

generalize from those less rare occasions on which an event in our own past suddenly becomes vividly present to us. This sometimes occurs without any apparent cause in the present. However, it is more often triggered by some aspect of the present situation. We speak of being reminded by something. Or we are guided by a skilled psychologist down a chain of associations, or under hypnosis a suggestion of the hypnotist is effective in causing us to reenact some part of our past.

This general discussion of the causal effect of the past upon the present is intended to set a context in which it becomes possible to take seriously the claim of some Christians that Jesus is immediately and effectively present in their lives. I am arguing that the unmediated prehension of past occasions even in the lives of others is possible. I would suggest that an attitude of expectancy, attention, and belief would be likely to facilitate such prehension and to determine which elements of the past should be prominent in their causal efficacy upon the present. Where such an attitude of expectancy, attention, and belief directed toward Jesus is shared with a community, as in the sacrament of the Lord's Supper, the possibility of the effective presence of Jesus to the individual believer is still further heightened. But the same presence might occur in private prayer, or even when there is no observable occasion for its occurrence in the immediate situation.

In itself the presence of Jesus to the believer proves nothing about his finality. If a case is to be made for finality, it must be in terms of the consequences in our existence of his presence and especially the consequences for our relationship to God. For the Christian the relationship to Jesus is experienced as the one adequate ground for his relationship to God. That this is true can only be confessed, not argued.

THE FINALITY OF CHRIST IN AN ESCHATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The affirmation of the finality of Christ is at best a theological option. However, it is a dubious option. For truth is an attribute of its occurrence, and Christ's finality does not occur when Christ is being affirmed as final. The history of Christology is the graveyard for just such direct claims about Jesus of Nazareth, because direct claims have no essential capacity to evoke a living faith. Jesus was believed to be anointed by God for the fulfillment of a mission. Yet the history of theology has been the history of the adulation of his person, and grandiose claims for Christ have lacked an essential connection with "what really happened." The titles of Jesus express a quite different reality when considered as events of disclosure than when considered as predicates of Jesus' person.

The first important break with Christology as direct claim for Christ came in the Protestant Reformation, when theology replaced what had become honorific personal titles with titles which indicated what he really did, titles bearing upon his functions, his offices, generally called the offices of prophet, priest, and king. The second and even more decisive break with the history of Christology has occurred in modern times in the realization that the person of Jesus functioned within an

entirely eschatological horizon. Because of that, it can now be seen that finality is not an attribute of Jesus of Nazareth himself, in his person, but of the eschaton whose imminence he signalizes. Finality as a christological claim, then, is not a wholly salutary option. The finality of Christ in the horizon of eschatology, however, is not optional at all, but simply redundant.

The primacy of eschatology in Christian understanding has come to light quite recently as a consequence of modern man's ability to treat the sources of faith with historical seriousness. Biblical exegetes applying modern historiography have come to know the nature of the early faith better than the apostles knew it themselves, and differently than the dogmatists, who until now have expanded upon and embroidered around the apparent historical gaps in the apostolic faith. Despite the great range of emphasis in current interpretations of eschatology, Jesus of Nazareth is unanimously regarded as an eschatological reality. The implication in that consensus is that it is unwise for the church to continue to build its faith upon claims for the person of Christ in himself.

Christology in the horizon of eschatology is nevertheless an important factor in eschatology. For one thing, a proper Christology has kept the church from allowing its eschatological message to become engulfed by apocalypticism. Apocalypticism is both ahistorical and anthropocentric. It is ahistorical because of the way it depreciates the world in the interests of an otherworldly future. Eschatology, on the other hand, ties the thought of God to the reality of history. Apocalypticism is anthropocentric, because apocalyptic "last things" visualize Christ as the judge of man according to human merits. The eschatology of the New Testament, however, is a fundamentally christological reality, tutoring man in the expectation of what God has brought about in Christ, rather than of what pious men will deserve. Apocalypticism may well have been the dominant

theology of the early church, and, as such, set Christology off on the wrong foot, making claims for Christ based on his alleged possibilities for the future, rather than on the achieved realities of his mission. The expectation of the kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus, on the other hand, had the power to transform the world through the response of repentance. When his death and resurrection appeared to have terminated his preaching, direct claims for Christ were allowed to supplant his indirect, kerygmatic effect. When these claims were apocalyptic, they converted faith, which was a bona fide transformation of history, into an attitude of waiting. The person of Jesus illuminated by his achieved history, however, serves as an open rebuke to the ahistorical and anthropocentric deviations of apocalypticism.

