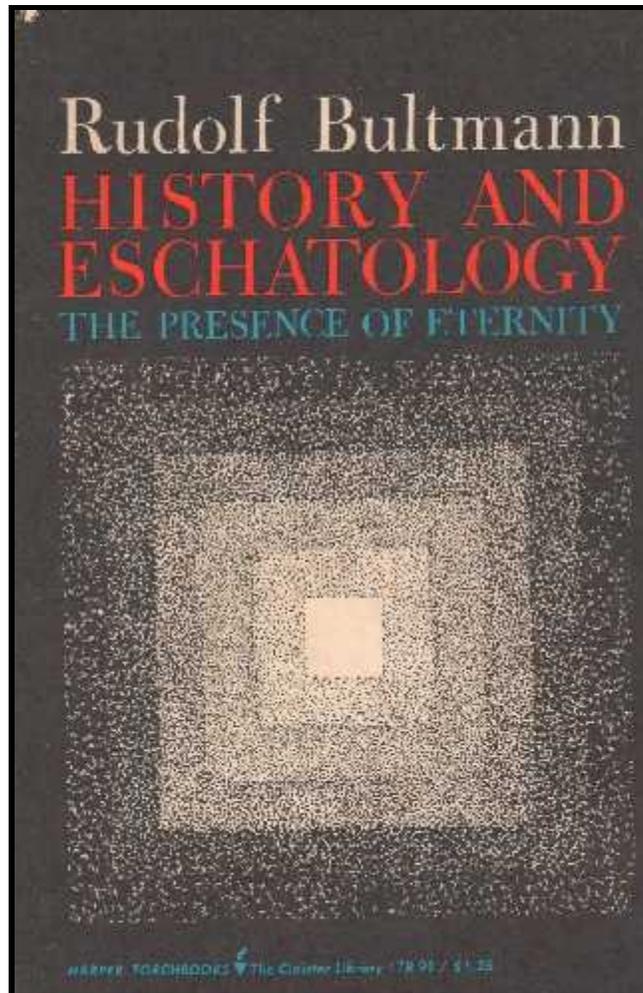


Bultmann's Meaning and Use of the Word **Eschatology**

Or

Die Gegenwart der Ewigkeit



By

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10. Juli 2022

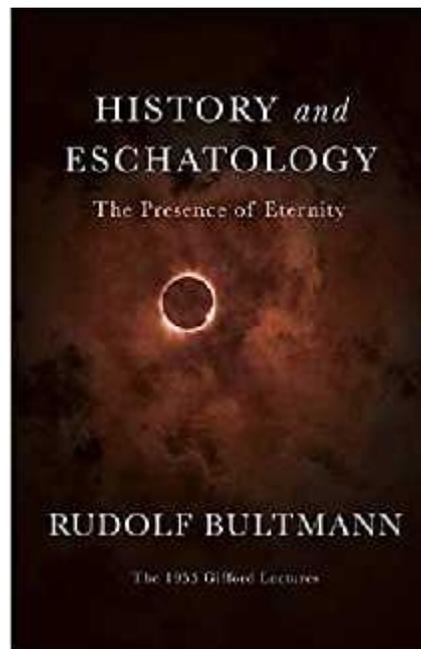
*“For a thousand years in your sight
are like yesterday when it is past,
or like a watch in the night” (Ps 90:4) - NRSV*

*“...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years,
and a thousand years are like one day” (2 Pet iii. 4) - NRSV*

O for a thousand tongues to sing
My great Redeemer’s praise,
The glories of my God and King,
The triumphs of His grace.

Hear Him, ye deaf; His praise, ye dumb,
Your loosened tongues employ;
Ye blind, behold your Savior come;
And leap, ye lame, for joy.

- Charles Wesley



Present edition of Bultmann’s book taken from Amazondotcom. The cover page book in my library was bought in December of 2012¹ and is still the same 1955 Gifford lectures in both editions.

