his wish that he remain alive until the Parousia. He wishes he will not have to put off his body in death, "be unclothed" and "found naked," but "further clothed" in the transformation of his physical body that which is mortal into the immortal. 19

Questions concerning the resurrection body, and the resurrection in general, must have been asked in other Gentile Churches at other times. The lack of any mention of problems of this nature in the


gospels or later epistles probably indicates that these ideas became
familiar and generally accepted throughout the later Church. As time
passed Gentiles, became more familiar with Jewish traditions.

(B) The Status of the Jews at the Parousia

This issue concerns the status of the Jews regarding the redemp-
tion promised them by God, in light of their rejection of the Messiah
and the Gospel. This issue is discussed here only insofar as it is an
apocalyptic issue, that is as it concerns God's plan for the end of
the age. In the New Testament this apocalyptic question only concerns
Paul. This may indicate either that the issue was of no interest to
others, or more probably that it was resolved by the time most of the
New Testament was written. It is significant, however, that by the
time Romans was written enough Gentiles thought that the Jews had been
rejected by God, thus forfeiting any hope of salvation, so that Paul
felt he must address them with this question (Ro.11:13-25).

Paul clearly presents the problem and his resolution of it in
Romans 9-11. In Romans 9:1-5 he expresses his anguish regarding his
people and their rejection of the Gospel:

... I have a great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my
heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and
cut off from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kins-
men by race. They are Israelites, and to them belong the
sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law,
the worship, and the promises; to them belong the pat-
riarchs, and of their race according to the flesh, is the
Christ:
Israel is the people to whom God has promised redemption. How could they have rejected the salvation offered them through Christ? What does this mean in the context of God's redemptive plan? Has He rejected Israel, and taken back His word to the Patriarchs? What of His promise?²⁰

Paul tackles this issue by asserting first and foremost God's perogative as creator, His freedom to act. This is clearly stated in Ro.9:18:

So then He has mercy upon whomever He wills, and He hardens the heart of whomever He wills.

Paul's argument in Romans 9-11 presupposes belief in the existence of a divine plan. Paul invisions a "salvation history."²¹ By establishing God as creator, with "free will," Paul establishes God's "right" to His creation.²² He can create ex nihilo, something where there previously was nothing;²³ His perogative to act includes His ability to create history according to His own purposes.²⁴ Paul's understanding of predestination consists of the belief that God can and does act

²⁰ Cf. Ro.9:6,14, 11:1,11.
²² Ibid., p.266.
as the creator, not only of humanity, but of history. His doctrine of predestination is to be understood in the light of God's eternal purposes for His creation, purposes which embody God's right to act so­teriologically.25 God acts with the freedom of mercy.26

Paul understands both Israel's rejection of the Gospel and his own Gentile mission in terms of God's plan. Israel's trespass has a divine origin. Romans 11:11-15 reads:

So I ask, have they (Israel) stumbled so as to fall? By no means! But through their trespass salvation has come to the Gentiles, so as to make Israel jealous. Now if their trespass means riches for the Gentiles, how much more will their full inclusion mean! Now I am speaking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an Apostle to the Gentiles, I magnify my ministry in order to make my fellow Jews jealous, and thus save some of them. For if their rejection means the reconciliation of the world, what will their acceptance mean but life from the dead?

Israel's "trespass" has enabled the salvation of the Gentiles. The divine purpose of this action is highlighted with Paul's use of the phrase "to make Israel jealous." It is a reference to Deuteronomy 32:21, which Paul has quoted to the Romans in 10:19.27 Paul uses Dt. 32:21 to set both his Gentile mission and the rejection of Israel into the context of Old Testament prophecy. As such Israel's "trespass" is presented as part of God's plan for its redemption.28

The notion of "jealousy" expressed in this passage is perhaps

25Käsemann, pp.264-266.
26CraneFieId, pp.472,484.
27Ibid., p.556.
28See Dt.32:36ff.
best understood in the context of the apocalyptic notion "the first shall be last, and the last first," the apocalyptic reversal of the norm.29 "The first" in worldly righteousness, is "the last" to be justified. The Gentile mission is both, that which precedes the full redemption of Israel and that which enables this to be accomplished ("the last," the Gentiles, must first be justified). Since Paul's apocalyptic hope, the redemption of Israel, now means the redemption of the nations, Paul can interpret this conversely to mean that Israel is redeemed because God redeems the nations. As such God's redemptive purposes are being realized in the Gentile mission (hence Paul magnifies it), as well as in Israel's rejection of the Christ which lead to that mission. This is the apocalyptic turning of the tables. Israel is, therefore, still the object of God's redemptive activity even in its "trespass;" its redemption, however, means that the redemption of the nations must first be accomplished. 30

The significance of the phrase "life from the dead" in Ro.11:15 is that it highlights the purpose of the whole passage: the redemption of Israel is the last stage, the zenith, of God's plan of reconciliation

29 See Käsemann, p.304f.

30 Cf. Ro.11:25.

It is also to be noted that the phrase "some of them" in Ro.11:14, refers specifically to those Jews who have been redeemed as a result of the Apostles' work. It does not refer to the fact that those Jews who will eventually be redeemed will only be few in number. Cf. Cranfield, p.559. In Ro.11:13-14, Paul is placing his ministry, which involves the saving "of some of them," into the context of the greater divine plan which encompasses the whole history of Israel, the work of all the Apostles, and the future redemption awaiting "all Israel" at the consummation of the age.
for the world. The phrase refers to the resurrection of the dead on the Day of the Lord. 31

In Romans 11:25-26, Paul brings his argument to a climax, and explains that what is happening to Israel is to be understood "as a mystery" revealed in terms of God's redemptive purpose:

Lest you be wise in your own conceits, I want you to understand this mystery, brethren: a hardening has come upon part of Israel, until the full number of Gentiles come in, and so all Israel will be saved (καὶ οὖτως οᾶς Ἰσραήλ εὐθείᾳ σεῖται); as it is written, "The deliverer will come from Zion, he will banish ungodliness from Jacob."

For Paul, Israel's rejection of the Gospel, its "hardening," is part of God's purpose. As such, it also is divinely limited; it will last only until the "full number of Gentiles come in." Cranfield argues:

While Israel's unbelief was something plain for all to see and not needing to be revealed, the fact that a divine hardening was involved was something which could properly come under the heading of μυστήριον. It could not be known by unaided human reason. 32

When the full number of Gentiles are brought into the community of the people Israel, then the hardening which enabled this inclusion will end. Then God's promises will have been fulfilled; His people Israel will be delivered from "all ungodliness." For Paul, the mystery of

31 See Käsemann, p.307; Cranfield, p.563. Even though according to Käsemann, p.307, the majority of scholars today interpret the phrase figuratively, both he and Cranfield, p.563, agree that it is to be interpreted in light of Ro.11:25. He argues:

Gentile Christians, too, must take into account the eschatological significance of Israel. This is made clear in what follows (11:17-24), which is not parenthetical.

32 Cranfield, p.575.
Israel's disobedience is resolved with his conviction that at the consummation of the age, with the reconciliation of the world "all Israel will be saved."

Paul does not resolve this issue as did the Gentile Church at a later time: to say that the Church replaces Israel as the people of God, "a new Israel."\(^{33}\) In Paul's eyes, the Gentiles are brought into the community of Israel, "wild branches" grafted on to a domestic "olive tree" (Ro.11:17-24). Israel's "hardening" is not a sign of God's rejection, but it is to be understood in terms of the "mystery" of God's activity. For Paul, even Israel's rejection of Christ is a sign of God's love for Israel, because it is through this rejection that both Israel and the nations are redeemed.\(^{34}\) It is through Jesus, crucified and resurrected, that God has begun and will accomplish His work of redemption.

2. Problems Caused by Traditions Inherited from the Primitive Community

The gospels preserve traditions which reflect a variety of circumstances. It is evident that some traditions from earlier periods caused difficulties in later times. These issues will be discussed under two subject headings: (A) The resolution of difficulties caused

\(^{33}\) See Käsemann, p.261; Cranfield, p.448.

\(^{34}\) Cf. Mk:8:31 with 10:45; Jn.10:18; Rev.5:9.
by traditions which delimit the time of the Parousia to the lifetime of the first generation; (B) Apocalyptic traditions reflected or preserved in the synoptic eschatological discourse. The latter includes a composite of traditions about the Temple and the "signs" of the end which were inherited by the gospel writers.

(A) The Resolution of Difficulties Caused by Traditions Which Delimit the Time of the Parousia to the Lifetime of the First Generation

The earliest Christians expected the Parousia to occur in their own lifetime. The gospels preserve some sayings which reflect this expectation. These sayings are presented as "word of Jesus" which herald the coming of the Kingdom of God before the death of some in the first generation. Mark 9:1 (and par.) is possibly the best example of such a saying. It is presented here along with its parallel in Matthew:

And he said to them, "Truly I say to you, There are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Kingdom of God come in power." (Gn, εἰς τὸν θάνατον ἐν ὁλισθήν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ εἰληφθεῖσαν ἐν δυνάμει.)

35 Mk.9:1, 13:30, Mt.10:23, and their parallels.

36 The underlined phrase follows the Authorized Version and The Jerusalem Bible; it differs from the RSV. The precise meaning, and therefore the translation of this verse has been the subject of much debate; see Kümmel, Promise pp.25-36. Dodd, Parables, p.53, prefers "until they have seen that the Kingdom of God has come with power," and so too the RSV. The translation used above is supported by Branscomb, p.154; Taylor, p.385; Kümmel, p.26-27;
Matthew 16:28:

 Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of Man coming in his Kingdom.

 There is a consensus among scholars that Mk.9:1 was an isolated saying before it was included into the gospels. The original setting is therefore obscure. Whether Mark 9:1 is an authentic saying of Jesus, or stems from early Christian prophets, or is another kind of creation originating with the primitive community, this saying, and others like it still represent the belief of the earliest Christians. If this were not the case, there would be no reason for the evangelists to include such sayings in gospels which were meant to be


37 See Nardoni, p.366.


40 Bultmann, History, p.121; Conzelmann, Theology, p.104; Nardoni, p.368-370; N. Perrin, in "The Composition of Mark 9:1," Novum Testamentum 11 (1969) pp.67-70, changes his previous opinion, see n. 35, and argues that Mk.9:1 is a creation of the evangelist. Marxen, p.205, states "a consensus will probably never be reached here."
read by second, third or later generation Christians. 41

The delay of the Parousia meant that these sayings had to be re-interpreted to suit the circumstances of the evangelists; they had to be able to account for the delay. The third evangelist altered the form of his version of the saying (Lk.9:27). He drops the words εληλυθώμεν τῷ συνάξι (come in power) allowing for a reinterpretation of the saying; the emphasis now is on "seeing the Kingdom of God" rather than on its coming in power. 42

The context in which the saying is placed by the evangelists may possibly reflect how this saying was used by the Church in their time. Regardless of its original purpose, the saying is used positively by the evangelists. Though they had to reinterpret the saying to account for the delay, the saying was also used by them to help bolster the community's faith in the Parousia. The context of Mark 9:1 reflects the fact that the saying may have caused difficulties, how these difficulties were resolved, and the positive use to which this saying was put.

By A.D. 73, 43 the death of some of the first disciples, the fall of Jerusalem along with the non-occurrence of the Parousia, the

41 If these sayings had gained dominical status by the time of the evangelists, their content must have been believed true at some earlier time. Had the primitive community not entertained such beliefs, the evangelists, writing between 70 and 100 A.D., would have included these sayings at a great risk to their credibility.