Christology is a significant aspect of eschatology for another reason. It now seems plausible, from a historical vantage point upon the early faith, that soteriology became the church's alternative to its ailing apocalyptic. Christological gains were made in the early ecumenical councils on the basis of soteriological alternatives to apocalypticism. In order to forgive sins, it was argued, Christ must have been more than a man, hence the direct claims for his deity. Eschatology, however, when seen as the horizon within which christological statements are to be made, subordinates soteriology, with its emphasis on Jesus' role in the forgiveness of sins, to history, with its call for a change of orientation toward the world. Forgiveness of sins is a phenomenon known prior to and outside the Christian movement, hence not at all unique to it. When it is taken up into Christianity, it is simply instrumental to eschatology. If Jesus himself underwent no transition from sin to salvation, why should such a motif be thought so central to the faith which he inaugurates? If Jesus in his associations and in his preaching accepted sinners on God's behalf, why should it be

thought necessary to floriate his chaste preaching into baroque myths of sacrifice based upon his cross? But forgiveness of sins is announced by Jesus in order to free men for the new age of responsibility for the world, as defined by the imminence of God and his kingdom. The history of theology has acknowledged the purely prefatory character of forgiveness wherever holiness and not forgiveness has been the distinctive mark of faith.¹ To have turned Christ into a new agent of salvation, replete with the soteriological claims which Judaism had applied to its altars and Hellenism to its cults, was to have blunted the edge of his mission to make God's reign imminent through preaching.

Therefore, the finality of Christ from an eschatological point of view is the finality of the eschaton whose imminence he heralds. In the event of his inauguration of God's kingdom, Christ fulfills the office of prophet. He is prophet, but not because he points to some far-off event in which God will yet manifest himself. He is prophet in such a way as to put an end to prophecy. In his word all that God promises is realized. (Luke 4:21.) The God of the future is brought into the present. Hope is grounded in faith. Standing with him in his word, men now have faith, which is the final mode both of their being with God and of their being in the world. Christ also fulfills the office of priest. He is priest, not primarily because he intercedes for us at the right hand of the father, but because he puts an end to the law, which is the occasion for sin because it tempts men to live without trust. Thus he strikes a blow at the institution of priesthood which exists for the mediation of forgiveness. Now that the eschaton has ended the age of law, men no longer need to exploit the world for religious purposes, using it as the

¹ See my essay, "The Hermeneutics of Holiness in Wesley," in *The Heritage of Christian Thought*, Robert E. Cushman and Robert Lowry Calhoun, eds. (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), pp. 127-41.

arena for fulfillment of the law and thus for self-vindication. All such piety is terminated when Jesus of Nazareth on God's behalf accepts sinners notwithstanding the condemnation of the law. Christ also fulfills the office of king. Not that in so doing he reduces man to the status of servant, lordship being unique only to him. He rather redefines lordship in terms of servanthood. From now on it is the last who shall be first. Then he passes the royal status on to man, a status distinguished by the crown of thorns, hallmark of the eschaton. By his words and acts, then, in one event Jesus united men with God in the purposes of his kingdom, overcoming their religious bondage to the world which the law enforced and setting them free for responsible stewardship in the world. Understood in that way, the definition of Christ in the Chalcedonian formula is essentially eschatological. The Chalcedonian formula in calling Christ "truly man and truly God, without separation and without confusion" gives testimony to the finality of Christ because it means that God's destiny for man is immutably tied to what Jesus of Nazareth has done. Thus Christology is primarily eschatology and the finality of Christ is a truth occurring within the horizon of eschatology.