¹ Bultmann, Rudolf. (1957). *History and eschatology: The presence of eternity*. New York, NY: Harper Torchbooks.

As you fold the other pages (or scroll them up to just see this page, I have a test for you – yes, I know, but humor me - and don't look back at the first two pages.

Note: You'll see the answer in a second.

Test: Without looking back - write down the title to the book show on the first page.

.
. .

Don't read past this line until have answered the title question assignment.

YES!
THE TITLE
IS **HISTORY AND**
ESCHATOLOGY BUT YOU
MAYBE (LIKE ME) HAVE
MISSED THE BLUE LINE THAT
SAYS THE *PRESENCE OF ETERNITY*.
NOW, I WANT TO MAKE A VERY BIG
DEAL OUT OF THIS BLUE LINE
FOR THIS IS THE DEFINITION
AND YOU NEED REALLY GO
NO FARTHER AS THE
PRESENCE OF
ETERNITY IS
NOW!

This answer to the [blue line](#) on page one.

After all these years of reading Bultmann and seeing his use of 'eschatology' (the big E.) the meaning finally came to me when reading his *History and Eschatology*. Still, the meaning did not show up until I asked (for the 80th time) what does he point to with the E. word? I closed the book and looking at the cover the [blue line](#) title jumped out at me. Finally, like being knocked off of my mule from a lightning strike, the answer came. I saw the light. I heard the word. Now I know. As close to having a Jesus moment as one can get. A Wesleyan warm feeling at Aldersgate...the gap was closed and it is [The Presence of Eternity](#) – it is "now."

What does Bultmann mean with his use of the word 'eschatology' in his writings? The task of this paper is to explain his meaning and the task of this page is to explain in laymen's term what it means. No, you don't need a religious experience to appreciate the lucidity of Bultmann's use of the E. word. The task of the rest of the paper will be the academic trek if you want to go to school on it. That work will be for explanation and exegesis. You may read as much as you like.

Bultmann takes the dichotomy of history and E. to compare what we read in the Bible pointing out the differences between the apocalyptic understanding as compared to the eschatological understanding about the 'end of times.' By everyone's definition "Eschatology is the doctrine of the 'last things' or, more accurately, of the occurrences with which our known world comes to its end" (Bultmann, *History...*, p. 23).

Paul, the Synoptic Gospels, most of the New Testament, most churches – especially the Bible churches, and the Roman Catholic Church, tend to use the apocalyptic and cosmic endings given for the end of time, when Jesus returns "on that day," when the wrath of God prevails. The eschatology of the Book of John carries the theme of 'realized eschatology' and claims the end of time is in the present. Jesus with his words to the lady at the well "*I am he, the one speaking to you*" (4:26) or "*The hour is coming and now is*" (5:24f) and "*I am the resurrection...and anyone who believes in me will never die*" (11:26). Of course, in other places the present or presence of God is in the now: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:15). Paul in Romans "For history has reached its end since Christ is the end of the law (x.4) and "Neither death nor life...shall be able to separate us from the love of God..." (Rom. VIII. 35-39).

The hour, the time, the word, is between the 'no longer' and the 'not yet' and is the eschatological transcendence of history to the presence. While in this presence you stand on the [blue line](#) with one foot almost in the past and the other foot 'almost' in the future. This is the [blue line](#) of eternity. The eschatological event of hearing Jesus say "*I that speak unto thee, am He*" is the same as seeing the [blue line](#) on the cover of the book as the eschatological event becomes eschatological reality and compresses the 2000 plus years into the present.

We no longer have expectation of future cosmic events but we eschatologically stand in the light and presence of the good Lord. "Every instant is eschatological" and "you must look into your own personal history...as in every moment slumbers the possibility of being the eschatological moment" (p. 155).

The Model for the Space in The NOW!