43 A tentative date for the writing of Mark; see p.99, n. 78.
dispersion of the Mother Church, and continued persecution among other factors, contributed to doubt regarding the Parousia. Some sayings of Jesus were probably also cause for doubt. This is evident from the condemnation which directly precedes Mk.9:1, Mk.8:38:

For whoever is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man be ashamed, when he comes in the glory of his Father with the Holy Angels.

Mark 9:1 together with the account of the transfiguration which follows (Mk.9:2-13) addresses this "shame" or doubt regarding the coming of the Lord.

A relationship between Mk.9:1 and the account of the transfiguration has been seen at least as early as the end of the second century in Clement of Alexandria's Excerpta ex Theodoto. Regarding the purpose of the Transfiguration chapter 4:3 reads:

And besides, it was necessary that that word also which the Saviour spoke should be fulfilled, "There are some of these standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man in glory." Therefore, Peter, and James and John saw and fell asleep.

44 See p.94 below.

45 The same order of verses is found in Matthew and Luke.


(In reference to Mk.9:1) What He is actually saying is that they shall not die before they have seen
Furthermore, the author of II Peter sees a relationship between the transfiguration and the promise of the Parousia (II Pet.1:16-21).  

In more recent times many scholars have also seen a relationship between Mk.9:1 and the transfiguration, and thus between the transfiguration and the prophecy of the Parousia inherent in Mk.9:1.  

The evangelist has reinterpreted Mark 9:1 such that the transfiguration account is the fulfillment of the prophecy that the Parousia will be verified by Apostolic witness. His purpose in doing so is not just to "explain away" a "hard" saying of Jesus, but to bolster faith in the Parousia. The transfiguration account is not meant as a fulfillment of the phrase "the Kingdom of God coming in power." Rather, it is meant as a reference to the Apostolic witness of the glory to come. The believer is thus assured that the Parousia is certain. The account of the transfiguration complements Mark 9:1.  

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47 See p. 91 below.  

This is an ecclesiological resolution of the problem. It teaches that the vision of glory to come is preserved in the witness of the Church. Sayings which refer to a Parousia delimited to the first generation are thus reinterpreted to mean that the first generation, here the pillar Apostles, bear witness to the reality of the coming Parousia. The ecclesiological setting, for this saying and for Apostolic witness, is emphasized in the Matthean context of the passages in question. Peter's confession (Mt.16:16) and the subsequent sayings which pronounce Peter the foundation stone of the Church (Mt.16:16-20) serve as a prelude to the teaching on discipleship (16:24) and suffering (16:25-27), and also the coming of future glory (16:28-17:13). 49

This same kind of reinterpretation is probably behind the use of Mark 13:30:

Truly, I say to you, this generation will not pass away before (μὴ πάσχηται τὰ ἄλλα) all these things take place.

An isolated saying, 50 has been used by the evangelist to serve a specific purpose in the eschatological discourse. Mark 13:28-32, addresses the evangelist's community, or situation. There is doubt regarding the Parousia. His purpose is to establish its certainty. This saying is used to ground the belief in the Parousia of his generation in the witness

49 Bornkamm, p.42, argues "The conception of the Church expressed in (Mt.) 16:17-19 finds its counterpart and basis in the Christology and context of 16:13-28." This context probably extends until 17:13.

50 Kümmel, Promise p.60; Bultmann, History p.123; Branscomb, p.239.
of the Apostolic generation. This generation, represented by the pillar Apostles of 13:4, bear witness to the fulfillment of "all these things" mentioned in 13:5-27, and therefore also to the Parousia (13:24-27). The "signs" have been fulfilled; only the Parousia is still awaited. 52 Certainty is provided in the fact that "this generation," the first generation, is witness to the fulfillment of all the "signs" of the Lord's coming. The next saying, Mk.13:31, resolves doubt in the Marcan community resulting from the death of certain members of the Apostolic generation: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." These "words," which promise the Church the Parousia, though "heaven," "earth," and the Apostolic generation, "pass away," are still valid assurance that the Lord is coming. Mark 13:32, which follows, qualifies the delimiting features of 13:30 by leaving open the exact time of the Parousia.

The early Church used these difficult sayings inherited from the primitive community to teach later generations that their hope for the Parousia is grounded in the Apostolic witness of the glory to come. The later datings of the synoptic gospels is significant in this regard. Many of the first generation had probably died, including prominent members of the Apostolic community. If these sayings were still being interpreted as they were in the primitive community, they would have

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51 This does not preclude the possible presence of some members of the first generation among the Marcan community.

52 See pp. 96-100 below.
caused more doubt in the Parousia than faith.

Indeed, by the end of the first century some did question the reality of the Parousia because they believed that some of the traditions handed on to them from the primitive community were in error. I Clement 23:3f. reads:

Wretched are the double-minded, who doubt in their soul and say "We have heard these things even in the days of our fathers, and behold we have grown old, and none of these things have happened to us." ... Truly his will shall be quickly and suddenly accomplished, as Scripture also bears witness that "he shall come quickly and shall not tarry." 53

This is also the kind of situation to which the author of II Peter addresses his epistle; it is a community marked by his "prophecy" in 3:3-4: 54

... scoffers will come in the last days ... saying, "Where is the promise of his coming? For ever since the fathers fell asleep, all things have continued as they were from the beginning of creation."

The author previously in the letter has defended the Church's expectation of the Parousia by referring his readers to the witness of the transfiguration. 55 Early in the second century, the author of II Peter understands the witness of the transfiguration to be an assurance


of the Parousia. Like the synoptic evangelists he has tied together the transfiguration and the promise of the Parousia. II Peter 1:16-18 reads:

For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty. For when he received honor and glory from God the Father and the voice was borne to him by the Majestic Glory, "This is my beloved son, with whom I am well pleased," we heard this voice borne from heaven, for we were with him on the holy mountain.

The Johannine community, however, resolved problems caused by these difficult sayings much differently from that outlined above. In John 21:20-23, the death of the last member of the Apostolic generation probably "caused a crisis in the Parousia expectation of the Church."56

The Fourth evangelist resolves the problem by effectively arguing that the Church has misunderstood sayings like the one recounted in Jn.21:20. John 21:22-23 reads:

Jesus said to him, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you? Follow me!" The saying went out among the brethren that this disciple was not to die; yet Jesus did not say to him that he was not to die, but, "If it is my will that he remain until I come, what is that to you?"

(8) Apocalyptic Traditions Reflected or Preserved in the Synoptic
Eschatological Discourse

There is general agreement among scholars today that the synoptic
eschatological discourse is a composite of different traditions.
Matthew 24 and Luke 21:5-38 are thought to be dependant to some degree
on Mark 13. Mark 13 may not however have originally been a literary
unit but has been compiled by the evangelist. These traditions have

57 Cf. Hill, p.318 regarding Matthew, and Conzelmann, Theology,

58 See Taylor, p.498f.; Beasley-Murray, Mark 13, pp.1-18; Weeden,
pp.72-73; Marxen, p.161; Bultmann, History, p.122; Jeremias, Theology,
123-127; L. Gaston, No Stone On Another, Supplements to Novum Testa-
mentum 23, ed. by W.C. Van Unnik et. al. (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1970)
pp.61-64; Kümmel, Promise, p.104.

Scholars differ on questions regarding the sources used by the
evangelist for the construction of this chapter. Many have believed
that a Jewish Apocalypse lies behind much of the discourse. Beasley-
Murray's extensive study on the history of the exegesis of Mark 13,
Jesus and the Future, (London: Macmillan & Co., 1954) points out the
assumptions behind this theory and its weaknesses; as is shown in pp.
33ff. almost every verse in the discourse has been considered either
part of the so-called Jewish apocalypse, or part of the Christian
additions. Variants of this theory, however, persist until today: e.g.
Kümmel, Promise, pp.94-104; Weeden, p.90f. Still many other theories
have been put forward in recent times: Beasley-Murray, Mark 13, pp.10-
18, upholds the view that the discourse was built upon teaching which
originated with Jesus; Gaston, pp.41-64, argues that the evangelist
compiled the chapter out of sayings of the Risen Lord; and L. Hartmann,
Prophecy Interpreted, tr. by N. Tompkinson, Coniectanea Biblica: New
Testament Series 1 (Lund: GW Gleerup, 1966) believes discourse is the
remnant of a "Daniel Midrash" spoken by Jesus of Nazareth.

This study, proceeding under the assumption that the discourse
in its present form was compiled by the evangelist, inquires into
his purpose, and the function of the discourse as teaching in the
Church at his time. The presentation of the traditions which consti-
tute Mark 13 as a discourse of Jesus, precludes the possibility that
Mark 13 was considered strange or abhorrent on the lips of Jesus by
the Marcan community. Whether these traditions originate with Jesus,
the primitive community, or a Jewish apocalypse, they are used by
the evangelist as Christian teaching addressing issues of importance
for his community.
been brought together in the gospel for specific purposes relevant to the circumstances of the evangelist's community. The purpose of the eschatological discourse is to bolster faith in the Parousia by grounding its expectation in fulfilled prophecy.

The conclusion of the discourse, Mk.13:28-37, reflects the situation of the Marcan community, a community which entertains some doubt regarding the Parousia. The exhortations to "watchfulness" are addressed to moral laxity within the Church, Mk.13:32 addresses questions regarding the time of the Parousia, while 13:30 addresses the source of some of these doubts. The rest of the discourse builds up to these verses; they constitute the exhortative portion of the evangelist's teaching. Mark 13:1-27 provides the basis for this exhortation.

The eschatological discourse is presented by the evangelist as a response to a question put to Jesus by some disciples. Mark 13:1-4 reads:

And as he came out of the Temple, one of his disciples said to him, "Look, Teacher, what wonderful stones and what wonderful buildings!" And Jesus said to him, "Do you see these great buildings? There will not be left here one stone upon another, that will not be thrown down."

And as he sat on the Mount of Olives opposite the temple, Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him

59 Cf. Marxen, pp.166-189; Weeden, pp.73-100.

60 See Weeden, p.89f., especially n. 34.

61 See pp.62-63 above.

62 See pp.61-62 above.

63 See pp.89-90 above.
privately, "Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign when these things are all to be accomplished?"

A prophecy about the destruction of the Temple is followed not only by a question regarding the time, but also with a request for a sign indicating when "these things" are to be accomplished.

The eschatological discourse as a whole concerns the Parousia and the events which precede it, and not the time of the destruction of the Temple. The phrase "ἵλη τῆς ἔρημης" (when will this be) refers back to the prediction of the destruction of the Temple. Since the evangelist has compiled traditions which concern the Parousia as the answer to the disciples' question about the destruction of the Temple, a relationship between the Parousia and the destruction of the Temple is presupposed by the evangelist. Furthermore, the association of the destruction of the Temple and the Parousia must also have been

64 There is a consensus which holds that Mk.13:2 is not a prophecy "after the fact;" see Bultmann, History, p.399; also Beasley-Murray, Mark 13, p.24; Kümmel, Promise, p.100; Taylor, p.501.

There is also agreement that this saying is probably an authentic saying of Jesus; Bultmann, History, pp.120-121,399; Kümmel, Promise, p.100; Beasley-Murray, Mark 13, p.22; Gaston, p.161f., holds that it doesn't stem from Jesus but early in the Christian prophetic tradition.