At least three large problems confront us in these generalizations. What do they mean? How can we believe them? Why do they signify finality?

I

Eschatology means that in some sense Christ is the "end of the world." But what is meant by "end" and by "world"? "End" does not connote a limitation in some spatial or temporal sense, but a determination. One does not "expect" an eschaton as one expects the end of a journey or the end of an affair. Eschaton is an end insofar as one lives under its influence. Nor does

"end" connote a cessation, such as death imposes upon life, but a coming to fulfillment. The fulfillment involved, however, may not be simply by anticipation, as of some larger realization yet to come. Eschatology does not have to do with what will be the case when history has run its course, known now only in part. Eschatology is the knowledge that the sort of reality which comes to expression because of Christ is reality in its final form and that this reality is all-we-have-and-all-we-need to go by. Paul, for instance, may not really be complaining when he says, "Now we see through a glass darkly," as if counseling the Corinthians to await some face-to-face encounter. He is inviting the church to the resolve of faith which is in itself the eschatological existence, an existence in which it is better to believe not having seen. Or, again, the words of John's Gospel on Jesus' lips, "until I come," are the words of primitive Christian apocalyptic. Therefore, they are not normative for faith and are immediately challenged in the very next verse, which safely lodges the answer to the question of Christ's return in Christ's own secret will. (John 21:22, 23.) Therefore, when Jesus says to his disciples in his farewell address, "yet a little while and I will come to you," he is not endorsing apocalypticism, because, in fact, he immediately advises them that the world will see him no more. For the New Testament faith the judgment of the world is fulfilled in Christ. To know that Christ will be with us always is, therefore, to enter "a new history" ² which will end all other histories and bring all other worlds under judgment by its finality.

When one says of eschatology that it designates the "end of the world," one means by "world" a fundamentally historical reality. For that reason the early church's attitude toward

² Rudolf Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (16th ed.; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck and Reprecht, 1959), p. 476.

apocalypticism was justifiably ambivalent. Apocalypticism was a development in late Judaism which visualized a universalism for God's relation to the world is a geographical and ethnic extensiveness unprecedented in earlier Hebrew thinking. God's apocalypse would be a revelation, not simply to Israel, but, so to say, to the "world." At the same time, the apocalypse was to occur through cosmographic manifestations which gave to "world" the connotation more of what we now know as nature, than as history. But when it comes to the world cosmologically conceived, eschatology is closer to the prophetic than to the apocalyptic tradition. While apocalypticism visualized a radically new world, it did so in terms more expressive of worlds of nature than of worlds of history. While prophetism visualized changes being made within the present world form, it expressed these changes in largely historical terms. When the New Testament does seem to be expressing its eschatology in the cosmological terms of apocalyptic, those expressions are usually in the service rather of the history of salvation. To take a single example, when the letter to the Ephesians holds up hope for the ultimate reconciliation of the "cosmos," it is clearly referring to the uniting of Jews and Gentiles in "one body," the church (2:11-22), a historical entity.

"World" in the New Testament, then, is not a quasi-scientific construct, a cosmographic arena upon which history plays out its game. World is a dominantly historical reality, a matrix of relationships into which, when one is fitted, one derives the meaning of one's own existence. Yet, world is not a space which preexists one's participation in it. It is the relationship which comes to fulfillment as one has his being-in it. World is not the box one is in. World is the mode of one's being-in. Thus there is the scientific world, the sports world, the art world. Yet, like the horizon, a world is not the creature or the product of man but rather makes the discoverability of man a possibility. For

"world" is the kind of reality which has a fundamental expressibility—in acts, gestures, and words. The end of the "world" to which eschatology refers is the end of the world which occurs when through his symbolic action and his parabolic speech, Jesus of Nazareth exposes the life of man to the horizon of God's imminent kingdom, giving man a whole new mode of being-in.

