# MILITANT GRACE

## The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology

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In memory of and gratitude to
J. Louis Martyn

# Contents

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Chapter 1 revises "Eschatological Dogmatics: To What End?," in *Eschatologie-Eschatology*, ed. H.-J. Eckstein et al., Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 272 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011), 348–59.

Chapter 2 revises "Some Remarks on Apocalyptic in Modern Christian Theology," in *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. Ben C.

Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2016), 199–216.

Chapter 3 revises "Love Is a Sovereign Thing: The Witness of Romans 8:31–39 and the Royal Office of Jesus Christ," in *Apocalyptic Paul: Cosmos and Anthropos in Romans 5–8*, ed. Beverly Gaventa (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2013), 111–30.

Chapter 4 revises "'Christ Must Reign': Ernst Käsemann and Soteriology in an Apocalyptic Key," in *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology: With and beyond J. Louis Martyn*, ed. Joshua B. Davis and Douglas Harink (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2012), 202–20.

Chapter 5 revises "*Nisi per Spiritum Sanctum*—The Holy Spirit and the Confession of Faith," *Journal of Reformed Theology* 8, no. 4 (2014): 247–56.

Chapter 6 revises "*Veniat Regnum Tuum!* Christology, Eschatology and the Christian Life," in *Game Over? Reconsidering Eschatology*, ed. C. Chalamet et al., Theologische Bibliothek Töpelmann 180 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2017), 407–23.

Chapter 7 revises "The Enmity of Death and Judgment unto Life," in *Eternal God, Eternal Life: Theological Investigations into the Concept of Immortality*, ed. P. G. Ziegler (London: T&T Clark, 2016), 131–48.

Chapter 8 revises "Creation, Redemption and Law—Toward a Protestant Perspective on the Question of Human Law," in *Explorations in Christian Theology and Ethics: Essays in Conversation with Paul L. Lehmann*, ed. P. G. Ziegler and M. Bartel (Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2009), 63–78.

Chapter 9 revises "The Fate of Natural Law at the Turning of the Ages," *Theology Today* 67, no. 4 (2011): 419–29.

Chapter 10 revises "The Adventitious Origins of the Calvinist Moral Subject," *Studies in Christian Ethics* 28, no. 2 (May 2015): 213–23.

Chapter 11 revises "The Christian Life of Discipleship," in *The T&T Clark Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. A. Edwards and D. Gouwens (London: T&T Clark, forthcoming).

Chapter 12 revises "Dietrich Bonhoeffer—An Ethics of God's Apocalypse?," *Modern Theology* 23, no. 4 (October 2007): 579–94.

Chapter 13 revises "Discipleship," in *Sanctified by Grace: A Theology of the Christian Life*, ed. K. Eilers and K. Strobel (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 173–86.

# Abbreviations

## General

| | |
|---|---|
| §(§) | section(s) |
| alt. | altered |
| art(s). | article(s) |
| *b.* | Babylonian Talmud |
| cf. | compare |
| esp. | especially |
| et al. | *et alii*, and others |
| n(n). | note(s) |
| NABRE | New American Bible, revised (2010) edition |
| q(q). | question(s) |
| RSV | Revised Standard Version |
| rev. | revised |
| s.v. | under the word |
| vol(s). | volume(s) |

## Bibliographic

| | |
|---|---|
| *CD* | *Church Dogmatics*, by Karl Barth |
| DBWE | Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English |
| *Institutes* | *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, by John Calvin |
| *JLPL* | *Juridical Law and Physical Law*, by T. F. Torrance |
| *JP* | *Journals and Papers*, by Søren Kierkegaard |
| Pap. | Søren Kierkegaard's Papers (Danish manuscripts) |
| *PC* | *Practice in Christianity*, by Søren Kierkegaard |
| PL | Patrologia Latina, edited by J.-P. Migne |
| *SV* | *Søren Kierkegaards samlede værker*. Edited by A. B. Drachmann, J. L. Heiberg, and H. O. Lange. 14 vols. Copenhagen: Gyldendalske boghandels forlag, 1901–6 |

# Introduction

Grace is God's sovereign realm.
—Karl Barth, *Holy Spirit and the Christian Life*

An informal working group of theologians and biblical scholars committed to undertaking some "Explorations in Theology and Apocalyptic" first met at the American Academy of Religion / Society of Biblical Literature annual meetings in Montreal in 2009. At that first gathering we took as our theme the significance of J. Louis Martyn's Pauline scholarship for contemporary theology and biblical studies. The expanding conversation has continued ever since. It has been a privilege and an education for me to participate in this work alongside so many fine colleagues. This book represents something of my own modest contribution to that conversation to date. Its ambition is simply to share with readers some of the insights and perspectives that have opened up for me in the course of my recent thinking concerning the significance of Paul's apocalyptic gospel for contemporary Protestant theology.