65 Kümmel, Promise, p.98.

66 Ibid., pp.99-100.

67 Gaston, pp.63-64, correctly observes that this is probably the unique, and "most important" contribution of the evangelist to the discourse.
presupposed by the original readers of the gospel. Otherwise the discourse would make little sense. Why would sayings concerning the Parousia or the end-time constitute an answer to a question regarding the time of the destruction of the Temple?

The presupposition that the Parousia and the destruction of the Temple are related underlies the problem faced by the evangelist as a teacher in his community. The difficulty to which he addresses his discourse will be made clear after a brief sketch of Mark 13.

Jesus predicts the destruction of the Temple. This is followed by a question regarding its time, along with a request for a sign. The main body of the discourse is made up of sayings and warnings concerning the events which are to precede the Parousia. These sayings all recall experiences and events which are known to have occurred in the years leading up to and including the Jewish war of A.D. 66-70. Mark 13:5-6 and 13:21-22, recall the messianic pretenders and rebellious uprisings which were incited in Palestine between 50 and 70 A.D. Historical occurrences may also lie behind the traditions cast in apocalyptic language in Mk.13:7-8. Taylor notes that these verses

68 Gaston, pp.457-468, also argues that the primitive community expected the Parousia with the fall of Jerusalem. Since he dates Mark before 70, he believes that the evangelist shares this conviction. It will be argued below that the evangelist knows of this expectation, but writing after 70, he addressed Mk.13 to the disappointment caused by its failure to occur.
69 See Branscomb, p.231f.; Weeden, pp.90-97; Marxen, pp.171-173.
70 See p.8 n. 6 above; also Marxen, p.171.
could refer to:

Current historical events may be in mind: risings in Palestine, the Parthian invasion, the famine in the time of Claudius (Acts 11:28), the earthquakes at Laodicea (A.D.61) and Pompeii (A.D.62).

Mark 13:9-13 vividly recall the experiences of the primitive community.

The events associated with the fall of Jerusalem are recalled in Mk. 13:14-23.

After recounting these events, which were to precede the end (Mk. 13:5-23), the evangelist presents his readers with a prophecy of the Parousia, the coming of the Son of Man on the Day of YHWH, in Mk. 13:24-27. This is the climax of the discourse. There is no vision or description of a Temple being destroyed in this passage. This absence is not what one would expect from a discourse which sets out to answer a question about "When" "the stones" of the Temple are to be "thrown

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72 See Bultmann, History, p.122; Kümmel, Promise, p.100; Marxen, p.171f.; Gaston, p.17f.


74 See Kümmel, Promise, pp.102-103; Gaston, pp.31-35; Marxen, p.184, 187; Weeden, p.91f. See L. Hartmann, Prophecy, pp.156-157, for study on the dependence of Mk.13:24-28 on the language and imagery of Jewish literature on the Day of YHWH.

down," and to respond to a request for a "sign" when "these things" "are all to be accomplished." Instead, the reader is presented with a vivid description of the Son of Man coming in glory to gather His elect from the four winds.

We must look for a reference to the destruction of the Temple elsewhere in the discourse. As is stated above, the traditions found in Mk.13:14-23 recall events associated with the fall of Jerusalem. They recall the horrors felt by those who had to flee in order to escape the destruction of the city. Signs such as there not being enough time to get one's coat (13:16), a lament for nursing mothers (13:17), or a prayer that the tribulation not happen in winter (13:18) all have the tenor of an actual crisis, "war-time conditions," and not stylized apocalyptic horrors. The Jewish War did indeed culminate in both the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem in 70 A.D. Inasmuch as the sayings in Mk.13:14-23 reflect this period, they constitute part of the evangelist's inheritance from the Jerusalem Church. They are traditions inherited from those who have experienced this period of tribulation.

The destruction of the Temple is the referent of the enigmatic phrase "Το μεταρρύθμισθαν τής ἔρημωσιν" in Mk.13:14:

But when you see the abomination of desolation (77) standing where it ought not

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76 See Taylor, pp.513-514; Weeden, p.92; against Hartmann, Prophecy, pp.151-154, who believes that these verses are eschatological teaching based on Lot's flight from Sodom.

77 The underlined phrase follows the Authorized Version which differs from the RSV reading: "the desolating sacrilege." The AV better emphasizes the desolation which is an abomination, as opposed to an abomination which makes things desolate. When "Τής ἔρημωσιν" is read as a genitive of content, Mk.13:14a implies the fulfillment of Dan.11:31, rather than being simply a restatement of the prophecy.
to be (let the reader understand), then let those in Judea flee to the mountains... 78.

The difficulty addressed by Mark 13 now becomes clear. The Temple has been destroyed, the Mother Church dispersed, and still the Parousia has not occurred. Has something gone wrong with the plan?

The task of the evangelist is twofold. He must reassure his community, which probably includes some members of the dispersed Jerusalem Church, that their traditions concerning the end-time and so also their expectation of the Parousia are still valid. Nothing has gone wrong with the plan. He must also stress the certainty of the Parousia in the face of its non-occurrence when expected. The association of the destruction of the Temple and the Parousia was part of the expectation inherited by the Marcan community.

78 Most of the debate on the date of this gospel hinges on the interpretation of this verse: see Beasley-Murray, Future. Does the verse refer to an apocalyptic prophecy of a desecration of the Temple? If so the gospel can be dated before A.D.70. Does it refer to the destruction of the Temple? If so, it is to be dated after A.D.70. The main question asked by those who argue the former is "Why hasn't the evangelist been more specific if he is indeed referring to the destruction of the Temple?" If it is argued that Mark was written before A.D.70, it is generally agreed to have been written only, a few years before; see Taylor, p.31. Indeed, most commentators who date Mark before 70 interpret Mark 13 as being written for those who must flee Jerusalem; see Martian, pp. 181-183; Lane, p.467f.; Gould, p.247. Given the association of the destruction of the Temple with the Parousia, since the fall of the city was imminent, why would any one write a gospel? Who would read it, and how would it be circulated amidst all the confusion of the end? Cf. G. Rohde, Rediscovering the Teaching of the Evangelists, tr. by D.M. Barton, The New Testament Library, ed. by A. Richardson et. al. (London: SCM Press, 1968) p.139, especially n. 53. A date after 70 is more probable, both in view of the interpretation of 13:14 and its place in the discourse put forth below, and because the evangelist felt there might be enough time before the end for a gospel to be useful.
The evangelist resolves this problem with his use of the community's inherited traditions, that is he compiles Mark 13. The events which occurred before the Jewish War are presented as the "birthpangs" of the Messianic age. Though the community expected the end to come when they had experienced the "signs" manifest before the War, the evangelist reminds the community in 13:7-8 that the end did not come at that time as some may have expected. The persecution of the Church, recalled in 13:9-13, which was expected before the end would come is also included in the period of the "birthpangs." He tells the community in what follows, 13:14-23, that the awaited "Messianic Woes" expected at the dawn of the Messianic age were realized during the tribulation of the Jewish War (13:19-20). The significance of 13:14 is brought out in this context. The formulation of the verse, and thus its purpose, is not to call attention to the destruction of the Temple as such. That fact was only all too real in the decade after 70 A.D. Mk.13:14 calls attention to the destruction of the Temple as the fulfillment of prophecy. The writer of Matthew correctly interprets the reference to Daniel in the phrase "the abomination of desolation" (Mt.24:15).

More importantly, 13:14f. constitutes the fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy about the Temple and the disciples' request for a "sign." The destruction of the Temple is the sign that "these things" will all be accomplished. It is the sign that God will bring this world to an end; it points to the cosmic destruction which will bring about the end of the age.

For the meaning of ὁμήρων as a portentous act which points to something yet to come, see K.H. Rengstorf, on ὁμήρων in The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, V. VII ed. by G. Freidrich, pp.216-217.
The destruction of the Temple as the consummate sign is the fulfillment of the Church's expectation of "signs;" the "messianic woes" have occurred. The community is now to expect nothing less than the Parousia of the Lord itself. Jesus has been asked for a sign (13:4), and this has been fulfilled. Its fulfillment is what the evangelist wants the reader to understand in 13:14. The readers of the gospel do not need to be told that the Temple has been destroyed. Rather, they need to be told that its destruction was the fulfillment of the Church's apocalyptic expectations. Its destruction is the fulfillment of prophecy, and is also the consummate sign of the coming of the Day of the Lord. The Marcan community is assured that the recent history of the Church has been foreknown and expected (13:23).

"The Parable of the Fig Tree" (Mk.13:28-29) is used to illustrate the evangelist's interpretation of "current events:"

From the fig tree learn its lesson: as soon as its branch becomes tender and puts forth its leaves, you know that summer is near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that he is near, at the very gates.

The evangelist reminds his community that they are among the generation who have witnessed the things described in 13:5-23 take place. Now, "after that tribulation" (13:24), they are to expect the Parousia; "he is near." Rather than doubt, because the Parousia did not occur with


81 It fulfills the request for a sign in 13:4. The significance of the Temple for the Jerusalem Church must not be underestimated. E.g. Acts 2:46, 5:42.

82 Cf. Gaston, p.453f.
the destruction of the Temple, the Church should take heart because it is a sign of the nearness of the Lord. The disasters experienced by the Church indicate, like the budding of a fig tree, that the summer of the Parousia is not far off.

Mark 13:32 sets the whole discourse in perspective. The community is no longer to await the fulfillment of any "signs." It awaits the Parousia itself. If any one is concerned about the reality of the Day of the Lord, they have only to look towards Jerusalem. The exact hour, of the Parousia is not known. So it can come at any time. The Church, therefore, is to "watch," that it may not be found "sleeping." No one knows the time, but the Church has all the "signs" it needs to know that the Parousia is certain.

The other synoptic evangelists add to and clarify Mark 13 for their own communities. Matthew includes the words "τῆς οὖς Παροικίας" in the disciples' question to Jesus which opens the discourse (Mt.24:3). The association between the destruction of the Temple and the Parousia is thus made explicit at the outset. Mark 13:14, is also clarified with the addition of a reference to the Prophet Daniel in Mt.24:15.

The Lucan discourse, Lk.21:5-36, diminishes the significance of the fall of Jerusalem as the consummate "sign" of the Parousia. The fall of the city is one event, or "sign," among many which constitutes God's plan for the end-time. Mark 13:14-22 is clarified in Lk.21:20-24 with explicit references to the fall of Jerusalem and the dispersal of Israel. The Lucan exposition of Mk.13:14-22, in Lk.21:20-24, offers
further evidence that the Church interpreted the destruction of the Temple as a time when its inherited apocalyptic prophecies were fulfilled. Luke 21:22 reads:

for these are the days of vengeance, to fulfill all that is written.

What follows the Lucan account of the fall of Jerusalem indicates the differing perspectives adopted by the synoptic evangelists with regard to the eschatological plan. The authors of Mark and Matthew were satisfied to consider all the prophecies for the end-time fulfilled, but to consider the time of the end itself unrevealed. Their gospels present an open ended version of the divine plan which is all but consummated in A.D. 70. The author of Luke omits the verse discounting knowledge of the time of the end to all but the Father. Instead, he records an apprehension of the divine plan which includes an unfulfilled prophecy concerning "the time of the Gentiles" after recounting the fall of Jerusalem. Luke 21:24b reads:

... and Jerusalem will be trodden down by the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles are fulfilled.

The inclusion of this prophecy allows for an extended period of time before the Parousia. This gospel teaches that the delay itself is part of the revealed eschatological plan.