Interpreters seem clear that eschatology does not involve a timeless truth. The reason usually given is that it is a truth which happens and therefore is eventful. That, however, is not the full story. Eschatology is a truth which occurs under the conditions of time, which is not mere eventfulness, but transience and finitude. Are not the expectations in finality and finitude incompatible? In apocalyptic, yes. In eschatology, no. The decision between eschatology and apocalyptic was made once and for all by Jesus of Nazareth in the Garden of Gethsemane in his final hours when he refused to ask God to rescue him from death. That eschaton is the horizon which continues to bring man's very finitude to light as final. Eternal life is not deliverance from finitude but obedience to God even unto death and the realization that God can be glorified by an obedient death. (John 12:27, 28.)

Those who understand the temporality of the eschaton do not always realize that they must also choose against its universality. Universality may be possible in a theology of grace where God's acts prevail despite their actualization in life. Or, universality may be possible in a cosmological theology where God's acts have relevance for things apart from mediation by men. But the eschatological world is a world of rapture over the joy of faith, and faith, unlike grace, is man's life qualified consciously by the presence of God in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. The joyful world of the eschaton is the world of a

happiness which knows it is happy. As John Wesley once put it, "No man can be justified and not know it!"³

Under the parabolic proclamation of Jesus, the truth of the eschaton is a historical truth. That means that the truth does not inhere in the correspondence of propositions with the things they signify. Parabolic propositions are not words which signify things. The words are the things. Luther knew that when he understood that the justification which comes by faith alone is also by word alone. Wesley knew it when he referred to the redeeming blood of Christ as "a speaking blood."⁴ Parabolic truth inheres in the events in which words bring to expression a new world, a new history, a newly qualified consciousness. If such events are final, as the term "eschaton" implies they are, they will have to be final, then, in a sense that includes neither infinite nor universal. And if such events are of the character of worlds, then they are worlds which live by words, worlds like creation itself, if, indeed, God created the world by his word. One could therefore say that Jesus of Nazareth has talked the world into the kingdom of God, or, more accurately, Jesus has talked the kingdom of heaven down to earth. Little wonder, then, that the gospel of John has called him "the word," the apostle Paul has interpreted faith as an acoustical affair, and the Synoptic Gospels record that he said nothing to the people without a parable. (Matt. 13:34.)

II

How does one arrive at such a vast conclusion about the eschatological significance of Jesus of Nazareth? In the same

³ "Minutes of Some Late Conversations," I, Question 5. *The Works of John Wesley*, authorized edition of 1872, VIII (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House, 1959), 276.

⁴ Sermon XVI, i, 12.

way Jesus did—historically; therefore, in the same way one would arrive at anything historical. Jesus of Nazareth, a fully historical being, was placed in a world. Worlds are invitations to decipher meaning and to reshape the world by that newly deciphered meaning. Worlds are historical realities. A world is a structure of reality in which tradition and interrogation interact in a circular way. Questions interrogate events and events illuminate questions. In the process of the historical world meanings sedimented in historical events are stirred up by mankind's sentiment for meaning. "Are you he who is to come?" "Whom do men say that I am?" The circular dialogue between traditional meanings and the quest for meaning is only terminated by a risk of judgment, such as, "thy will be done!"

As historical beings, men stand within events which are conferring meaning. Jesus is no exception to this fundamentally historical structure. He is the one through whom it comes to evidence in history that the God of the future has come into the present as the basis for man's ongoing life. In his baptism he is brought to light as the Messiah and the kingdom of God dawns. (John 1:26, 31.) His baptism, therefore, is the sacrament of eschatological history. In his parables he is speaking as one who is already standing within the eschatological nearness of God. (Luke 4:21.) Like a poet who always says more than he knows, Jesus in his parables brings to expression the movement of God's kingdom. His expression provides the basis for his comprehension of himself and bursts like lightning over the terrain of his whole time. He says, "The kingdom of God is like . . ." and the world is swept up into the kingdom. He says, "I am," and the world articulates back to him its newfound stance, "Thou art!" In his preaching Jesus stands as the sign of the kingdom of God that is upon him and in whose presence there is no neutrality.