The apocalyptic eschatology, language, and imagery of the New Testament is integral to its witness to the accomplishment of God's salvation in Jesus Christ, representing a primary idiom by which faith sought to attest the gospel and conceive its consequences. As the Scottish divine James Stewart remarked already half a century ago, "however we may interpret it," when we confront the apocalyptic eschatology of the New Testament "we are dealing, not with some unessential . . . scaffolding, but with the very substance of the faith."[1] Some of the most important reconsiderations of apocalyptic in this

1. Stewart, "On a Neglected Emphasis in New Testament Theology," 300.

spirit have been undertaken in recent Pauline scholarship: Ernst Käsemann, J. Christiaan Beker, J. Louis Martyn, Martinus de Boer, Beverly Gaventa, Susan Eastman, John Barclay, Douglas Campbell, Alexandra Brown, and others besides have labored at length to discern, display, and better understand the apocalyptic character of Paul's evangelical witness.[2] While this body of biblical scholarship is, of course, not uniform, its collective insight coalesces around Paul's apprehension of the profound depth and immense scope of the consequences of God's own saving advent in Christ. As Gaventa concisely puts it, "Paul's apocalyptic theology has to do with the conviction that in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God has invaded the world as it is, thereby revealing the world's utter distortion and foolishness, reclaiming the world, and inaugurating a battle that will doubtless culminate in the triumph of God over all God's enemies (including the captors Sin and Death). This means that the Gospel is first, last, and always about God's powerful and gracious initiative."[3] Inasmuch as it is an expression of specifically Christian faith, "apocalyptic theology always and everywhere denotes a theology of liberation in an earth that is dying and plagued by evil powers."[4]

In the words of Donald MacKinnon, its subject matter is nothing less than "God's own protest against the world He has made, by which at the same time that world is renewed and reborn."[5] Undoubtedly there are all manner of other "apocalyptic" sensibilities, postures, and even theologies abroad that stand at a distance from all this. Whether the product of "overenthusiastic misinterpreters" within the churches, or a trace left by the manifold cultural diffusion and refraction of biblical concepts and images now floating free of the determinative interpretative context once provided by the New Testament itself, we can be sure that any "apocalyptic reduced to a mood of world ruin and promoting desperate anxiety has nothing to do with the gospel."[6] In the mouth of a Christian theologian, the nominal adjective "apocalyptic" does

2. In addition to the work of these authors themselves, much of which is engaged in this book, there are a number of works that provide a useful entrée into this Pauline scholarship, including Blackwell, Goodrich, and Maston, *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination*; Gaventa, *Apocalyptic Paul*; and concisely in Lewis, *What Are They Saying about New Testament Apocalyptic?*, 38–52. For recent critical appraisal of representative work in this area, see J. Davies, *Paul among the Apocalypses*; and more briefly in J. Frey, "Demythologizing Apocalyptic?," esp. 502–27. There is rather more vigorous criticism on offer in N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters*, esp. part 2, "Re-Enter Apocalyptic," 135–220, as well as the earlier work of Matlock, *Unveiling the Apocalyptic Paul*.

3. Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 81.

4. Käsemann, "Beginning of the Gospel," 8.

5. MacKinnon, "Prayer, Worship, and Life," 247–48.

6. Käsemann, "Beginning of the Gospel," 8. The phrase "overenthusiastic misinterpreters" is taken from Gaventa, *Our Mother Saint Paul*, 84.

not give voice to an anxious and resigned pessimism. Rather, it denotes the distinctive form of "God's eschatological activity" displayed in the gospel, and proclaims the unrivaled and salutary divine activity that "*generates* what it determines" and "*effects* the judgment which it presents."[7]

This book ventures to begin to take renewed theological responsibility for just this kind of hearing of the Christian gospel and its entailments. In this it is distinct—and in many ways even remote—from other cultural projects as well as theological programs to which the term "apocalyptic" might be affixed.[8] The overarching argument of this book is that in pursuit of renewed accountability to the apocalyptic gospel, theology is required to think again about its own forms, methods, and foci precisely in virtue of its distinctively eschatological *content*. Indeed, a range of Christian doctrines—centrally, those concerning sin, grace, salvation, and the character of the Christian life—invite reconsideration in light of an understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ as the announcement of God's eschatological overturning of the "old and passing age," that "shattering message of the Kingdom of God drawn near, and the consequent end of all mediating philosophy, theosophy and cosmology,"[9] as Karl Barth once put it. For theology to take an "apocalyptic turn" of this kind means undertaking to discern and inhabit forms of thought that eschew conformity with the schema of that old "world which is passing away" because they seek to accord with the world graciously remade by God in Christ. It means working to conceive and to articulate what it means that by grace Christians suffer the loss of that same world, that in faith they own that loss, and that by the Spirit's power they may know and exercise the dizzying freedom of those who have been won from captivity to—and complicity with—powers antithetical to God. For while we are "still in the sphere of that evil ambivalence," Barth observes, "we are already in the very different sphere of the Holy Spirit who awakens, enlightens, comforts and impels us."[10] To pursue an "apocalyptic turn" in Christian dogmatics is thus simply to learn

7. The final phrase is from Jüngel, "Emergence of the New," 55. De Boer, "Apocalyptic as God's Eschatological Activity in Paul's Theology," gives a pellucid account of the meaning of "apocalyptic" understood in this way.