The overarching purpose of the three versions of the eschatological discourse is the same. They assure the Church that there is a plan, that all that has happened has been foreknown, nothing has gone wrong,
and the Parousia is still to come. The Church should "watch" and remain firm in its expectation of the Lord.

And then they will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory. And then He will send out the angels, and gather His elect from the four winds, from the ends of the earth to the ends of heaven. 84

84 Mk. 13:26-27.
CHAPTER FOUR

THE APOCALYPSE OF JOHN
IN LIGHT OF APOCALYPTIC ISSUES REFLECTED
IN OTHER NEW TESTAMENT WRITINGS

Chapters one through three examined apocalyptic issues reflected in the New Testament apart from the Book of Revelation. This chapter will examine the Apocalypse against this background; its place in relation to the apocalyptic concerns of the early Church may thereby be established. The Apocalypse will be discussed under two subject headings: (1) The place of the Apocalypse in relation to issues which arose among first generation Christians; (2) The place of the Apocalypse in relation to issues which arose due to the delay of the Parousia.

The division of apocalyptic issues in this manner is only provisional. These categories represent the chronological progression inherent in the Church's adjustment to the non-occurrence of the Parousia. Issues arising due to "imminent expectation" preceded issues caused by the delay; as Christians were confronted by the "delay," apocalyptic issues changed accordingly. However, while these categories delineate the "evolution" of apocalyptic issues in the life of the Church, one should recognize the problems inherent in positing simple linear progression. It is understood that first generation Christianity, which
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dealt primarily with apocalyptic issues caused by "imminent expectation," may have in particular instances, had to address problems caused by the delay of the Parousia. Similarly, though the delay was the primary source for the emergence of apocalyptic issues for the Church after 70 A.D., new converts in the second or third generation along with communities which experienced a resurgence of "imminent expectation" probably had some of the same difficulties prevalent during the early years of the Church.

1. The Place of the Apocalypse in Relation to Issues Which Arose Among First Generation Christians

The Book of Revelation does not speak directly to any of the problems which were peculiar to first generation Christianity. Issues which arose due to the expectation of an imminent Parousia, questions about the status of the Jews at the Parousia, and questions about the doctrine of the general resurrection, do not concern the author of the Apocalypse. John addresses his book to difficulties which arose because of the non-occurrence of the Parousia.¹

Significantly, the absence of direct reference to these issues does not mean that the Book of Revelation bears no relationship to them. The Apocalypse does include traditions which represent the

¹See Sec. 2 (C) below.
resolution of these issues by the early Church. Traditions which arose in response to problems peculiar to the first generation have become part of the Apocalypse's inherited teaching. These traditions have been put to new use; they are incorporated into the author's exhortation to the Church of his day.

(A) Issues Arising due to the Church's Expectation of an Imminent Parousia

The Apocalypse is not addressed to those who fear they may miss out on the Parousia, nor to the concern reflected in I Thess. 4:15-18 about the status of those who had died. Furthermore, it does not reflect difficulties which the primitive community experienced due to its "interim ethic."

Inasmuch as the Apocalypse preserves traditions from an earlier period, it contains a few passages which reflect the resolution of some issues which arose due to "imminent expectation." The presence of such passages in the Apocalypse, similar to their presence in the synoptic gospels, are examples of traditions initially used in response to a particular problem, which in later times were used to satisfy other needs. Revelation 1:7 is one such passage:

Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, every one who pierced him; and all the tribes of

the earth will wail on account of him. Even so. Amen.

This passage is similar to Matthew 24:30. Both are constructed from Daniel 7:13 and Zechariah 12:10. The tradition combining Daniel and Zechariah probably predates both the writing of Matthew and the Apocalypse. Possibly it was originally used to teach Gentile converts about the universal impact of the Parousia. The combination of the two passages from different Hebrew prophets provides an abbreviated reference to a Jewish apocalyptic image of the Day of YHWH and that of the appearance of the Son of Man.

John's use of this tradition is not meant to be an introduction to, or a corrective of, the Church's teaching on the Day of YHWH. It is used in the blessing which opens the Apocalypse. He probably did not have anybody in mind who believed that "not every eye will see Him."

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3 Vos, pp.60-70, argues that John has altered Zechariah 12:10 under the influence of the universal characteristics already present in the tradition when he inherited it from his source. The wording of Rev.1:7 as it stands is, however, John's. He has changed Zech.12:10, "when they look on him whom they have pierced" to "every eye will see him, every one who pierced him." What was familiar to John was the combination of Dan.7:13 and Zech.12:10, and not simply the tradition as found in Matthew.

According to Vos, p.51ff., John uses older traditions profusely; he probably quotes from memory since for example he never quotes the Old Testament directly. He amplifies his various points with slight alterations in his traditions which may or may not be intentional.


5 See p.14 above.
The verse continues the thought started in the previous verse: Rev. 1:6 glorifies Christ who has freed us from our sins; Rev. 1:7 continues glorifying Christ who will come with universal recognition. Both verses represent what by John's time are familiar aspects of the Christian confession.

Revelation 14:13 includes a phrase which echoes Paul's use of the "dead in Christ" in I Thess. 4:16: "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord." The phrase is used here to console those who face martyrdom rather than those who have been shaken by the death of friends before the Parousia.

Paul's teaching in I Thess. 4:16 about the Parousia is corroborated by Rev. 19:11ff. Though more elaborate than the cursory reference in I Thessalonians, the Apocalypse includes all three features mentioned by Paul. Among other things, Christ is portrayed as coming in command of holy legions (19:11-16), an angel cries out with "a loud voice" proclaiming the defeat of evil (19:17-21), and there is also a vision of the resurrection of the dead (20:4-5, 11-14). John, however, describes the Parousia in order to proclaim God's victory over evil and not, as did Paul, to provide his readers with information.

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6 Charles, Revelation vol. 1, pp.15-17.
7 "οि ζεκρόι οτ έν Κυρίω και Βροικοντές" in Rev. 14:13 and "οι ζεκ-ροι έν Χριστῷ" in I Thess. 4:16.
which they lacked concerning status of "the dead in Christ" at the end of the age.

It is clear that John shows familiarity with apocalyptic motifs stemming from early in the life of the Church. He has adapted some of these traditions for his own use. He prefaces the revelation with a doxology constructed out of traditional confessional and liturgical statements (1:7). He consoles those who face martyrdom with a saying concerning the future blessing awaiting those who die "in the Lord" (14:13), and he exhorts the whole Church with a vision of the Parousia so as to build up its faith at a time when the delay was causing doubt. 10

The Apocalypse reflects a time when the Church had in some places, notably in Laodicea, achieved a certain measure of financial security (Rev.3:17). John's attitude towards wealth, however, recalls a time when worldly riches were considered incompatible with the Kingdom of God. While Laodicea is condemned, Smyrna, a poor Church (Rev.2:9), is applauded. Though other factors contributed to John's evaluation of the state of these Churches, wealth is generally condemned in the Apocalypse.

There is a consensus which holds that Revelation 18, "at least on one level, depicts the destruction of the city of Rome and the

10 See Sec. (C) below.
breakdown of the world order associated with it. Though there is some debate whether Rev. 18 is a lament over the fall of Rome or a song expressing joy over the triumph of God's cause, it is clear that John regards wealth as one of the reasons for Rome's predicted downfall. Since the book was initially sent to Christian Churches in Asia Minor, and not to Rome, it can be safely assumed that the passage was not meant to warn Rome of impending doom. The passage is not meant merely to express joy at the prospect of its downfall, but to warn John's readers not to put their trust in the things of this world.


12 See Collins, Revelation 18, pp.185-204. It must be noted that reactions like that of H. Lilje, The Last Book of the Bible tr. by O. Wyon, (Philadelphia: Muhlenbrg Press, 1957) p.235, that the "long list of luxury articles (18:9-19) sounds like bitter mockery" may not be required if one takes into account John's purpose in writing the book. Wealth and power which insure security in this world, represented by Rome, will be of no importance when the day of judgment dawns. John's "taunt song," Kiddle and Ross, p.359, warns his readers in Asia Minor not to put their trust in worldly things.

13 Collins, Revelation 18, p.230; Caird, p.227, followed by Sweet, p.264, believes that John doesn't condemn wealth as such but Rome's use of it; it was used by the "harlot to seduce men into materialism."
world; worldly security will not help Rome on the day of its judgment, and neither will it help the community of believers. 14

John may have been someone who remembers the time when the primitive community rejected worldly attachments. He may possibly also be an early Christian prophet who wants to continue this tradition he inherited from his elders. Either way, John's attitude towards riches as reflected in the Apocalypse represents a reaction towards a Church which has become complacent about the temptations which present themselves when one has dealings with this world. John's attitude does represent an important development over that associated with the primitive community. By associating wealth, or opulence, with Rome (Babylon) the harlot, John has explicitly associated wealth with the presence of the eschatological adversary; it is not only a symbol of worldly attachment.

(B) The Apocalypse and the Issue of the General Resurrection of the Dead

Unlike I Corinthians 15, the Apocalypse does not address any problems which may have arisen out of unfamiliarity with the Jewish apocalyptic teaching on the general resurrection. 15 In fact, the


15 The material it contains about the resurrection of the dead could be used to familiarize new converts with some aspects of the teaching; this was not, however, John's purpose in writing the book.
Apocalypse presupposes an acquaintance with traditions about the resurrection body; John's readers are expected to be familiar with 'the clothing metaphor' for the resurrection body. The metaphor, furthermore, is not used simply to describe the resurrection body as it is used by Paul in II Cor.5:1-5. The metaphor is used by John to stress the necessity of living a moral life if one expects to inherit this body at the Parousia.

Rev.3:4 reads:

Yet you have a few names in Sardis, people who have not soiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white, for they are worthy.

In this passage John assumes that his readers know what it means to "keep" one's "garment." Similarly Rev.16:15 reads:

Lo, I am coming like a thief! Blessed is he who is awake, keeping his garments that he may not go naked and be seen exposed!

Again one must know what it means to "keep" one's "garment" or to "be seen exposed" for this warning to have any effect. John does not explain his use of the metaphor. In II Cor.5:1-5, Paul uses clothing metaphor when teaching the Corinthians about the resurrection body.

He argues that the believer can look forward to "a heavenly dwelling" which is to be "put on" at the Parousia. In II Cor.5:3-4, the phrase "that we might not be found naked" refers to Paul's wish that he not be disembodied through death. Paul is concerned about the possibility of his "nakedness" in the interim between death and the general resurrection. He hopes he will be "further clothed" through the
miraculous transformation of the earthly body into the spiritual at the coming of the Lord.  

In the Apocalypse, John uses the same metaphor, but for different purposes. In Rev.16:15, he does not mean "Blessed are those who remain alive until the Parousia," he warns that one can lose the inheritance of the resurrection body if one does not remain "awake."  

To be seen "exposed" is to be raised disembodied, a fate reserved for the wicked in some apocalyptic literature.  

"Wakefulness," furthermore, in the Apocalypse as also for Paul and in the synoptic gospels, involves living a moral life.  

Rev.3:4 warns the believer that an immoral life here and now "soils" the resurrection body which he or she is to inherit at the general resurrection. Since those "who have not soiled their garments" are the exception in a Church whose works "have not been found perfect" (3:2), Rev.3:4 carries the implication that most of the members of the Church in Sardis have "soiled" their "garments." The condition of the resurrection body will indicate the kind of life the believer has lead in this world. John thus uses a familiar metaphor or tradition which speaks about the resurrection body in terms of clothing in order to exhort his readers to live correctly in this world.