But that was in his time. How does our time any longer sense the imminence of God's kingdom? The answer is: We do it in the same way Jesus did, except that now we do it within his horizon. His eventfulness is sedimented in the history into which we now direct our sentiment for meaning. We make the risk of judgment that he made, but on the basis of his judgment. To be a man of faith is to live in remembrance of him. Our resolve will decide whether his judgment will find its consummation in our history. Luther alleged this to be Paul's meaning when he said in Galatians, "The life I live is Christ." Christ is *mea forma*. That means that the eschaton comes in the speaking of Jesus and continues to come when the church remembers Jesus in its speaking, that is, when the church enters into the horizon of understanding within which Jesus stood when he spoke.

In Richard Kim's novel, *The Martyred*, the son of a Korean minister has revolted against his father's faith and has become a professor of history in the University. The father, I believe, is justifiably confident in his son's spiritual destiny, not because as a Presbyterian he is convinced that in the end God will unite all things in himself. Rather, as he said, "If one is a good historian . . . he will invariably come to the large question of whether or not history must have an end one day. . . . If he does that some day, then I shall have to admit that we are not so far apart from each other as it might appear." Kim said that what the pastor had in mind was not "some sort of teleological question. . . . No, he said, it was an eschatological question."⁵

Christian faith is a fundamentally historical enterprise, not despite its eschatology but because of it. Jesus of Nazareth brought a new horizon to bear upon history. Because the church

⁵ (New York: George Braziller, 1964), p. 168.

reminds us of his word, his horizon still mobilizes us, so long, that is, as it answers to something in us, to our sentiment for meaning. We must not assume that we are being historical if we think of his words in detachment from our own concerns, any more than we are being historical if we attempt to conserve the laws of the land as they were at their inception. When Jesus said to Nicodemus, "Ye must be born again," he was not issuing a universal command. He was sensitizing Nicodemus' preunderstanding.⁶ To acknowledge the importance of a preunderstanding is to concede that the meaning at stake in any relationship is something that will occur in one's own situation. We now bring that prior question to our faith as the faith has been traditioned by its history: Is there anything in the words of Jesus heard across these centuries by which we may be "born again," anything which promises us something we still really want? If there is not, then we shroud the church in the shawl of a sect, standing guard over claims we are able to venerate, but which no longer give birth to a history for us, claims we can express in our will to rhetoric, but which no longer quicken our imaginations. Theologians who are resisting this sectarian trend for the sake of a lively historical meaning ought not be written off as innovators whose passions (as Eusebius of Caesarea once warned) only lead to heresy. An irrevocable conviction which does not move the world is no fitting symbol for a faith whose lord defined his existence as mission.

Two such convictions especially thwart the birth of faith in our time. One is no serious temptation to Methodists. It is a futuristic eschatology which sees in the doctrine of the resurrection of the dead "the absolute metaphor."⁷ All other meta-

⁶ Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes*, p. 106.

⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Grundzüge der Christologie* (Gütersloh, 1964), Blumenberg's phrase, p. 189, used approvingly by Pannenberg.

phors in Christian preaching are taken to be merely proleptic moments of that metaphor, such as Jesus' resurrection, but conceivably also the life-giving word of Jesus in his parabolic metaphors. The warrant for this view is that it is strong in the early church and can even be said to have been the dominant theology of the early church. Its objectionable feature is not simply that it becomes a species of eschatological verification for Christian faith, delaying the real engagement with the world to some far-off divine event. The real objection is to the way it depreciates the eschatological significance of Jesus' historical eventfulness. There is a theology implicit in the preaching of Jesus which conflicts with the allegedly dominant apocalyptic theology of the early church. The new quest for the historical Jesus has brought it more clearly to light than previously in the church. The meaning of that message is that the eschaton comes, not in the chronological last days of history, but in the speech of Jesus. Jesus' resurrection is a sign, as the gospel of John makes clear. But it is a sign, not of his future conquests, but of the victory already achieved in his word, of which he says, "I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). Faith looks for nothing more. Apocalyptic theology awaited God in the distance. New Testament eschatology brought the distant God near. We ought not be allowed to forget that the characteristic literary form of early Christianity was not the apocalypse, but the gospel.⁸

