CHAPTER TWELVE

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT IMMINENT EXPECTATION FOR THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH TO-DAY

Jesus' own understanding of the future has been elucidated by an examination of the duality of motifs present in his self-conciousness, a duality which informed also his expectation for the future. The hope of the early church, on the other hand, has been reconstructed by an examination of its assessment of the past (principally its assessment of the person and work of Jesus Christ as the fulfilment of salvation-history), and of the present (principally the working of the Holy Spirit amongst them, interpreted as a foretaste of the End). Despite the differences of approach, the content and significance of the future outlook is, in both cases, entirely similar: for both are founded upon the conviction that the End has—*in a hidden manner*—come; that its coming in manifest form cannot therefore be far off, though for the moment it is held back in the interests of grace, allowing an opportunity to be given to men to repent and believe.

There is, therefore, no question of abandoning an *outmoded* hope; no necessity to re-interpret (or demythologize) an expression of the early church's expectation which is now no longer tenable. Much rather, because the essence of the New Testament hope is Christological, it is possible for our hope to be similarly orientated and our assessment of the purposes of the present time similarly informed by that hope. If Jesus, or the early church, had orientated their hope about some delimited expectation, then we would indeed be forced to revise their hope, to orientate ours differently from theirs, to re-interpret and refashion their hope in order to make it meaningful and relevant to-day. But such, as we have tried to maintain, was *not* the case: Jesus and the early church as a whole, based their future expectation upon the conviction that the End was in Jesus Christ (though hidden), and that therefore the End in its manifest, unambiguous, universal form could not be far off: but they persistently refused to allow the sense of nearness to be turned

into a belief that the End would definitely come within a certain number of years. They steadfasty rejected such a delimitation because beside the eschatological motif in the salvation-history they reckoned with the grace motif and realised that the time for repentance and faith could not be limited by men and that the provision of God's mercy could not be measured nor forecast.

In this chapter we propose to allow the undelimited but imminent Parousia hope to illuminate the character of the present and its significance in the total salvation-history pattern. We suggest that four major characteristics of the present, understood as grace-time, should be considered: they are:

1. The present period must be regarded as a time given in order to facilitate *repentance and faith*. The grace motif of Jesus' life, death and resurrection is entirely 'of a piece' with the provision of the present time before the final, universal, open display of the End. The vicarious nature of Christ's work is not considered in the New Testament as absolving men from aligning themselves to that work through repentance and faith. The demand for such alignment is inherently bound up in the vicarious work itself, and so the provision of an opportunity wherein such repentance and faith can be effected is as much a part of the 'gospel'—of grace—as the events of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are 'gospel'. The entire dependence of men for salvation upon the grace of God is not divorced from the response of faith and repentance required of man,[1] and it is the grace motif which is responsible for providing an opportunity and a time for this.[2] However, the provision of this opportunity is not altogether 'natural', self-evident or obvious, but actually stands in tension with the eschatological impulse towards the glorious revelation proper to the End events. This tension, which—if we may speak in this way—is a divine tension based upon God's purpose both to reveal his rule and also to give men time to respond to it freely in faith, gives rise to a human tension of a similar nature. The Christian is, on the one hand, thankful for the opportunity to repent and is not over anxious that the occasion should be cut short prematurely (cf. e.g. Lk. 13, 8) yet, on the other hand, being himself caught up in the ambiguity

[1] Cf. questions 56, 86 and 87 of the Heidelberg Catechism.
[2] Cf. Eph. 2, 8. The entire matter, even faith itself, is subsumed under the concept of grace.

of the present, being involved in suffering and endurance[1] the Christian hopes and prays for the End to come speedily (cf. I Cor. 16, 22; Rev. 22, 20). Hence the provision of time (cf. Mk. 13, 10) to repent and believe stands side by side with the shortening of the time (Mk. 13, 20) for the sake of the elect. The New Testament is clear that the present ('now'[2]) is *the* opportunity which men have to repent and believe,[3] and that the End delays only for this purpose—and not indefinitely. It is man's final chance. It is man's final *chance*, because the End *is* held back, God *is* patient and wills to give men time for repentance and faith and obedience: it is man's *final* chance, for the End delays not naturally, not indefinitely, not unintelligibly, but solely because it is held back by God's mercy, all the while remaining near, ready to arrive, belonging to the complex of events broken off at the Ascension, belonging as the *revelation* of that which has already occurred in Christ in lowliness and hiddenness.