The parts of The Model are:

1. The hour has come
2. **Eschatology**
3. The presence of eternity
4. How will you spend your time?
5. The no longer and the not yet
6. The NOW

The hour has come is the left side of the model and the top side is **eschatology**. **Eschatology** joins the 'hour' with the right side which is **the presence of eternity**. The bottom side joins the 'hour' with the 'presence' with the question of **"How will you spend your time?"** The middle space of the model is the wedge blade of life, or **the no longer** looking over to **the NOT YET**. In the middle of the whole model space is the word **"NOW."**

Around the Model are globe circles surrounding the space showing the finitude of space and time. This means the NOW is enclosed. All is in the model. All is combined in the space by these sides and has NOW in the center. This is the Model of *eternal life* in **The Presence of Eternity**.

Research and background Excursus

Given the small reading group to witness and read this paper, let me say the recent events have been just short of remarkable for combining the wisdom of the theologians and believers to help raise into the question of *eschatological reality* to a level of appreciation for the *Kingdom of God* and some of the stories to authenticate this **eschatology**. You will see a compression of time in history where two thousand years it just two days in God's **eschatological** time. We will move out of the history and into this cosmic compression in such a way that we can then be put back to where we are in the NOW.

This paper has the hint of being academic in sight but the scope is more toward a study of the Model with a bunch of **eschatological** existentialism thrown in for clarity, purpose, and correction. This paper has already shown the punch line. But to an interested reader I shall explicate, explain, and explore each part of the Model using quotes, pithy sayings, and pertinent expressions to support the claim of the Model. The Bibliography will reflect the depth and 'diamonds' of the neo-theologians and existential philosophers – with page numbers for those of you interested in following the argument(s).

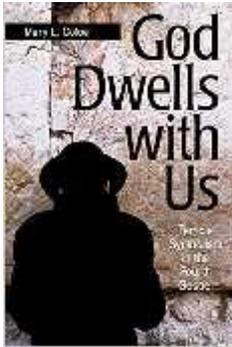
If there were a reason to dedicate this to anyone it would be Rudolf Bultmann – and his followers like Schubert Ogden and other [Wesleyan] Methodists – to name a few. Bultmann has for me since the early 70's been an inspiration with his fatherly and professional writings. God bless his work.

Finally, and again, you have the word or words in the Model. Read as much of this as you like. When we meet again I will show you the two main sides of the Model. These two expressions have been and are the inspiration for the charge to compose and write about the **eschatological** event, the **eschatological** existence, and **eschatological** hero of the New Testament. Now, is the time.

"And the Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn. 1:14).

The Model

1. The hour has come.



by Mary Coloe. The divine logos is “tabernacled” “tenting” and “dwelling” with us.

“The Fourth Gospel asserts that the divine glory is now accessible to human sensory experience in the flesh of Jesus” (cf. 1:14 – p. 13).

- A. “...the approach taken in these pages has grown out of my own ongoing spiritual journey that has come to know an indwelling God. Christians of many centuries have found in the Fourth Gospel words that speak to their experience of God’s closeness...Can the words of this Gospel still speak to men and women of the twenty-first century who seek intimacy with God ‘without seeing’ the Jesus of history? Are these images just words, or do they name a reality that Christians of all ages can experience? Can we still see in our world a God who dwells with us?” (p. 14).

“Verses 4:19-26 lie at the core...shows great narrative skill” (p. 99).

“...the hour is coming...

But the hour is coming, and now is...

I am, the one speaking to you.”

- B. In Jn. 4:35-38 “The Johannine passage draws on these prophetic images of the **eschatological** harvest but speaks of this as a present reality, already happening...With the Father’s sending of Jesus, and his mission in Samaria, the **eschatological** ingathering of fruit for eternal life is happening now. ‘The hour is coming **and now is...**’ (v. 23)...In ordinary time, there is an elapse of four months between the sowing of the seed and the harvest, but in the **eschatological** (v. 23), sowing and reaping coalesce. The collapse of normal time frames continues in verse 38...” (p. 110). This is **eschatological** background to the imagery of the harvest.
- C. “God dwells with us (1:14). This is the Good News proclaimed within the Johannine community and announced that readers may believe and have life (20:21). No longer need Christians look back with longing to the past, to the traditions of Israel’s tabernacle or Temple, nor to the experience of the historical Jesus. God dwells with us **now**, in the living Temple of the Christian community. Believers, drawn into the community through water and the Spirit, are drawn into Jesus’ own relationship with God. In the Son, we are sons/daughters, becoming the new household/Temple of the Father(14:2). (pp. 220-221).