The other conviction which may thwart a candid arrival of faith is more peculiarly Methodist, even though it existed in the early church as a major alternative to futuristic eschatologies. It is the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in so far as the Holy Spirit is said to be our continuity with Christ. An understanding of

⁸ Gerhard Ebeling, "Der Grund Christlicher Theologie," *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, LVIII (August, 1961), 232.

history and language has made that use of the doctrine superfluous as it was superfluous in certain sectors of the early church. The distinction made between human witness and the witness of the Holy Spirit is a distinction familiar, for instance, to the Acts of the Apostles, but not to the Gospel of John, not even to the Synoptic Gospels. Mark, for instance, has no narrative regarding the post-Easter descent of the Spirit upon the disciples. For the Gospel of John the paraclete who will relieve Jesus, as in the changing of the guard, is the word of preaching. Witness to the word is not a second reality alongside the witness of the spirit. Why is it not the case, then, that the word for us as for Jesus is the mode in which God makes himself present? Those who hear the preaching of the church hear Jesus, not because some independent action of the Holy Spirit makes him present, but because the word itself overcomes chronological distance. Those who hear Jesus hear the Father, not because the Holy Spirit intercedes, but because the human word itself has the power in history to substitute for God. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit in this relation becomes a mythological way of alluding to "the power of preaching in the church." The intention of the myth was utterly kerygmatic. It means to conserve the valid and indispensable conviction that when the word is preached it is God's word that is heard, word in the dimension of eschatological disclosure. The church's historiographical responsibility in exegeting and traditioning the apostolic faith has, however, often been weakened by the myth of the Holy Spirit. Dependence on it also fosters hopes for spiritual manifestations more powerful than the plain meanings conveyed in merely human words. "Holy Spirit" has been the church's way of saying "the presence of God." Since Christ, however, the presence of God is given in the word of Christ. It is true that in the first five centuries of Christendom the doctrine of the Holy Spirit, taken up into

the formulation of the doctrine of the Trinity, was in effect a demythologizing of the polytheistic tendencies in the developing Christian doctrine of God. When the works of God in creation, revelation, and redemption began to splinter God three ways, to the jeopardy of monotheism, the church found a way of saying that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are not three gods, but one God three times. It was also true, however, that the doctrine of the Holy Spirit in the early church was a rival to Jesus' eschatological message, even while being an alternative to apocalypticism.

III

What of finality, then, is really brought to light when the word of Christ is spoken into our situation today? What does it mean to say that the word spoken by Jesus of Nazareth and heard by us today is the eschaton? If an eschatological event is an event in which faith is made possible, what is that structure which makes it so final?

To say this event is *unique* would not exhaust the meaning of its finality. In history all events are in some sense unique. To say it is *ultimate* would not be enough, either, because all events which occur through obedience to God are, in respect of their God-relation, *ultimate*. One question remains: What makes the Christ event *final*? What is there about Jesus of Nazareth that makes him absolutely important and valid for all the future? Why must salvation be bound up entirely with faith in him, so that the relation to him can be called the determination of the final destiny of men? Why is it legitimate to call him *alpha* and *omega* without any sense of doxological hyperbole? What can it mean to say that faith in God is so irrevocably dependent upon Jesus of Nazareth that the wisdom communicated in this event makes all other wisdom anachro-

nistic and obsolete, so that subsequent to this event nothing can appear that will supersede it, indeed, so that man needs to look nowhere else for God and God needs to do nothing more, and so that Jesus can be said to have had the last word?