2. Because the present grace-time spells the opportunity for men to repent and believe, the present is also to be seen as the *era of the church*, of those called to repentance and faith and obedience who hear the call and, more or less, here and there, attempt to understand and respond to it. We have already suggested[4] reasons for thinking that in all probability Jesus envisaged that 'his mission and message should be enshrined and mediated in a community living under his allegiance'.[5] This community has a two-fold purpose. In the first place it is the community in which Jesus Christ is recognised and openly acknowledged.[6] In the second place, it is the community through which Jesus Christ is proclaimed to 'those outside', and so through which his gracious ministry is continued. Thus the church is the eschatological community partaking in the blessings of the End through its relationship with Christ. It is also the community specially established to further the purpose of grace by participating in furthering the occasion of repentance and faith through constant witness. Both aspects are present in

[1] Cf. Mk. 13, 9; Rev. 5, 10f., etc.
[2] Cf. Stählin, in *T.W.N.T.* IV, pp. 110ff.
[3] Cf. Mk. 1, 15; Acts 3, 20; Lk. 13, 6-9 (cf. Michaelis, *Gleichnisse*, p. 98, who thinks this parable referred *originally* not simply to Jews but to all men).
[4] Above, chapter 7, pp. 95ff.
[5] Turner, *Jesus, Master and Lord*, p. 262.
[6] Cf. Cullmann, *Early Church*, pp. 105ff., *Time*, pp. 185f.

embryo in the choosing of the Twelve (Mk. 3, 13f., par.) 'that they might be with him' (sharing in the eschatological nature of his person and work, anticipating the End through union with him), and 'that he might send them forth' (participating in his ministry by preaching and calling forth repentance and faith). In both respects, the church's character and purpose are parallel to her Lord's who himself was 'sent' by God.[1]

3. Following from this, the present grace-time can be designated the time of the *Christian mission*. 'The time of Jesus' life on earth and of his presence in the Spirit is the time of grace, for it is the time of the proclamation of the Word'.[2] The mission of the church is already prefigured in the short preaching tour which the Twelve undertook during the earthly ministry of Jesus (Mk. 6, 7ff. par., cf. also Lk. 10, 1ff.) and is continued in his absence—though in this mission his hidden presence is assured.[3] The mission is paramount in the church's life; persecution must not hinder the progress of mission—indeed, it is anticipated that the mission will be costly[4]. The mission is especially to the fore in the Epistles [5] and it is evident that Paul himself was entirely dedicated to the service and progress of the gospel.[6] The variety of the gifts which Christians possess he subsumes under the overall purpose of edifying—particularly edifying the unbeliever (cf. I Cor. 14, 23ff.).

Of course, according to the New Testament, witness is not exhausted by the idea of preaching. Nor is repentance and faith simply regarded as confession of faith if this is understood as an intellectual conviction orally expressed. The witness which the

[1] This idea, not prominent in the Synoptics (cf. Mk. 1, 38; 12, 6) is emphasised by the Fourth Gospel—cf. Jn. 3, 17; 24. 5, 36; 38. 6, 29; 57. 7, 29. 8, 22. 10, 36. 11, 42. 17, 3; 8; 18; 21; 23; 25 ἀποστέλλω: and 4, 34. 5, 23f; 30; 37. 6, 38f; 44. 7, 16; 17; 28; 33. 8, 16; 18; 26; 29. 9, 4. 12, 44f.; 49. 13, 20. 14, 24. 15, 21. 16, 5. πέμπω cf. Rengstorf, in *T.W.N.T.* I, pp. 397ff.; Barrett, *John*, pp. 403f.