16 See p.77 above.
19 See pp.56-59 above; also Lövestam, p.105.
References to the resurrection body, particularly as a way of speaking about the quality of the lives of believers in this world, are present throughout the Apocalypse. The Laodicians, in 3:18f., are told they are "naked" and ought to acquire "white robes" from the Lord through repentance. The Holy Martyrs in 6:11 receive their "white robes" immediately upon their deaths, and those who "have come through the great tribulation" have "washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the lamb" (7:14). In Revelation 22:14, the readers of the Apocalypse are exhorted to "wash" their "robes" also.

The clothing metaphor in the Apocalypse reaches its zenith perhaps in Revelation 19:18. The Church, the Bride of the Lamb, is told that her wedding garment, "fine linen, bright and pure," is made up of nothing less than "righteous deeds of the Saints." John's use of the clothing metaphor emphasizes that "every act of the present life is thus linked up inexorably to the future."22

Paul believed that those who die before the Parousia are with the Lord, "away from the body" (II Cor.5:6-9, Phil.1:23); one remains disembodied and only receives the resurrection body at the Parousia. John it seems shares this belief, but the Apocalypse nevertheless

20 The bride is to be interpreted as the whole Church (Caird, p.234), and not only as a reference to the community of martyrs (Charles, Revelation vol.2, p.126f.).

21 Cf. Eph.5:26-27.

22 Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.188.

23 Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.98; see also vol.2, pp.194-199.
represents a further development with respect to this teaching as found in the Pauline epistles. John informs the Church that the believer is already in possession of the resurrection body in so far as he or she can "wash," "soil," or lose it in this life. Activity in this world affects the believer's inheritance of the resurrection body. For example, so great is the effect of martyrdom that those who experience it receive the resurrection body immediately upon their deaths (Rev. 6:11) and will reign with Christ in the millennial age (Rev. 20:4-6).

The Apocalypse was written for communities which had existed long enough for their members to become well acquainted with the Church's apocalyptic heritage. John's readers knew of the general resurrection and were familiar with the Church's traditions about the resurrection body. His teaching on the resurrection and its place in relation to what one accomplishes in this life illustrates the way he attempts to apply the Church's apocalyptic traditions in community life. He is not teaching the Church about the resurrection body, but using her traditions about it in order to emphasize the need for living a moral life.
The Apocalypse and the Status of the Jews at the Parousia

Paul, a Jew, agonized over the place of the Jews in God's plan for the end-time in light of their rejection of the Messiah and the Gospel (Ro.9-11). The Apocalypse does not reflect this problem, nor does it seem to concern its author. Significantly, however, John's vision of future redemption, a vision which makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles, is decidedly grounded in the Jewish apocalyptic and prophetic tradition.

The absence of anguish over the fate of unbelieving Jews could indicate that John was a Gentile; the issue might not therefore concern him in the same way that it might concern a Jewish Christian. There is, however, a consensus among scholars, based primarily on linguistic grounds, that the writer of the Apocalypse was an Aramaic or Hebrew speaking Jew. Furthermore, John's use of the term "Jew" in Rev.2:9 and 3:9, "those who say they are Jews and are not," has positive connotations. John retains its meaning as a reference to

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24 See Rev.7:9f.; 21:24f.


God's people, the elect. This use of the term reflects John's understanding that the Church is not a replacement of Israel, but the continuation of it.

If John is a Jew, then his attitude towards the Jews in Rev. 2:9 and 3:9 may reflect a period of tension between Jews and Jewish Christians at the turn of the first century. Jewish persecution of the Church, together with the tension created when the Council at Jamnia, circa 80–115 A.D., was formulating the "benediction against the Heretics," made it increasingly difficult for Jewish Christians

27 Cf. Rissi, Future, p.16.
This use of the term is unparalleled in the New Testament except perhaps in its use in Ro.2:29 by Paul.

28 Cf. Preston and Hanson, p.92; Rissi, p.74f.; Sweet, p.195.
An important example of this aspect of Johannine ecclesiology is found in Rev.12. The "Woman clothed with the sun" is identified by Sweet, pp.194–195, as "the bride of Yahweh," "Zion out of whom will come the Messiah," "Mary, but only in so far as Mary embodies faithful Israel, and mothers the Messiah," by Swete, p.148, as "the Jerusalem Church," by Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p.197f., as "the mother of the people of God," and by Collins, The Combat Myth in the Book of Revelation, Harvard Dissertations in Religion 9, ed. by C. Bynum et. al., (Missula: Scholars Press, 1976), p.135, as "the heavenly Israel." Sweet, p.195, highlights the importance of identifying the Woman with the Church "only in so far as the Church is continuous with God's people from the beginning and with Eve, 'the mother of all living' (Gen.3:20)." It is significant that the Woman is the same figure who gives birth to the Messiah (12:5), that is the Israel symbolized by Mary and the Jerusalem Church, and also the one who escapes from the dragon by flight on eagle's wings into the wilderness (12:14). This is possibly a reference to the presence of the Church, Israel, kept safe among the Gentiles during the persecution and dispersal of Jewish Christians, "the rest of her offspring . . . those who keep the commandments of God and the testimony of Jesus (12:17)," during the Jewish War. Cf. Sweet, p.203.

29 Sweet, p.28f., 85.
to maintain personal links with the synagogue. 30 This tension, which some scholars believe plays a role in the writing of the Fourth Gospel, 31 is possibly also reflected here in the Apocalypse. 32

It is not important for John, however, whether one is a Gentile or a Jew. He only distinguishes between the redeemed and those who are not or are yet to be redeemed. The matter of importance is that one is a follower of the Lamb and not a worshiper of the beast. 33

2. The Place of the Apocalypse in Relation to Issues Which Arose Due to the Delay of the Parousia

The discussion in chapters two and three outlined many different but interrelated issues which arose because of the delay of the Parousia. Among these were the danger of moral laxity and questions regarding the signs and time of the Day of the Lord. These issues are addressed in varying degrees by the writer of the Apocalypse. John does not however address, nor does his book reflect, the difficulty

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33 Collins, Combat Myth, pp.158-161.
reflected in the gospels regarding traditions which delimited the
time of the Parousia to the lifetime of the first generation.

(A) The Apocalypse and Traditions Delimiting the Parousia to the
Lifetime of the First Generation

The synoptic gospels preserve traditions which delimit the time
of the Parousia to the lifetime of the first generation. The evan-
gelists have reinterpreted these traditions such that they point to
the testimony of the Apostolic circle regarding the reality of the
Parousia.

The writer of the Apocalypse places himself in the tradition of
those who bear witness to the certainty of the Parousia without mak-
ing Apostolic claims. John, unlike the synoptic evangelists, does
not need to reinterpret such sayings in order to assure members of
the Church that the Parousia will occur. Through his vision he him-
self bears witness to the defeat of evil and the establishment of a
new creation. As an early Christian prophet or seer he keeps alive
the testimony of the Glory to come. 34

34 Cf. D.E. Aune, "The Social Matrix of the Apocalypse of John," Bi-
also E.S. Fiorenza, "Apokalypsis and Propheteia. The Book of Revela-
tion in the Context of Early Christian Prophecy," L'Apocalypse johanna-
que et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament, ed. by J. Lambrecht,
pp.105-128; D. Hill, "Prophecy and Prophets in the Revelation of St.
(B) A Brief Sketch of the Early Church's Response to the Delay of the Parousia

This synopsis of the early Church's response to the delay is based on the issues discussed in the preceding chapters. It provides a framework within which the Apocalypse can be placed.

The primitive Church took Jewish apocalyptic expectation of the Day of YHWH to be references to what the Church expected as the Parousia of the Lord. Jewish apocalyptic belief in the existence of a divine plan, therefore, provided a framework for the community's expression of its future hope. The divine plan provided a context in which the Parousia could be expected at a "proper" time.

The earliest Christians expected the Parousia soon. Its non-occurrence meant that hopes were transferred from one day to the next. At first there was no reason to develop explanations for why it had not yet occurred; if it had not come today, it might come tomorrow.

Prior to A.D. 70 Christians expected certain events, or signs, to occur before the Lord's arrival. They expected the "messianic woes." According to Jewish tradition these woes meant the natural, social, and political upheavals which would occur before the Day of YHWH. Part of the tradition included the appearance of an eschatological adversary among these woes. The primitive community simply took over most of these expectations from Jewish apocalyptic sources.

As further delay became apparent Christians began to expect that the Gentiles would have to have a chance to hear the Gospel before the
Parousia would occur. The primitive community had also associated its prophecies about the destruction of the Temple with the Parousia. There is the possibility that some teachers pointed to the undese- 

crated Temple in order to explain why the Parousia had not yet occurred. 35 During the dramatic events preceding the fall of Jerusalem the Church in Palestine probably lived in an atmosphere of heightened expectation. During the Jewish War "the signs of the times" all pointed to the nearness of the Lord.

After A.D. 70, a new attitude with regard to the end of the age can be observed. This is visible for those Churches which produced gospels. The deaths of many first generation Christians made it nece- 

sary to re-evaluate traditions which had been thought to delimit the Parousia to the lifetime of the Apostolic circle. The destruction of the Temple had also to be accounted for, especially in light of the fact that its destruction was not accompanied by the Parousia as-anticiated.

The authors of the synoptic gospels no longer looked for the fulfill- 

ment of traditional apocalyptic signs. The writers of Mark and Matthew believed that these signs, the "messianic woes," were fulfilled in the fall of Jerusalem. These gospels teach that after the great tribulation of the Jewish War only the Parousia itself is still to be expected. It could arrive at any time, but these gospels do not ex- 

clude the possibility of an extended delay. Matthew is much more explicit than Mark in reference to this possibility. The third

35 See II Thess. 2:4-5.
evangelist teaches that the Church must still await the fulfillment of the "times of the Gentiles;" only then will the cosmic upheavals which herald the end ensue. The author of Luke still awaits the fulfillment of the "messianic woes" in so far as they involve cosmic signs and tribulation. All three evangelists taught their respective readers that there was no need for the Church to know the time of the Parousia in order to be prepared or to carry out her function in this world.

By the beginning of the second century the teaching that the Church did not know the time of the Parousia seems to have prevailed, particularly as a response to false claims and questions about its time. The author of II Peter does not attempt a calculation of the end-time when he is faced with "scoffers" who doubt the reality of the Parousia. Rather, he appeals to scripture to show that the time of the end is known only to God. In II Pet.3:8 he quotes from the Psalms teaching his community that with regard to calculating the end-time, his reader's apprehension of days and years may not conform to God's:

But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day.

The main result of the delay with respect to life in Christian communities was the loss of eschatological motivation. The "delay

\[36\text{See Lk.21:24-26.}\]

\[37\text{Psalm 90:4.}\]
ethic" which allowed interaction with the world had the added effect of allowing people to become caught up in worldly affairs. Thus doubt and moral laxity threatened the Church from within. The evangelists responded to this situation with sayings, stories, parables, and exhortations inherited from a time when the community rejected such worldly association in view of the "impending crisis." The evangelists tried to reintroduce eschatological motivation into the life of the Church by using these traditions along with some traditional metaphors to proclaim the certainty of the Parousia. They used the metaphors of "wakefulness" and "sobriety" in order to emphasize the way a life lived in this age determines the impact of the age to come. Proper preparation for the Parousia becomes important for the believer regardless of when it actually occurs; the believer's way of life in this world will determine the circumstances under which he or she will be received by the Lord.