“For the temple of God is holy, which [temple] ye are?” (p. 221).

2. Eschatology

“Today it is commonly accepted that the reign of God which Jesus proclaimed is the **eschatological** reign. The only point in dispute is whether Jesus thought that the reign of God was immediately imminent...or whether he thought that it was already present in his person – what today is called ‘realized **eschatology**’...But it is not disputed that Jesus understood his time as the time for decision...and his message was decisive for them. The time has now arrived in which the old promises and hopes will be fulfilled:

Blessed are the eyes which you see what you see!

For I tell you:

Many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it,

And to hear what you hear and did not hear it. (Luke x. 23f).

“The preaching of Jesus differs from the apocalypses in so far as he does not give any picture of the coming welfare, except to say that it is life” (pp. 31-32)².

Let’s go back to Bultmann’s definition of Cosmic and Historical **Eschatology**.

“**Eschatology** is the doctrine of the ‘last things’ or, more accurately, of the occurrences with which our known world comes to an end. It is the doctrine of the end of the world, of its destruction” (p. 23). He says “In later Judaism cosmology...it has replaced the conception of cyclical periods...and a real **eschatology** is established” meaning “history is understood from the point of view of **eschatology**, which is a decisive change from the Old Testament conception” (p. 29).

“All this means that in early Christianity, history is swallowed up in **eschatology**. The early Christian community understands itself not as a historical but as an **eschatological** phenomenon...God reckons with other times than men, for ‘with the Lord one day is as thousand years and a thousand years as one day’” (p. 37).

Schubert Ogden – *Christ Without Myth*³

“One needs only to note how John completely eliminates the futuristic **eschatology** of the primitive community to realize that the canonical writers themselves were far from being uncritical of the mythical world-picture” (p. 41).

“Whether one considers...John’s complete elimination of apocalyptic **eschatology**, it is obvious the New Testament itself both permits and requires existential interpretation...Bultmann says ‘If life in faith is interpreted as an anxious apocalypticism nor as a new super natural state, but as an authentic understanding of one’s existence as a person, then the modern man can understand the New Testament message’” (p. 64).

“Thus the New Testament speaks of the cross as ‘the **eschatological** event,’ which never becomes an event of the past, but rather is constantly present both in preaching and sacraments...and the proclamation of the cross asks its hearer whether he will appropriate this meaning, whether he is willing to be crucified with Christ” (p. 80).

“Bultmann holds...[Jesus] is proclaimed as the crucified one who is at the same time the risen Lord. The cross and the resurrection belong together as a unity...the New Testament presents the cross and the resurrection as a single event...that the one who is crucified is already the Son of God and that even in the occurrence of his death the power of death has already been overcome” (pp. 83-84).

² Bultmann, *History and eschatology*...

³ Schubert M. Ogden. (1961). *Christ without myth*. Dallas, TX: SMU Press.

3. THE PRESENCE OF ETERNITY

This line is the most significant line in this report, as it was, when I closed the cover to Bultmann's book and saw the blue line, it dawned on me as a Blessing from on High. First of all this opened to me as the definition of what **eschatology** means. I could look at Bultmann's word and think "He is talking eternity. He is talking presence of the moment. He is not talking history he is talking about the collapse of normal time. The past and the future coalesce in the present.

I am going to run with this blue line. While running I am marking the **PRESENCE** to **PRESENCE** to set it off from the mundane and the bourgeoisie. It is too bad I cannot add it to my joisting blue banner!