[2] Holwerda, *Spirit*, p. 84.

[3] Cf. Mtt. 28, 20. Jn. 15, 26-27 (Mk. 16, 20).

[4] The interim period is characterised by distress and persecution under which witness is to be carried out. This includes domestic distress (cf. Lk. 14, 26. Mk. 13, 12), cosmic distress (cf. Mk. 13, 8. Rev. 6, 5-6), and political distress (cf. Mk. 13, 8 par.). In point of fact, the Christian mission has apparently progressed mainly under the utmost persecution (cf. e.g. K. S. Latourette, *The Unquenchable Light*).

[5] Cf. Rom. 11, 25. 15, 19ff. I Cor. 1, 18ff. 9, 13; 23. II Cor. 3, 6. 4, 3f. 5, 18f. 6, 2-3. 9, 13. 10, 16. Gal. 1, 6ff. Phil. 1, 12ff. etc.

[6] Cf. esp. I Cor. 9, 23 and 9, 13.

New Testament demands in the present includes the whole field of Christian ethics: 'Not one of us is only a Christian; we are all also a bit of the world. And so we are necessarily also concerned with worldly attitudes, with translations of our responsibility into this realm. For the Confession of Faith claims to be fulfilled in its application to the life we all live, to the problems of our actual existence in the theoretical and practical questions of our everyday life . . .'.[1] Mk. 14, 7ff. speaks of a ministry to the poor which obviously includes the alleviation of need such as the price of the ointment would have furthered.[2] In the authority which Jesus gives his disciples (Mk. 6, 7ff.) to 'cast out unclean spirits' it is made apparent that the physical needs of men (in all their variety) must also be the concern of those who preach 'that men should repent'. As Mtt. 25, 31-46 makes evident, such ministration to those in need is regarded as ministry to Christ himself (even where it is not recognised by the doer as such [3]). A definite ministry to society at large seems to be envisaged in the expression (Mtt. 5, 13 par.) 'ye are the salt of the earth': perhaps Mk. 9, 50 is a fundamentally different saying from Mtt. 5, 13: but its meaning is very similar if the clue to its interpretation is the salting of sacrifices: [4] whilst Mark sees the effect of 'salting' in individualistic terms, Matthew thinks of the entire Christian community as the necessary salt apart from which the entire world is unacceptable to God (cf. Mtt. 5, 14).

This entire ministry to the world is a part of the church's witness to the world, being a confession of its allegiance to Jesus Christ. The tension between eschatology and grace, between already accomplished and not yet revealed, between longing for the End and thankfulness for its delay, is nowhere more apparent than in this sphere of Christian faith and witness. For ethics, Christian

[1] Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, p. 32.

[2] One wonders whether in the phrase εὖ ποιῆσαι in Mk. 14, 7 there might be an allusion to preaching the gospel to the poor? Cf. Is. 61, 1-2 (Lk. 4, 18 par. 7, 22 par.). Whereas v. 5 uses the verb δοθῆναι, v. 7 does not speak of *giving*, but of *doing good*.

[3] Some wish to understand 'brethren' as only needy *Christians*, but this seems unlikely; 'for, while all the individuals denoted by "all the nations" (whichever sense we give it) would be sure to have had some opportunity to succour a fellow man in need, it is obvious that they certainly could not all be assumed to have had a chance to succour a needy Christian', Cranfield, 'Diakonia', in *L.Q.H.R.* CLXXXVI, 1961, p. 276.