(C) The delay of the Parousia and the Apocalypse of John.

The Apocalypse proclaims to the Church Catholic that the Lord is near. This proclamation is made in the face of what John believes is one of the most pressing dangers confronting the Church of his day. Christian communities have become lax. They have begun to live as if the Lord might not return. The Apocalypse tries to rectify this weakening of eschatological awareness. It, therefore, addresses the loss of eschatological motivation in the life of the Church.
The Letters

The Book of Revelation is cast in the form of a letter to seven Churches in Asia Minor. There is a consensus that these Churches are meant to symbolize the Church Catholic. Each "letter," however, reflects some understanding of life in each of the seven cities, and each shows an awareness of particular circumstances within each of the Churches. There is, therefore, agreement that the Apocalypse was probably sent to and circulated among the seven named Churches. It was probably read aloud, perhaps during worship service. It is understood that though the Apocalypse was circulated among these seven Churches, and probably elsewhere, it was composed as a prophetic word to the whole Church.

38 W.M. Ramsay, The Letters to the Seven Churches in Asia and Their Place in the Plan of the Apocalypse, (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1904), p.177; Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.47; Kiddle and Ross, p.18; Preston and Hanson, p.59; Lijje, p.59; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p.52; Caird, p.15; Sweet, p.65; E.S. Fiorenza, "Eschatology and the Composition of the Apocalypse," The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 30 (1968), p.562.

39 See most notably Ramsay, pp.210-433.

40 Though Kiddle and Ross, p.17f., regard the references to problems in each of the Churches to be only incidental ("we must regard the Churches as 'colonies of heaven'"); most commentators interpret the letters such that the circumstances reflected therein have some basis in actual fact. E.g. Charles, Revelation vol.1, pp.47-102; Caird, pp.27-58; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp.70-108; Sweet, pp.75-110.

41 This is presupposed by both Ramsay, pp.171-184, and Swete, pp.lv-lx, who believe that the order of the cities cited in Rev. 1:11 reflects the most probable route of a courier. Cf. Caird, p.28; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p.53f.; Sweet, p.64f.

42 Caird, p.13; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p.52.

43 Fiorenza, "Eschatology," p.537.
The "seven letters" address both the positive and negative aspects of the seven Churches. Since these Churches symbolize the Church Catholic, their virtues and shortcomings may be assumed to be indicative of most Churches in John's day. The difficulties which John brings up in these "letters" thus represent the historical situation to which the visions of Rev. 4-20 are addressed.

The recurring theme throughout the book is that "the Lord is coming soon," "the time is near." This proclamation is found in many passages. With the exception of 12:12, all these passages occur in the "ecclesial section" of the book, the section addressed directly to the Church (Rev. 1:1-3:22, 21:1-22:21). The need for this exhortation reflects that which John understands to be the problem at hand: the loss of an eschatological awareness. Inasmuch as John feels called to remind the Church that the Lord is near, this loss is probably due to the delay of the Parousia. The difficulties which John has observed to be the result of the delay are delineated in his criticism of five of the seven named Churches.

The letters to the Churches in Ephesus, Pergamum, Thyatira, Sardis, and Laodicea address the two basic arenas of Church activity,

44 Charles, Revelation vol. 1, p. 37.
48 John has only praise for the Churches in Philadelphia and Smyrna.
the Church's relationship with the world and activity within the
community itself. Though these two realms of activity are inter-
related, John addresses these issues separately, each in relation to
a Church which he feels is representative of the problem. The dif-
ficulties addressed in the letters to Ephesus, Pergamum, and Thyatira
concern the effect the delay has had on the Church's relationship
with outsiders. The letters to Sardis and Laodicea, on the other
hand, concern life with the Church itself.

The warning in the letters to Ephesus, Pergamum and Thyatira
concern the Church's relationship with false teachers, that is those
whom John believes are not part of the followers of Christ, though
they may be among the members of the Church. In the case of Pergamum
and Thyatira John's opponents may claim to be Christian but John
denies this. The Church in Ephesus holds resolutely to correct doc-
trine (2:2-3,6), but it has become intolerant and forgotten how to
love (2:4). 49 The Church has "patiently endured" hardship, possibly
persecution. 50 It has rejected false teachers, and had the fortitude
to reject false apostles. The love John believes the Ephesians have
forgotten is, therefore, probably more than affection among its own
members. 51 Perhaps they no longer love their enemies or bless those

49 Cf. Swete, p.26; Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.50f.; Caird,
p.31; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p.74f.; Swee, pp.79-80.

50 Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.49.

51 Kiddle and Ross, p.23, argue "that the Ephesians had given up
loving one another as they did at first." Lilje, p.71, believes they
have forgotten how to love Christ.
who persecute them. The opposite is true of the Churches in Pergamum and Thyatira. In their "accommodation to Pagan society," these Churches have allowed false teaching, and those who promote it, to persist among them (Rev.2:14f.,20f.).

In Sardis and Laodicea, the delay has affected life within the believing community itself. In these Churches their own works are the problem, and not their relationship with false teachers and other "outsiders." John reproaches the Church in Sardis quite severely in Rev.3:1b-2:

I know your works; you have the name of being alive, and you are dead. Awake, and strengthen what remains and is on the point of death, for I have not found your works perfect in the sight of my God.

The metaphor of wakefulness is used here as it is used by Paul and the synoptic evangelists. It refers to the moral life which is proper preparation for the Parousia. The Sardians are told to "awaken" because their works are not perfect. In fact, the Sardians' moral life is so horrible they stand condemned; they are "dead."

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52 Cf. Luke 6:27 and Romans 12:4. Jesus' teaching on love must have been one of the first things the Apostles taught new converts. Laxity in the practice of this hard doctrine may well qualify as the "love" and "works" the Ephesians had "at first." Cf. Sweet, p.81.


54 See pp.56-67 above; also Lövestam, pp.105-106.

The absence of eschatological motivation in Church life is epitomized by John's portrayal of the Church in Laodicea. Rev. 3:15 reads:

I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of my mouth.

This Church has counted worldly riches as providing real security. They have become complacent and satisfied with life in this world. This attitude is highlighted in 3:17: "you say, I am rich, I have prospered." Their "lukewarm" attitude is worse than the toleration of false teachers or over-enthusiastic heresy hunting; they are threatened with total rejection.

John calls on these Churches to repent because the Lord is coming soon (Rev. 2:5, 16, 22; 3:3, 19). He alerts these Churches regarding the Parousia in an attempt to reintroduce eschatological motivation in their lives. This is accomplished with the proclamation of the nearness of the Parousia, together with its accompanying judgement or blessing.

John, much like the synoptic evangelists, emphasizes a close interrelationship between the activity of the Church and the Parousia. The emphasis is not simply on the chronological nearness of the Lord. Regardless of when He actually comes, the Church is near the Lord to the degree that her actions condition the nature of His advent. The

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56 See pp. 65-67 above.
Parousia has a dual potential, blessing and judgment. The predominance of one over the other in the future depends on the activity of the Church in the present. Moral responsibility and eschatology are interrelated.

The judgment/blessing motif is clearly illustrated in several passages among the "seven letters." In Rev. 3:3 the image of the "thief in the night" warns the Church of coming judgment:

Remember then what you have received and heard; keep that, and repent. If you will not awake, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what hour I will come upon you.

In contradistinction to the warning of 3:3, 3:20 promises blessings for those who are found prepared:

Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and eat with him, and he with me.

The image in 3:20 is composed of elements similar to features in two synoptic parables: "The Parable of the Doorkeeper" (Mk. 13:34-36) and "The Parable of the Waiting Servants" (Lk. 12:36-38). The image carries the presupposition that those who "hear" the Lord's voice are not "asleep;" they are "awake" and can open the door. The images

57 This dual motif pervades the entire book; numerous visions of impending judgment and blessing culminate with the vision of the lake of fire and new Jerusalem. This dual motif corresponds to the "cosmic dualism" observed by Collins, Combat Myth, p.158f.

58 See Bauckham, pp.170-174.

59 See Vos, pp.97-98; Bauckham, pp.165-174; also Lovestam, p.81.
in 3:3 and 3:20 when taken together teach the Church that the way the Parousia is experienced depends on the preparation of the Church. If it is found "asleep," or "dead" in its works, the Lord will come like a "thief," unexpectedly with judgement. If the Church is found "awake," and can "open the door" when He calls, He will come with the blessings celebrated in table-fellowship. The same kind of warning is present in the letters to Ephesus and Pergamum. Rev.2:5 reads:

Remember then from what you have fallen, repent and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent.

Rev.2:16:

Repent then. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.

Both passages speak of an advent whose nature depends on the condition of the Churches.

The passages emphasize the certainty of the Parousia. The conditional element in these verses applies to the state of the Churches and not to the Parousia. The text does not mean "If you repent, I won't come," but "If you repent, I won't come with condemnation."60

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60 See Vos, pp.84-85; Bauckham, p.172ff. Caird, pp.25,27,41,49, along with other scholars (e.g. Swete, p.27; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp.75,87,97; Sweet, p.82.) believe these passages to be references to a "special visitation" (Charles' phrase) in judgement prior to the Parousia. Charles, Revelation vol.1, allows for reference to both a special visitation and to the Parousia in 2:5 (p.52), only to a special visitation in 2:16 (p.65), and in 3:3 only to the Parousia (p.81).

If one does not see a reference to the Parousia in any of these passages there is little reason to interpret any references to the
The Parousia itself is certain; the Lord will come regardless of the state of His Churches.

The Apocalypse's use of the thief in the night tradition is completely in line with the way it is used by Paul and the synoptic evangelists. The metaphor is used to describe the way those who are unprepared will experience the Parousia. John, like the synoptic evangelists uses contrasting images in order to emphasize the difference between future of the prepared with those who are not.

The Visions

The Apocalypse was not written simply to inform the Church or the world of the judgment or salvation to come. John's purpose was to stress the urgent need for repentance. The motivation for this repentance is to be found in the Church's awareness that she is an eschatological community; an awareness that has been lost or weakened by the duration of the delay. John hopes to provide members of the coming of the Lord in Revelation as referring to the Parousia. Indeed this is Caird's thesis; in Revelation the advent refers mainly to Christ's presence in the Church (see pp.25,291f., 298-301). It will be argued below, that the Parousia, or Day of the Lord, in the Apocalypse is not a single event, but a complex of events which began with the crucifixion. John's eschatology can rightly be called "constant expectation" (Steigerwartung—H. Schurmann cited by Fiorenza, "Eschatology," p.538 n. 106.). He expects the continual coming of the Lord until the complex of events involved finds its consummation with the final defeat of evil. The image of the Lord walking among the "lampstands" (Churches) in 2:1 is illustrative of this eschatology. The Church is present now in the last days.

Cf. Fiorenza, "Eschatology," pp.554-560; Sweet, p.82.

61 See pp.55-59 above.
Church with the impetus to make the kinds of choices and live the life which will ensure their salvation. The simple fact that John wrote down his revelation, that he did so in order to reintroduce eschatological motivation into the life of the Church, points to his hope that no one will have to face the condemnation of God but Satan.