"Every present moment, however related to the whole historical process, is full of meaning, for the meaning of the whole process is concentrated in the now, in the present moment...And every present hour is responsible for the future" (p. 127).

"But the future is open in so far as it brings the gain or the loss of our genuine life and thereby gives to our present its character as moment of decision" (p.141).

"Every moment is the *now* of responsibility, of decision" (p. 143).

"The believer too lives from the future; first because his faith and his freedom can never be possession; as belonging to the eschatological event they can never become facts of past time but are reality only over and over again as event" (p. 152).

"But now we can say: *the meaning in history lies always in the present*, and when the present is conceived as the **eschatological** present by Christian faith the meaning in history is realized" (p. 155).

"Every instant is **eschatological**" (p. 154).

4. How will you spend your time?⁴

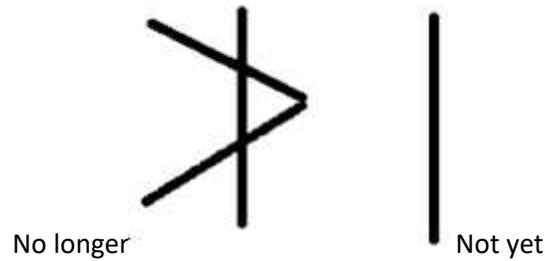
"Here is the main point at issue in the earlier discussion of a certain kind of existentialist theology. The danger in any restrictively existentialist interpretation of **eschatological** symbols is that man's decision of faith or unfaith will be assigned a greater weight than it actually has. I can indeed decide whether to let myself be loved by God and so be freed to share in the 'new creation' which that decision opens up for me. But what I can never decide is that I am destined for eternity to be raised up either to salvation or damnation by being incorporated in every present into God's everlasting life. Loved by God we are and ever shall be – and about this, we ourselves can do nothing whatever. Our decision is simply whether we are to accept this eternal destiny and thereby enter upon that new life here and now in the moment which is possible for all who open themselves to God's love.

The question facing us, we might say, is not the one that stares at us from the fundamentalist's road signs, "Where will you spend eternity? but rather,

"How and in what ways will you spend your time?" (p. 227).

⁴ Schubert M. Ogden. (1963). *The reality of God: And other essays*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

5. The no longer and the not yet



Bultmann says “For both Paul and John the present time is a ‘time-between’.
For Paul: between the resurrection of Christ and His expected Parousia at the end of the world.
For John: between the glorification of Jesus through his crucifixion (which is the same time his exaltation) and the end of the earthly life of the individual believer.
But for both of them this ‘between’ has not only chronological, but also essential, meaning.
It is the dialectical (discourse between different views) ‘between’ which characterizes the Christian existence as between ‘no longer’ and ‘not yet” (History and Eschatology, p. 49).

6. The **NOW**

The space between ‘*No longer*’ and ‘*Not yet*’ is the **NOW**.

This space is where we are.

This space is where it **all** is.

This space is the **presence**.