[4] Though, perhaps, the reference is to the ordinary domestic use of salt.

ethics, are at the same time an aspect of faith, an aspect of the purpose for which this grace-time is given us, and also an aspect of the End, a participation already in the blessing of the End. Christian ethics are at once a testimony to the world of the world's failure and condemnation and at the same time an assertion that God has reconciled the world to himself and that men can enter into the service of God. Christian ethics, made possible by the delay of the End (and so by grace) spring from participation in the End, from thankfulness to God for his work in Jesus Christ [1] (and so are eschatological). The constant tension in Christian ethics, between a tendency towards world affirmation (the desire to anticipate the time when the adversary the devil no longer goes about as a roaring lion!), and the tendency towards world denial (the desire to opt out of the struggle against evil by not coming into contact with it!) testifies to the twofold character of the present as an eschatological period (the world *is* reconciled—Col. 1, 20. II Cor. 5, 19, etc.) and as a grace-time prior to the End manifestation (the world still awaits its 'deliverance'—Rom. 8, 18f.). The same twofold character of the present time is also emphasized by the fact that Christian ethics are imposed as a free response. They are demanded as part of the response of faith, to be undertaken responsibly and urgently, and with utter obedience: and yet they spring from thankfulness, and are entered into with joy and confidence. In this sphere of Christian ethics, the eschatological situation of the present grace-time can be discerned in all its complexity; our understanding of the situation brought about by the advent of the End in Christ, its advent in hiddenness and the holding back of its advent in openness, makes sense of Christian ethics and of the tension within

[1] So the Heidelberg Catechism's third section (in which good works are discussed) is entitled 'of Thankfulness'. Calvin, in grounding ethics at least partially on a general law of God rather than upon a specifically Christological foundation, emphasises this character of ethics less, but cf. Book III of the Institutes. The responsive character of ethics is brought out by Luther (cf. e.g. his comments on Gal. 4, 8ff.) The Westminster Confession is similarly orientated (cf. Ch. XVI 'Of good works'). And the Scottish Confession of 1560 asserts, 'So that the cause of gude warkis, we confess to be not our free wil, bot the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, who dwelling in our hearts be trewe faith, bringis furth sik warkis as God has prepared for us to walke in . . . and thir thingis they do, not be their awin power, bot be the power of the Lord Jesus, without whom they were able to do nothing' (taken from Barth, *Knowledge of God and Service of God*, Gifford Lectures for 1937-8, pp. 113f. Barth's text is based on Sir John Skene's *Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, 1424-1579.).

faith and obedience and releases the disciple for obedience both with joyfulness and with serious urgency. *Now* is the time for Christian ethics; yet not with anxiety and distress as though all depended on our own good works, but from thankfulness and joy because the world *is* reconciled: yet not without seriousness and urgency as though we had all the time in the world, but with the utmost urgency since this opportunity to express our faith and make our witness to the world is dependent entirely on grace and on the withholding of the End.

4. The present grace-period is the *era of the Holy Spirit*. In one sense the Spirit stamps the present as the eschatological time of the End. He is the real presence of Christ with his church.[1] In Acts 2, 16f. Peter asserts that Pentecost has fulfilled the prophecy of Joel 2, 28-32, thus characterising the present as 'the last days'.[2] The same concept is contained in the choice of the two terms used to define the Spirit's presence ἀπαρχή und ἀρραβών.[3] Both testify to the real anticipation of the End, and also encourage a straining forward to the final manifestation of the End in its unambiguous form.[4]

In another sense the Spirit stamps the present as the grace period in which men are given occasion to repent and believe. For it is the Spirit who sustains the mission of the church—indeed He inaugurated it.[5] The Spirit mediates the presence of Christ to the believing community speaking to the community of Christ.[6] He

[1] Cf. esp. Mtt. 28, 20. Jn. 14, 17-18.

[2] Clearly that did not mean that he thought that the End had occurred in its final, open form. Joel 2, 31 speaks of that which will occur 'before the great and terrible day of the Lord come'.

[3] Cf. the discussion above, chapter 9, pp. 169ff.