John accomplishes his purpose by reporting to the Church the numerous visions which make up the main body of the book. The arrangement of these visions provide the context within which to better understand the divine plan expressing God's purpose without necessarily providing the Church with a "timetable." The arrangement of these visions is not always chronological, but it does denote a progression or development of eschatological events which culminates in the final defeat of evil.62 Apprehension of God's purpose by means of these visions in Rev.4-20 are to be interpreted. Charles, Revelation vol.1, pp. xxiii, believes that by rearranging several passages, that is by correcting the mistakes of a well meaning but "very unintelligent disciple" (p.xxii), the Apocalypse can be interpreted "in strict chronological order;" there is no need for recourse to a recapitulation theory like the one first espoused by Victorinus of Pettau (c. 270 A.D.). According to the recapitulation theory, each series of visions repeats, or recapitulates, the same series of events in a different fashion. In recent years modified versions of the "classical" recapitulation theory are finding acceptance. Collins, Combat Myth, pp.21-32, believes that the book contains two great visionary cycles corresponding to the contents of two scrolls (5:1; 10:2,8-11). Within each of these cycles are contained numerous smaller cycles; some of these visions are numbered and some unnumbered. The various cycles develop, repeat, clarify, and interpret aspects of each other (see pp.32-44).

J. Lambrecht, "A Structuration of Rev.4:1-22:5," L'Apocalypse johannique et l'Apocalyptique dans le Nouveau Testament, ed. by J. Lambrecht, pp.77-104, has recently proposed that John combined the
visions may enable the Church to better understand her role in the unfolding of eschatological events.

John uses a complex system of "interlocking" and recapitulating visions to expand the period of apocalyptic importance. The Apocalyptic age is no longer limited to a specific generation as it is in the synoptic gospels. It is extended forward from the time of the destruction of the Temple to include the Church's confrontation with Rome. The age of eschatological significance thus encompasses the Church's perennial struggle with evil in this world. For John the end-time, or age of eschatological significance, is experienced here and now in this very confrontation even though the end itself may lie in the distant future.

This eschatological awareness, or John's apocalyptic perspective, is perhaps best illustrated by an examination of the way he presents and accounts for the delay of the Parousia. John has reworked some of his traditions concerning the destruction of the Temple and the end-time in order to do so. In Revelation 6 he uses traditions, which are found also in the synoptic gospels, in order to explain the role of repetition itself functions as gradation (p.103)." Lambrecht's outline of this structuration does justice to both the fact that there is to some extent repetition in the visions, and that there is also a progression of theological or eschatological ideas behind them. Cf. Caird, pp.104-106; Sweet, p.44.

63 See Collins, Combat Myth, pp.16-19, for examples of this literary device. Cf. Lambrecht, pp.82-99.
played by the fall of Jerusalem in the divine plan. In Revelation 7 the delay of the Parousia is depicted in terms of its meaning for the Church.

This visionary cycle begins in Rev.4-5. Here John describes the heavenly court which guides the history of the world. God is the "one who sits upon a throne" (4:2-11), He holds in His hand a scroll with seven seals (5:1). The scroll represents the destiny of humankind. Only the "Lamb of God," he who "was slain," is worthy to open the scroll by breaking the seven seals (5:3ff.). We are thus told that the Risen Lord by virtue of His crucifixion initiates the unfolding of eschatological events. The description of the Lamb

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66 Swete, p.75; Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.138; Kiddle and Ross, p.95f.; Caird, p.72; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p.120f.; Collins, Combat Myth, pp.24-25; Sweet, p.123.

67 It is important to note that in the Apocalypse the terms "Lamb," "blood of the Lamb," and "slaughtered lamb" (ἀρπιον ... λόγαρθυνόν) have sacrificial connotations; they refer specifically to the crucified Messiah. Cf. Charles, Revelation vol.1, pp.cxii-cxiv, 140-141; A.T. Hanson, The Wrath of the Lamb, (London: S.P.C.K., 1957) p.165f.; Caird, p.74f.; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, 124-126; Sweet, p.124.
in 5:6, "\( \kappa \alpha \nu \eta \varphi \gamma \nu \zeta \sigma \tau \mu \nu \zeta \) (a lamb standing as having been slaughtered) points to John's understanding of the resurrection. Charles observes that the Lamb "is represented \( \eta \sigma \varphi \alpha \gamma \mu \epsilon \nu \zeta \) because in very truth He is not dead but alive: cf. 1:18, 2:8."\(^{68}\) God's plan is thus being made effective through the activity of the Risen Lord.\(^{69}\) Furthermore, since the opening of the seals sketches the recent history of the Church,\(^{70}\) this vision informs the Church that the Risen Lord has been guiding and will continue to guide her through the eschatological crisis.\(^{71}\)

The description of events which result from the opening of the first through fifth seals is a visionary account of the same events related by the evangelists in the eschatological discourse.\(^{72}\) The four horsemen which appear when the first four seals are opened represent the apocalyptic signs referred to in Mark 13:8 as "the beginning of the birth pangs." The first horseman refers to the appearance of pseudo-messiahs, corresponding to the first of the predictions recounted in the eschatological discourse (Mk.13:5-6;)

\(^{68}\) Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.141.

\(^{69}\) Ibid., p.140; Caird, p.71; Collins, Combat Myth, p.25.

\(^{70}\) See below; only with the opening of the seventh seal does John begin to cast his gaze towards the future. Cf. Rev.1:19.

\(^{71}\) Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.140; Sweet, p.124.

The next three horsemen represent war, famine, and pestilence or death respectively. They thus correspond to the evils recounted in Mk.13:7-8, Mt.24:6-8, and Lk.21:9-11. The opening of the sixth seal depicts the persecution of the Saints, a picture evoked with the cry of the martyrs; it thus corresponds to

Vos, pp.187-191.

There is much debate and not much consensus regarding the identity or referent of the first horseman (Rev.6:2). Swete, p.86, argues against identifying him with the rider in 19:11ff., and thus interprets 6:2 as a "picture of triumphant militarism," an evil. Charles, Revelation vol.1, pp.160-162, believes it is a reference to war, which is repeated with the appearance of the second horseman, "international strife." Kiddle and Ross, pp.109-114, believe that John is referring here to the Lamb as "a divinely empowered warrior." Sweet, p.138, following A. Feullet, "Le premier cavalier de l'Apocalypse," Zeitschrift Für Die Neutestamentlich Wissenschaft 57 (1966), pp.229-259, argues that the image is of the conquering power of the Lamb, either the Gospel or the Lamb's witnesses though it probably is not Christ Himself. Lilje, p.125, Caird, pp.80-81, and Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp.131-132, argue against identifying the first horseman with the Lamb, Gospel, or Christ; Caird perhaps recognizing the difficulties of precise identification simply regards the appearance of the first horseman to be "an evil," while Beasley-Murray and Lilje follow Charles. M. Rissi, "The Rider on the White Horse: A Study of Rev.6:1-8," Interpretation 18 (1964), pp.407-418, sees here a reference to the Anti-Christ, a view not far from pseudo-messiahs. Since there is a consensus regarding the referents of the next four seals (see n. 86 & 89), and since they correspond to the pattern established by Mk.13, Vos argues that Rev.6:2 should be interpreted accordingly. This interpretation is most compelling in the face of much disagreement.

Swete, pp.87-89; Charles, Revelation vol.1, pp.158-172; Kiddle and Ross, pp.114-117; Caird, p.81; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp.132-134; Sweet, pp.139-140.

Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.158; Vos, p.186f.; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p.130.
the synoptic predictions of Mk.13:9-13; Mt.24:9,76 and Lk.21:12-19.77

Upon the opening of the sixth seal, John completes the pattern established by Mark 13 or the tradition behind it. Mark 13:24-27 and parallels recount traditions predicting the cosmic upheavals which will accompany the coming of the Son of Man. Commentators who see a relationship between Rev.6 and the eschatological discourse believe that Rev.6:12-17 depicts these same upheavals.78 However, none of the versions of the eschatological discourse moves straight to a description of the Parousia after predicting the persecution of the Church. Before the Parousia, the discourse relates traditions associated with the Jewish War and the fall of Jerusalem.79 John has combined traditions referring to the Parousia and the fall of Jerusalem in his vision of the opened sixth seal. This significant transformation of the pattern found in the synoptic discourse reveals John's understanding of the role the fall of Jerusalem played in the divine plan.

76 The first evangelist has placed much of the material found in Mark as 13:9-13 in Mt.10:16-22, where it speaks directly to the question of discipleship.

77 Swete, p.92; Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.158,171-179; Vos, p.184; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp.130,136-137; Collins, Combat Myth, p.33.

78 See footnotes 87 and 90.

Revelation 6:12-17 reads:

When he opened the sixth seal, I looked, and behold, there was a great earthquake; and the sun became black as sackcloth, the full moon became like blood, and the stars of the sky fell to earth as a fig tree sheds her winter fruit when shaken by a gale; the sky vanished like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. Then the kings of the earth and the great men and the generals and the rich and the strong, and everyone, slave and free, hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains, calling to the mountains and rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb; for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand before it?"

Part of this passage uses traditional motifs referring to the Parousia, but John is also referring to the fall of Jerusalem. Two observations will help establish this interpretation. The first has already been mentioned. Rev. 6 follows the order of events established by the eschatological discourse; predictions of persecution are followed by traditions associated with the Jewish War and fall of the city. One may therefore look for a reference to the fall of Jerusalem after the vision of persecution presented in the opening of the fifth seal. In the second place, Revelation 6:16 recalls a saying attributed to Jesus in Luke 23:30:

Then they will begin to say to the mountains, "Fall on us;" and to the hills, "Cover us."

This saying, a quotation from Hosea (10:8), is associated in the gospel with the fall of Jerusalem, or rather the prediction.

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80 Swete, pp. 92-95; Charles, Revelation vol.1, pp. 158, 179-183; Kiddle and Ross, 122-126; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, p. 130-137-139; Collins, Combat Myth, p. 33.
thereof.⁸¹ John uses this association, already present in the Church's traditions, in combination with Parousia traditions in order to interpret the fall of the city.⁸²

Mark and Matthew both present the Jewish War and the accompanying destruction of the Temple as the "tribulation" which is to occur before the end itself.⁸³ Luke calls the fall of Jerusalem a "great tribulation" but refers to the fulfillment of "the times of the Gentiles" and to cosmic tribulations as events which are still to come.⁸⁴ All three evangelists thus portray the fall of Jerusalem as an event which precedes the cosmic upheavals of the end. John presents the fall of Jerusalem as the beginning of these cosmic upheavals.

John's purpose in combining these traditions is to maintain the significance of the fall of Jerusalem as a consummate eschatological event, even though it has probably been many years since this event took place. It is the fulfillment of prophecy, and it is the beginning of the end itself. This vision, however, simply sets the scene for what follows. In Revelation 7, John explains what has been happening

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⁸²One result of John's use of the saying found in Luke in this passage is, according to A.T. Hanson, p.170, that he like the third evangelist sees the fall of Jerusalem to be the "working out in history of the consequences of the rejection and crucifixion of the Messiah."

⁸³See pp.100-102.

⁸⁴See p.103 above.
to the Church since the destruction of the Temple. He addresses the question of why its destruction was not accompanied by the Parousia. This is one of the reasons behind the vision of the seven seals in general, to explain the present situation of the Church in terms of her traditions regarding the end-time.

"Revelation 7:1-3 explains why the Parousia did not accompany the fall of Jerusalem:

After this I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the earth, holding back the four winds of the earth, that no wind might blow on earth or sea or against any tree. Then I saw another angel ascend from the rising of the sun, with the seal of the living God, and he called with a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm earth and sea, saying, "Do not harm the earth or the sea, till we have sealed the servants of our God upon their foreheads."