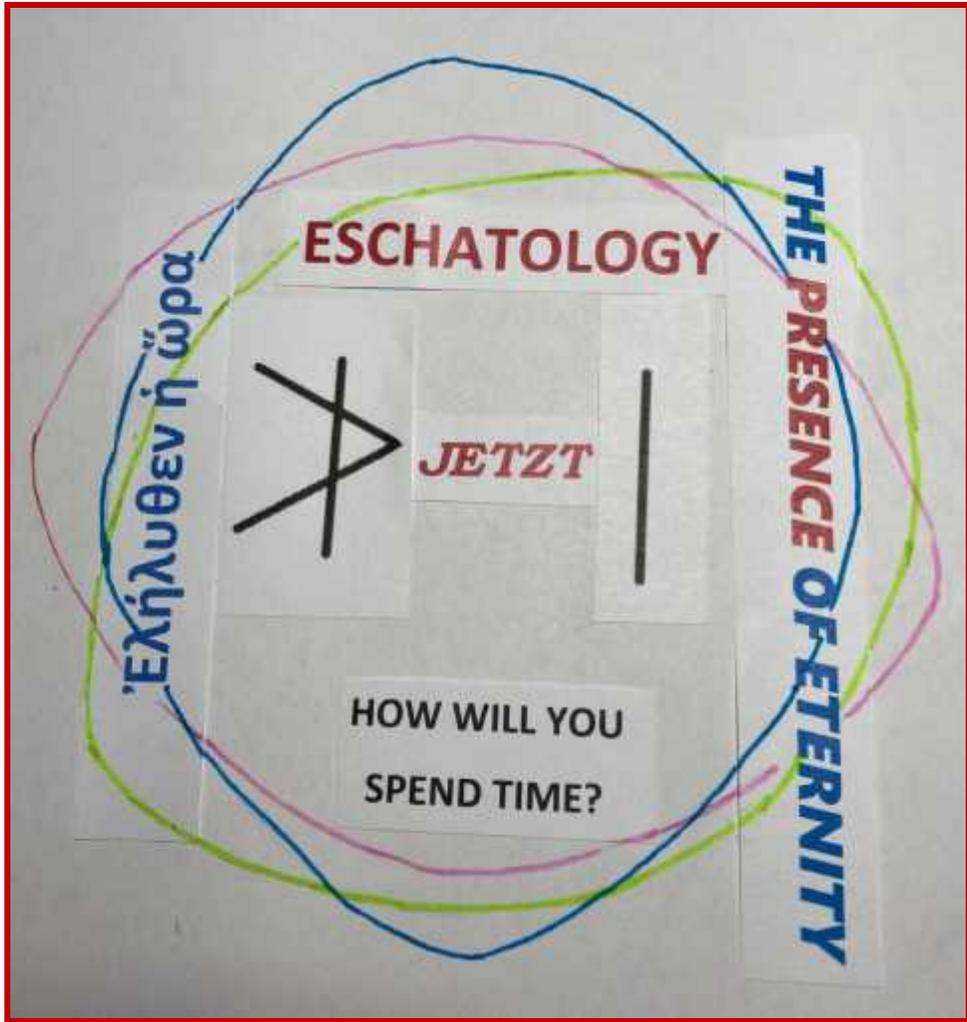
This space is **eternity**.

NOW we have our Model to encompass the whole of our realistic and existential eschatology.

The German word for now is, in my opinion, a little more robust for the title and I will add this new word in the final model.

The word is “Jetzt”

JETZT



JETZT MODEL

eschatology

PRONUNCIATION:

(es-kuh-TOL-uh-jee) 

MEANING:

noun: The doctrine or the study of final or ultimate matters, such as, death, judgment, end of the world, etc.

ETYMOLOGY:

From Greek *eschatos* (last) + *-logy* (study). Ultimately from the Indo-European root *eghs* (out), which also gave us *strange*, *extreme*, and *external*. Earliest documented use: 1844.

NOTES:

What happens after we die? There are as many eschatologies as there are religions, none with any evidence in support of its claims (“My favorite book says so” doesn’t count). In some, you get assigned a whole planet to yourself, in others you get to play a harp and float on a cloud. Here’s something we do have evidence for: We go back to Earth where we came from. If you need more eschatology, the Earth itself gets burned in about five billion years when our Sun runs out of juice and burns out and expands taking down its planets. Meanwhile, let’s enjoy a few rides on our planet around our Sun, take good care of this ride, and everyone traveling with us. Let’s do the best we can in the time we have: a split second on the cosmic scale.

USAGE:

“And now climate change has given us an eschatology for reckoning with our guilt: coming soon, some hellishly overheated tomorrow, is Judgment Day.”

Jonathan Franzen; Carbon Capture; *The New Yorker*; Apr 6, 2015.

See more usage examples of [eschatology](#) in Vocabulary.com’s [dictionary](#).