[4] Cf. e.g. Rom. 8, 23 where the ἀπαρχή of the Spirit is spoken of in connection with the Christian 'groaning', waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body: or II Cor. 1, 22, which speaks of the ἀρραβών of the Spirit in connection with being sealed (σφραγισάμενος) by God—clearly a reference to the yet future redemption which the Christian awaits (cf. v. 10).

[5] To be sure the mission *is* commanded by Christ (cf. our discussion above, chapter 11, pp. 205ff) and *is* at least prefigured in the preaching tour of the Twelve. But it is the Spirit who actually sets the mission in motion. Of Jn. 16, 7 Barrett writes, 'The thought is identical with that of 7, 39; the coming of the Spirit waits upon the glorifying of Jesus. The Spirit is the agent of the creation of the Church and the salvation of the world; in this sense the coming of the Spirit depends upon the completion of the work of Christ' (*John, ad loc*).

[6] Cf. Jn. 14, 26. 15, 26-27. 16, 13ff. I Cor. 12, 3. Eph. 2, 18. etc.

also mediates Christ through the community to those outside.[1] He not only guides the witnessing but leads the geographical progress of the gospel.[2] As Barth writes, '. . . there is a dominion of the Holy Spirit. It corresponds to the dominion of Christ, between his resurrection and return. Christ's resurrection, in a sense, might have been the end. Does it not declare the end of this world and the beginning of the Kingdom of God? But God did not will it so. He inserted between the resurrection and the Kingdom of God, the Dominion of Christ, the Dominion of the Holy Spirit. We may still repent, we may still live on, at once facing toward resurrection and return, during these final times which make God's mercy and his patience manifest to us'.[3]

Thus the present time is a time of grace, made possible by the patience (μακροθυμεῖ)[4] of God in withholding the End: it is a time for repentance and faith, the time of the Church and of the church's mission: the time of the Holy Spirit. And whilst these features testify to the grace-character of the present, they also testify to its eschatological nature, being signs that the present *is* grace-time, *is* 'the last days', and that the End *is* at hand. The grace-time, though not temporally delimited, is not unending: the End waits to break in.

Two important corollaries follow from this understanding of the character of the present and the nearness of the End. Though the present is not unending, it is not within *our* knowledge nor is it our prerogative to delimit the present time and specify how much time yet remains. Throughout the Christian era there have been those who have thought to reconstruct from the contemporary political, cosmic or domestic situation, a programme whereby the further duration of the interim could be estimated if not exactly defined. This occurs particularly (and understandably easily!) where a sense of the urgency of the church's missionary task is perceived. It would serve no purpose here to describe exhaustively the number of occasions on which this has happened; but it may illustrate how easily men have fallen into the error if we select instances through the history of the church.[5]

[1] Cf. Mk. 13, 11 par. Jn. 15, 26-27. 16, 7f. Acts 5, 32.
[2] Cf. Acts 13, 2. 16, 6f. 21, 11. (also 10, 44f. 11, 18).
[3] Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, pp. 111f.
[4] Cf. II Pet. 3, 9; 15. Interestingly the B.F.B.S. New Testament has a marginal reference from Lk. 13, 8 to II Pet. 3, 9; 15.
[5] For another historical survey cf. Glasson, *Appearing*, pp. 43ff.

Already in II Thessalonians 2 we meet with some who, because of misunderstanding of Paul's preaching, sought to anticipate the End, and because of their belief in its proximity (if not its actual presence) apparently ceased working altogether (cf. 3, 10f.).