The question of the finality of Jesus is the question of what it means that he has spoken of God. The revelatory significance of Jesus' speech is not that he communicated information about God, but that he stood in an event in which men were once and for all enabled to let God be, even when they could not say what he is. The eschatological encounter with God is an encounter with a reality who allows himself to be brought out of the future into the present. But it is not an apocalyptic encounter, as with a child at hide-and-seek who, unfound, must at last show himself. Jesus speaks of God in such a way as to encounter men with God's hidden presence. Like a faithful Jew who would rather call upon the kingdom of heaven than upon the kingdom of God, he scarcely even uses the name of God. One could almost say of him what Montaigne once said of the apostle Paul: "Of all the cults St. Paul found in Athens, the most pardonable of all seemed to him the one dedicated to the 'unknown God.'"⁹ Jesus' name for God is *ho pempas me*, "He that hath sent me" (John 1:33; 4:34; etc.). That is why Christology is so crucial to theology: the identity of God is somehow bound up with Jesus. And who, indeed, is Jesus? He is "son of God" whose office is eschatological, namely, to finish the Father's work. And what was the Father's work? To let himself be revealed as "Father." Henceforth, anyone who has seen Christ has seen the Father. Anyone who has received Christ has received the Father. Anyone who has heard Christ has heard the Father. Christ and the Father are one in an event

⁹ *The Autobiography of Michel de Montaigne* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), p. 206.

of speech. If Philip's request is any solid indication of the human preunderstanding, Jesus' revelation of the Father is final: "Show us the Father," Philip asked, "and we shall be satisfied." When that revelation occurs, man's joy is said to be full, and no one can take it from him. (John 14:8, 15:11.)

The answer to the question of the finality of Jesus is not primarily that God is now known to be Father, but the historical effect of that realization, namely, that men understand themselves as sons of God. The eschaton, therefore, derives its finality, not so much from supernatural inferences about the presence of the Almighty as it does from the status conferred on history by the knowledge of man's sonship and the consequent insinuations of maturity in history.

The work of the Father which Jesus finished was to make men sons of God, no longer slaves or even children, but sons, and if sons, then heirs. Unlike a slave or a child, a son is an heir to whom the Father turns over responsibility for what is his. In the word of Jesus of Nazareth men are brought to maturity in the world by receiving the world as an inheritance from God which henceforth remains their responsibility. (Gal. 4 and Rom. 8.) The time in which that act occurs is the fullness of time. Thereafter man is to govern himself as one mature and not as those who are unstable in all their ways. (James 1:4 ff.) They are the mature, as contrasted with the babes. (Heb. 5:13.) In Christ men have been brought to completion. (Col. 2:10 NEB.) Precisely in the word in which God is addressed as Father, Jesus takes sonship upon himself and on God's behalf confers sonship upon those who hear his word. By that performatory word he turns the world over to men as their responsibility, and the ground of the world's maturity is once for all established. To hear the word "Father" addressed to God is to participate in an event in which man's sonship comes to expression.

The Finality of Christ

Becoming a son (John 3:1-8) is being born into an eschatological existence, being set within a whole new history. To know oneself as son of God is not to have information about oneself. That would turn theology into anthropology. To know oneself as son is to receive the gift of humanity, that is, to have permission to be a man, that is, to be free to be only a man. In this event in which the Fatherhood of God becomes the basis for man's sonship, history emerges in its eschatological form. There one is free—free from all requirement for realizing salvation through the world, free from the fear of finding devils in the world, free from the possibility of identifying God with any part of the world, free from the psychological need to hide one's moral fears and failures from the world, free from the superstitious ruse of using God to explain the wonders of the world, free from the fear of death because our life is lived toward God and not toward our own erosive future, free from any necessity to fill the future with conjectures based on our limited knowledge of the world, free from the temptation to derive our ultimate meaning from our limited tasks in the world, free from the problems which come in regarding the world as a riddle for men to solve, thus free from worldly care as are the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, free from what Aristotle called "the itch of desire," free like art, that is, which does not always have to be for-the-sake-of something, but can be simply what it is, as D. H. Lawrence said, "not bent on grabbing, because we know we inherit."

Jesus is final, then, because in him the conditions for immaturity in history have been terminated and the conditions for maturity are now at hand. Now we know what creation is. Creation is the matrix of relationships in which, because there is a God who is known as Father, men do not belong to the world but the world belongs to men. Creation is the historical structure of reality in which, because men receive the world

The Finality of Christ in an Eschatological Perspective

from God, they can be responsible for it, not being responsible to it, not turning the creature into a creator and worshiping the creature, thus not forfeiting the grounds of responsibility for the creature.