God has held back the dissolution of the world which has begun with the destruction of the Temple. There is to be a delay before the opening of the sixth and final seal. This is a picture of the delay of the Parousia. The final dissolution of the physical world, "the

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Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.192, n.2, points out that Rev.7:1-3 has several things in common with the way "a pause" is pictured in some Jewish apocalyptic books. In I Enoch 66:1-2, for example, the "angels of punishment," who are about to "let loose all the powers of the waters ... in order to bring judgment and destruction on all who dwell on earth," are commanded by "the Lord of Spirits" "to hold the waters in check" and not let loose the deluge until Noah has enough time to build an Ark. With regard to II Baruch 6:4-5, which may be contemporary with the Apocalypse Charles states: Here we have four angels standing at the four corners of Jerusalem, ready to destroy it, and a fifth angel bids them pause and not destroy it until the sacred vessels of the Temple were secured and hidden away.
earth or the sea," is delayed for a specific reason. The servants of God must first be sealed.

The sealing of God's servants ensures their preservation, and also marks them as God's witnesses. The sealed in Revelation are the followers of the Lamb (14:1f.). The number of the redeemed, 12,000 from each of the Twelve Tribes of Israel (7:4-8), interprets the great multitude envisioned in Rev.7:9-10:

After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude which no man could number, from every nation, from all tribes peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands; and crying out with a loud voice, "Salvation belongs to our God who sits upon the throne, and to the Lamb!"

The numbering of this multitude is symbolic ("which no man can number"). It represents the multitude as the reconstituted Israel; the people of God are gathered together from dispersion and have been made complete. Significantly the people of God are comprised both

86 See Rev.14:4b; Cf. Swete, p.99; Collins, Combat Myth, p.34.
87 Swete, p.147.
88 Swete, p.99; Charles, Revelation vol.1, p.200; Preston and Hanson, p.83; Lilje, p.134; Beasley-Murray, Revelation, pp.143-144; Sweet, p.149-151.
Caird, pp.94-99, argues that the 144,000 represent only the martyrs among Christians, while Kiddle and Ross, pp.13-137, interpret the 144,000 as a symbolic representation of the "great multitude" of 7:9f. which together represent the martyr Church. Charles argues that the 144,000 represents the "spiritual Israel" (Revelation vol.1, pp.199-200) though this "Israel" only includes the present generation of believers, first as militant on earth, 7:1-8, and next as triumphant in heaven, 7:9-17 (p.199). A. Feullet, "Les 144,000 Israélités Marqués d'un Sceau," Novum Testamentum 9 (1967) pp.205-224, argues that the
of Jews and Gentiles. The two visions of Rev. 7 (1-8, 9-17) represent the Church Catholic as the Israel of God. 89

Revelation 7:9-17 is a vision of the redemption awaiting the people of God; it shows the Church that for which she is being preserved (sealed). The vision of the multitude standing before God and the Lamb in white robes is a vision of the Parousia and the general resurrection of the dead. 90 Its placement in the text provides an anticipation of the Parousia, 91 and as such it is not an event which precedes the opening of the seventh seal. 92 Chronology is superceded by eschatology. After explaining the reason for the delay, John provides the Church with a quick glance at what she can expect when the delay is finally over. John's underlying purpose behind writing

number represents the faithful remnant, Jews who will be redeemed at the final consummation together with the Gentile Christian Church represented by the "great multitude." Definitive interpretation of Rev. 7 may remain elusive. The position adopted in this study seems warranted in view of the interpretation of Rev. 6:4 put forth above. John is addressing the situation of the whole Church in view of the delay of the Parousia.

89 Swete, p.99; Sweet, pp.147,151.
90 Cf. Swete, p.100; Lilje, pp.136-138.
91 Ibid.
92 This is an example of John's literary technique: interlocking visions and recapitulation. The two visions of Rev.7 provide further links (Collins, Combat Myth, pp.16ff. examines the use of the interlocking device at other points in the book.) between the two "greater visionary cycles" (see n.74). The 144,000 appear again in Rev.14, and 7:9-17 is one of several points in the book where John anticipates the final consummation before describing the Parousia proper in Rev. 19:1ff. (e.g. 11:15-19).
the Apocalypse is highlighted by this break in chronology. The Apocalypse is not meant to provide a step by step description of the end-time. It was written to bolster the faith of Churches in which eschatological hope had been lost. Significantly, the opening of the seventh seal, which inaugurates the sounding of the seven trumpets, is coterminous with the delay. It is referred to again between the sounding of the sixth and seventh trumpets (10:6).\footnote{The sounding of the first through seventh trumpets constitute the eschatological crisis for which the Church has been sealed (cf. Rev.3:10). This time is the interim between the fall of Jerusalem and the final consummation, revealed with the sounding of the seventh trumpet. The "second great cycle" of visions (the little scroll, Rev. 10-20; see Collins, Combat Myth, pp.26-32) interprets (recapitulates) this period in terms of the Church's confrontation with the beast (Rome). The "intercalation," or pauses, in the text are integral to John's thought. They are not necessarily haphazard interruptions caused by the combination of various traditions; see Lambrecht, pp. 85-99.} The net result of John's portrayal of the delay of the Parousia is that it is given an important role in the unfolding of eschatological events. The time elapsed during the delay itself becomes eschatologically significant; it means the redemption of God's people. In the face of doubt caused by the length of the delay,\footnote{Cf. "the doubters" in II Pet.3:4, and I Clem.23:3-5.} John argues that the delay is part of God's plan for the end-time and should, therefore, not be a reason for doubt.

The Apocalypse fits, therefore, among those traditions in the early Church which resolve the problem of the non-occurrence of the
Parousia by teaching that it is being delayed by God according to His eternal purposes.\(^{95}\) Similar to I Enoch 66-67, the delay is the manner in which God provides the time necessary to secure His people and preserve them from destruction. As in II Peter 3:9, the delay is seen as a mark of God's compassion.

Once the Church was reconciled to the idea that the Parousia may lie far in the future, there was a danger that believers would lose their awareness of being an eschatological community, that is a people who have a particular role in God's plan for the consummation of the age. This in turn could remove or weaken the eschatological motivation for pursuing a life proper to those who would be followers of the Lamb.

John provides a vision which allows believers to see the eschatological significance of the Church's historical situation. An aspect of this apocalyptic perspective is the expansion of the temporal framework within which eschatological events can occur. This expanded perception of the apocalyptic age, the "last days," is illustrated well in the vision of the seven seals. The end-time begins when the Lamb, who is worthy, takes the scroll from the one sitting on the throne (Rev. 5). His worthiness stems from the fact that he was slain (5:9). The end-time, it seems, has begun with the crucifixion. It subsequently includes the events represented with the opening of the first six seals; these things have already been accomplished in the years preceding and including the fall of Jerusalem. The fact that only the seventh seal remains

\(^{95}\)See pp. 46-50 above.
heightens the sense of the nearness of the end. However, the time required for the manifestation of the events represented by the seventh seal is indefinite; it includes the sounding of the seven trumpets. Significantly, the end-time spans a considerable number of years and the reader has been prepared for a further indefinite period before the Parousia itself.

Another example of John's apocalyptic perspective is found in his use of traditions regarding the eschatological adversary. A brief comparison with the adversary in II Thess. 2 will clarify John's perspective. In II Thess. 2 the "Anti-Christ" is portrayed as a single figure which will be defeated by "the Lord Jesus" at His Parousia. It embodies both the characteristics of a mythological archetype of evil and of a human figure. Revelation 13 portrays the eschatological adversary in terms of two beasts. One embodies the characteristics of a mythological figure (13:1-10; also 17:7-14), while the other is expressly identified with a human figure(s) (13:18). The two beasts taken together account for all the characteristics embodied in the Thessalonian "man of lawlessness." The first beast

1) usurps the perogatives of divinity (13:4-6), and
2) is empowered by Satan (13:2,4a).

96 The eschatology of the Apocalypse is not a "timeless" one. There are numerous temporal references: 11:2,3; 12:6, 12,14. Sweet, p.182, argues that these references represent a "divinely limited period of oppression," time given over to Satan's activity (p.204); cf. Swete, p.134, Charles Revelation vol.1, pp.279,321, Collins, Combat Myth, p.149.

97 See pp.40-41 above.

98 See p.41.
The second beast

3) comes with false signs and wonders (13:13),
4) deceives (13:14),
5) causes those who do not love the truth (or do not have the seal of God) to perish (14:9-11). 99

John has identified the "Anti-Christ" with Rome. 100 The first beast in Rev. 13, which is identical to the beast in Rev. 17, is to be identified with the Roman state. 101 The second beast (13:11-18, 14:9-11) is a human tool of the first beast; it "exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence" (13:12). The second beast probably refers to anyone who exercises the power of the Roman state. 102

John accomplishes two important things by identifying the eschatological adversary with Rome: (1) He makes the Church's confrontation with Rome eschatologically significant; (2) The role of the adversary in divine plan now encompasses many figures over a long period of time. Most commentators interpret the seven heads of the

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99 Vos, p. 105, may be correct when arguing that the two presentations of the eschatological adversary are grounded in the same oral tradition.


first beast as references to various Roman emperors. Regardless of the precise identity of each head, the fact that they together comprise the "Anti-Christ" presents an altogether different picture than the one presented in II Thessalonians. The readers of II Thessalonians would expect a single figure to do battle with the "Lord Jesus" on the future Day of the Lord. The readers of the Apocalypse are told that the "Anti-Christ" has come, and is manifest in Rome. The activity of the "Anti-Christ" encompasses an empire, including its social, religious, and political institutions. It is the defeat of the City of Man that is the subject of the dirge in Rev.18. The Church does not await Christ's battle with Satan, but is herself already engaged in it.

John's description of the role of the "Anti-Christ" has some similarities to the one in I John 2:18f. The readers are told "many Anti-Christ have come." These "Anti-Christ"s probably include many of the author's opponents. This same attitude toward the opponents of the Church can also be observed in the Pastoral epistles and Jude.

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In these writings the presence of false teachers indicate that "it is the last hour;" the present thus takes on eschatological significance and believers should act accordingly.

So also, in the Apocalypse the Church's confrontation with Rome is presented as part of the cosmic battle between good and evil. The Parousia will bring final victory to a conflict that is now raging in this world. 106

John's vision allows the Church to understand herself in terms of God's redemptive plan for the consummation of the age. The delay in spite of its duration is part of God's plan. These "last days" have extended over a period of many years and may take many more. 107 The length of time should not concern the Church; no matter how long the struggle takes the eschatological battle against evil is being fought now. The Church has a specific role to play in the defeat of this evil, the beast. The Church is presently engaged in the tribulation and conflict of the end-time. She is in exile; she sojourns in the wilderness (Rev.12:6,14). Pain, disappointment, the deaths of Holy Martyrs, and the sacrifices of all the followers of the Lamb are elements of the eschatological battle which has engulfed this

106 Cf. Rev.12:9,13f.

107 Depending on which Roman emperor is represented by the first head of the beast in Rev.17, the Day of the Lord is already 20-100 years long. Cf. II Pet.3:8.
John provides a vision of hope and the motivation to grasp at this hope. John's prophecy promises the reconciliation of God with His people. He promises a new creation and the descent of the city of God.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away." Revelation 21:2-4.


"The History of Religions Approach to Apocalypticism and the 'Angel of the Waters' (Rev.16:4-7)." The Catholic Biblical Quarterly 39 (1977):367-381


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