Montanism is an example. The Montanists maintained that 'as the dispensation of the Father had given place to the dispensation of the Son when Christ came to earth, so now the dispensation of the Son had given place to the dispensation of the Spirit'.[1] The coming of the Spirit marked for Montanus the immediate heralding of the Parousia and the establishment of the New Jerusalem in Phrygia itself. An ethic of world-denial and an enthusiastic anticipation of the imminent end followed. As Greenslade remarks, its 'enthusiasm was not purely and specifically Christian; it smacked of the fanaticism of those Asiatic cults of which Montanus had once been a priest, a fanaticism which the English bishops of the eighteenth century found in Methodist enthusiasm'.[2] Undoubtedly Montanus failed to see that the 'sign' of the Spirit stamped the present not only as an eschatological time *but also* as grace time.[3]

An example from the time of the Reformation is Luther himself. Not untypical of this Reformer, his desire to translate his understanding of eschatology into the terms of ordinary practical involvement in life resulted in some inconsistencies. Partly the man's unsettled personality was responsible for this, but partly too was his mixed background with his strict scholastic intellectual training rubbing shoulders with his fascination for the popular apocalyptic writings of his generation. On the one hand, this background led him away from attempting to translate eschatology in chronological terms for scholastic theology was not inclined to consider categories of space and time as having real bearing in the rule of God; but on the other hand, this background led him almost involuntarily towards relating time to the Kingdom of God in a false, delimited manner. For the most part realisation that the inbreak of God's final and unambiguous rule could not be far off expressed itself in a proper sense of urgency and his resolve, in 1530, to publish his translation of the Book of Daniel without

[1] F. F. Bruce, *The Growing Day*, p. 87.
[2] *Schism in the Early Church*, p. 109.
[3] Cf. Cullmann, 'Early Christianity and Civilisation', originally in *Verbum Caro* V (Nos. 17-20), 1951; now in English in *Early Church*, pp. 207ff.

further ado reveals only a due sense of the open possibility that the End could come at any moment, a realisation that God would not indefinitely delay his final coming.[1] Consistently with this, Luther was scornful of attempts to date the End,[2] an activity in which not a few of his contemporaries engaged. At the same time, he himself was guilty on occasions of trying to do the self-same thing. As Torrance says, his 'fervid eschatological expectation kept up its force until Luther's death, but it became more and more calculating'.[3] In a revised edition in 1545 of his book Suppatatio annorum mundi, first issued in 1541, he determined that there were strictly speaking just 500 years remaining before the End, but since God had promised to 'shorten the days' the Parousia could occur at any moment; there might be only 100 years left. This is just the sort of delimitation which a sense of urgency can easily prompt, but which, as even Luther at his wisest knew, should be guarded against and avoided.

In the early part of the nineteenth century, millenarianism, with a strong belief that Christ's Advent was about to dawn, spread in Evangelical circles, chiefly owing to the books by Hatley Frere [4] and Lewis Way.[5] Both maintained 'that the view which had prevailed since the time of Augustine, that the Second Coming of Christ would be at the end of the world, was contrary to Scripture, and that the earlier view of the second and third centuries was the true one, that Christ would return and reign on earth for a thousand years . . .' [6] The result was a growth in the expectation that Christ was about to return, and whilst some found in this a motive for increased activity, others were 'afloat on prophesying, and the immediate work of the Lord is disregarded for the uncertain future'.[7]

An example from the present day may serve to complete the sketch. It is chiefly amongst the smaller sects that Christ's return is calculated, and a notable case is Seventh-Day Adventism. Right

[1] Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, p. 19.

[2] 'In 1533, Luther had to deal severely with Michel Stifel for calculating that the world would end at 8o. a.m. on 19th October 1533'; Torrance, *Kingdom and Church*, p. 20.

[3] *Kingdom and Church*, p. 21.

[4] *A combined view of the prophecies of Daniel, Esdras and St. John*, 1815.

[5] *Thoughts on the Scriptural Expectations of the Christian Church*, 1823.

[6] G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party*, p. 137.