Does it not seem in such an understanding of eschatology that God has abdicated and is virtually even dead, having nothing left to do? It is true that he has nothing left to do, except what he has already done, namely, to turn the world over to men, making them sons. But as Father, he remains the living ground for man's continuing sonship, thus for man's everlasting responsibility. When sons forfeit their inheritance, the Father does not reduce them again to servanthood, he reaffirms them in their sonship by giving the world back to them again, as the father did the prodigal. (Luke 15:11-32.) Therefore, we do not say with William Blake,

Thou art a man, God is no more,
Thy own humanity learn to adore.

The eschatological speech of Jesus remembered and renewed in the church liberates the creature from the self-preoccupation which perverts creaturehood into demonic bondage to the world. In Christ God delivers up his rule to men, but he continues to reign.

However, neither would we say in Thomas DeQuincey's rather eschatological terms (to use the paraphrase of J. Hillis Miller¹⁰), "In God's time all time is fulfilled, and the dreadful hemorrhage of time has stopped." Eschatology holds out no dilated hopes for man. It discloses the situation of man as it most really is. The eschaton is not that than which a greater cannot be thought, the dream of some humanly desirable

¹⁰ *The Disappearance of God* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), p. 73.

utopia. The eschaton is that than which a greater need no longer be sought now that the revelation of the end is at hand. Expressed in the lordship of Christ and his crown of thorns, eschatology sees obedience unto death as the "red badge of courage" in which the mature son is the one who willingly sheds his own blood in imitation of the obedience of Christ, not asking for more. The sower sows the seed. The rest is up to the land. (Mark 4:3-9.)

You may say to me, then "You allege as Christian what any modern man can know without that faith." I do not wholly deny it. Modern man has learned to get along without God in all the important affairs of his life, assuming a fully historical existence which is an existence in which man holds himself responsible for the world. I could, of course, attempt to register as a matter of history that modern men have not, in fact, known responsibility for the world without Christian faith. The eschaton is a historical reality. Why, then, should it seem strange that its effects are manifest even where its sources are unacknowledged? But I would rather say, in a less defensive vein, that devotees of Christian faith do not deplore modern man's apparently independent courage and responsibility. For Christians are not bent upon converting men to Christ. That evangelistic drive is abandoned with the abandonment of direct Christology and with the dawn of the eschatological horizon. Christians are responsible for announcing the eschaton and thus for bringing the world to expression as creation, as responsible sonship. Therefore, when we hold out faith to men, we do not do so in the expectation of taking something from them, or even of giving something to them which they do not have. We do so to confirm and strengthen them in what they could indeed already in some sense have. So may their sonship be brought out of latency and fate into patency and history, and their joy become final by being made full.

THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST IN WORD AND SACRAMENT

Brueghel's astonishing picture of the Crucifixion might be taken at first sight for a cynical comment on its irrelevance. Hundreds of people are milling around, all occupied with their own affairs, and no single one of them so much as glances at the man who has stumbled under his cross. Only when one looks closely does he see that he is at the exact center of it all, that in him all the lines of the picture focus and cohere. History has vastly extended the frame to take in countless millions of other human beings, for the most part also unregarding, yet this immense claim stands. Here is a final, universal deed. And the work of Christ is bound up with his person. Long ago, it was the conviction sustaining Athanasius that only one who was truly God could save a world.

When the *Report on the Conversations Between the Church of England and the Methodist Church* appeared, it came under heavy fire from a group of Anglicans known as "conservative evangelicals." One of them, the Rev. R. T. Beckwith, has returned to the attack in a volume *Priesthood and Sacraments*.¹ Mr. Beckwith regards the section of the Report on the Sacraments as a sell-out by the Methodists to the Anglo-Catholics.

¹ (Appleford, Abingdon, Berkshire: The Marcham Manor Press, 1964).