Final comments

My sister and I used to fuss at one another over our ‘religious beliefs’ and still do to some extent but both know we see the Word differently. My Dad and I used to also swap notes and I still have more than one letter written by him on some aspect of why we should go to church on Saturday. I used to think to myself how in the world can anybody spend as much time as he does on the Sabbath. He is almost acting the same way Patty Gayle is on her totally leaving by being raptured.

The parallel here is striking. I am becoming more like my Father and sister with my myopic vision of realized eschatology and finally figuring out what my hero Bultmann really means with the E. word. Guess this kinda runs in the family. Kinda of joyful to think about this as we are so far apart we probably couldn’t sit together in the same church...but that’s ok. We all love the Lord. Mine just lives only in the Fourth Gospel somewhere between the no longer and the not yet but near to Jetzt.

Have saved the last page below having taken some quotes from Günther Bornkamm.

You should read out loud every word as this is, in my opinion again, a little bit like an altar call.

BIBLIOGRAPHY - Will provide a reading list of books if requested.

From Günther Bornkamm⁵

“But also the disciples, who leave everything and obey Jesus’ call to ‘follow me’. In each case a world has come to its end, be it for salvation or judgment. Its past is called in question. Its future is no longer secure – that future towards which it has been moving, according to all those traditions and laws which had been valid until then. In this sense its ‘time’ has ended. In the encounter with Jesus, time is left to no one: the past whence he comes is no longer confirmed, and the future he dreams of no longer assured. But this is precisely why every individual is granted his own new present. For life, world and the existence of every individual, now stand in the sudden flash of light of the coming God, in the light of his reality and presence. This is the theme which Jesus proclaims” (pp. 62-63).

“The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, ‘Lo here it is!’ or, ‘there!’ for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you’ (Lk. xvii.20f.) In this way, in both word and action, Jesus fastens upon today, this present moment in which are contained the decisions of the ultimate future...The Jesus of the synoptic Gospels – and we may here say with certainty the historical Jesus – speaks in a characteristically different way from the Jesus of John’s Gospel, who is seen entirely with the eyes of post-Easter faith. The great ‘I am’ sayings of the fourth gospel (light, way, truth, resurrection, life) have no parallels in the synoptic Gospels” (p. 68).

“Just for this reason the hearer is directed to the world of his daily experience, to the seed and the fruit, the sowing and the reaping, the fig tree and the vineyard, the farmer and the housewife. Of course he knows, when he so much as lifts his eyes, that the small beginning holds promise of a magnificent ending. For beginning and end, however wonderful and incomprehensible the end may be, stand in a very definite relationship, one to another. The end comes from the beginning, the fruit from the seed, the harvest from the sowing, the whole leavened loaf from the leaven. Thus our task is to understand the present, in which the coming event already finds its beginning, the present in its apparent insignificance; and from it we are to demand no other signs of the splendour to come” (p.72).

“The future of God is *salvation* to the man who apprehends the present as God’s present, and as the hour of salvation. The future of God is *judgment* for the man who does not accept the ‘now’ of God but clings to his own present, his own past and also to his own dreams of the future. We might say with Schiller: ‘What we have denied the moment, eternity will never give back.’ Only here it applies in a new and fulfilled sense. In this acceptance of the present as the present of God, as we have tried to make clear, pardon and conversion are one in the works of Jesus.

God’s future is God’s call to the present, and the present is the time of decision in the light of God’s future. This is the direction of Jesus’ message. Over and over again, therefore, we hear the exhortation: ‘Take heed, watch’ (Mk. xiii. 33-37). This ‘take heed to yourselves’ (Mk. xiii. 9) stands in marked contrast to all curious questioning. Therefore, those very words of Jesus which refer to the future are not meant to be understood as apocalyptic instruction, but rather as eschatological promise” (p. 93)⁶.

⁵ Günther Bornkamm (1960). *Jesus of Nazareth*. New York, NY: Harper & Row.

⁶ This quote is also listed in Bornkamm book located on my Web site www.gheart.net 100 Books - as number 035.