[7] Quoted by Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party*, p. 137 from E. Bickersteth's *Memoir*, Vol. II, p. 43.

at its inception, the founder William Miller 'as a result of his original studies in the Scriptures . . . became convinced that the end of the world would come on 10th December, 1843. His enthusiasm was such that he gathered tens of thousands of followers who watched in vain for the expected Advent of Christ. Nothing daunted he essayed another prophecy, and, blaming an error in mathematics for the fiasco, advanced the date by a year'.[1]

It is an easy and subtle step from the assertion that Christ's return is 'near' to declaring that it will come at a definite date. Yet it is instructive to notice how—at least in the examples we have cited—non-New Testament factors have helped to achieve what we maintain is essentially a non-New Testament standpoint. Thus, in the case of Montanism, Phrygia (and Asia Minor as a whole) was noted for its enthusiastic cults. In Luther's case, as has been pointed out, the influence of popular apocalypticism was strong upon him. The 19th century example was strongly influenced (as one of the titles of the important publications makes clear) by the apocalypticism of Daniel and Esdras. Seventh-Day Adventism derives much of its encouragement from the fact that the 'institutional' churches do not (generally speaking) hold, or manifest an awareness of, the idea of the nearness of the End in any sense, and its own calculating tendency is, in part, a revolt against indifference.

However, the transition, though subtle and easy, is fundamental. 'Die Zeichen der Zeit, auf die zu achten Jesus uns ausdrücklich auffordert, zeigen unmissverständlich an, dass "das Feld weiss geworden ist zur Ernte", dass das "Ende dieser Weltzeit" bevorsteht. . . .' and yet, 'Es ist selbstverständlich völlig wertlos und verkehrt, darüber zu streiten, *wie* "nahe" Jesu Wiederkunft ist . . .'.[2] Recognition of the character of the present time should make us aware of the nearness of the End, held back in the interests of grace, but should not lead us to suppose that we can, or ought to delimit the date of the End.

That is the first corollary which follows from what we have said about the nearness of the End. The other is this: that the

[1] J. O. Sanders and J. Stafford Wright, in a pamphlet, *Some Modern Religions*, p. 16.

[2] Hermann Leitz, *Die christliche Hoffnung und die letzten Dinge*, pp. 94 and 149.

church is required to recognise that its task in this present interim period must be pursued with intense urgency, 'whilst it is yet today'.[1] Though we cannot say that the End will certainly come tomorrow, or next year, its *nearness* should drive the church to serious, responsible and urgent obedience to its tasks. The provision of a grace-time is not to be taken for granted as self-evident or 'natural'. Self-evident and natural it certainly is *not*, for Jesus' 'life, death, resurrection and *Parousia* belong together as parts of an indivisible whole, as moments in the great and all-decisive movement of God to man now breaking into the world'.[2] The present opportunity for repentance and faith and obedience is the time of God's patience; this merciful provision must not be allowed to blind us to the urgent necessity imposed upon us but should rather undergird that sense of urgency. Nevertheless, this sense of urgency must not become an anxious matter, as though the End's coming were dependent not on God's mercy but on our faithfulness in performing our task. To be sure, the church must witness with zeal! 'Within the time of God's patience, she announces the grace and judgement accomplished in Jesus Christ, which on his return will be revealed in glory and in public.' [3] But the coming of the End is not withheld on account of the church's zeal or lack of it, but on account of the patience of God.[4]

We suggest that where the person and work of Jesus Christ is evaluated in terms of eschatology *and* grace, there too the present time will be recognised both as eschatological and the provision of grace. The End will be regarded indeed as near, as ready to break in at any moment, as held back only by the merciful patience of God who wills that men should repent whilst there is time: but the End's coming will not be delimited, either by our calculations or by our imagining that its coming is determined by our success in witnessing. It is for God only to decide (Mk. 13, 32).[5]

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[1] Cf. Barth, *C.D.* III/2, pp. 468ff.

[2] Camfield, 'Man in his Time', in *S.J.T.* III, 1950, p. 133; cf. Cranfield, in *Essays in Christology*, pp. 89ff.

[3] Barth, *The Faith of the Church*, p. 118.

[4] Cf. Cullmann, 'Eschatologie und Mission', in *E.M.* 1941, pp. 98ff.

[5] See further, Preiss, *Life in Christ*, p. 71.