8. One might think here of the "apocalyptic" mindsets and political ideologies that are the target of the critical theological writing of Catherine Keller in her works *Apocalypse Then and Now* and *God and Power*. The work undertaken here is also at some remove from the style of the "apocalyptic theology" advanced by Thomas J. J. Altizer under the rubric of "radical theology," which concentrates on tracing and creatively amplifying the modern philosophical and literary transformations of ancient Christian apocalyptic concepts and images: see his *Call to Radical Theology*, 17–30.

9. K. Barth, *CD* III/1:53.

10. K. Barth, *CD* IV/4:172.

anew what it means to "never boast of anything but the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world," as Paul wrote (Gal. 6:14). The effort, in short, is to do theology in a manner both shaken and disciplined by the "elemental interruption of the continuity of life" that the gospel is and brings about.[11]

The argument of the book is developed in three parts. Part 1, "The Shape and Sources of an Apocalyptic Theology," consists of two programmatic chapters in which I make a case for the kind of theological endeavor I would like to recommend as "apocalyptic theology." These essays outline the sources, themes, and tasks that I take to be fundamental to that work. Part 2, "Christ, Spirit, and Salvation in an Apocalyptic Key," encompasses five chapters that together explore cardinal themes in soteriology, arguing in turn for a renewed understanding of the distinctive doctrinal importance of Christ's royal office, the primacy of redemption in our understanding of salvation, the eschatological character of the Spirit's gift of faith, the Kingdom of God as the object of prayer, and the last judgment as the final victory of divine grace. Following on from this, the six chapters of part 3, "Living Faithfully at the Turn of the Ages," examine different aspects of the Christian life. The first two chapters consider the difference an apocalyptic theological understanding makes for the way in which we conceive of our relation to natural, moral, and positive law. The next three chapters undertake what might be thought of as apocalyptic "readings" of aspects of the theologies of John Calvin, Søren Kierkegaard, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer in order to illumine in turn the nature of our existence as moral agents, the fundamental posture of Christian existence in humility and gratitude, and the nature of Christian ethics. In the final chapter, I argue that an apocalyptic theology naturally sees the whole of the Christian life as *discipleship*, that is, as a free and faithful venture to inhabit—and so to attest—the world being remade by the living lordship of Christ.

D. Stephen Long has observed that apocalyptic has particular currency among "some ardently Protestant theologians."[12] Perhaps not all who are working in relation to the rubric would characterize themselves in this way.[13] For my own part, I am certainly drawn to the task of envisaging an apocalyptic

11. Jüngel, "Value-Free Truth," 205.

12. Long, *Hebrews*, 198–211, at 207. At the end of an excursus reflecting on apocalyptic as a tone in contemporary thought (with Derrida and Žižek as exemplars), Long comments critically on Nathan Kerr's book, *Christ, History and Apocalyptic*, worrying about the "anti-ecclesiocentric" posture deriving from the fact that Kerr advocates for "a pleromatic christological apocalyptic with a kenomatic ecclesiology" (211).

13. In addition to Kerr's work, for an indication of the kind of theological work already being done under these auspices, see the programmatic essays by Walter Lowe: "Prospects for a Postmodern Christian Theology" and "Why We Need Apocalyptic," as well as Harink, *Paul*

theology for "ardently Protestant" reasons. For it seems to me that, understood as it is here, apocalyptic is a discursive idiom uniquely suited to articulate the radicality, sovereignty, and militancy of adventitious divine grace; just so it is of real import to the dogmatic work of testing the continued viability of Protestant Christian faith. The chapters that follow can be read as an attempt to vindicate this intuition materially and, in the case of my interpretation of other theologians, also heuristically. The apocalyptic idiom starkly illumines at one and the same time both the drastic and virulent reality of human captivity and complicity in sin, and the extraordinary power of saving divine grace that outbids it, reminding us that things are at once much worse yet also paradoxically far, far better than we could possibly imagine them to be. For just this reason, Jörg Frey is undoubtedly right to suggest that "neutralizing apocalyptic is . . . a dangerous way of weakening the Christian message."[14] Perhaps, for the sake of the gospel, Protestant theology has a peculiar vocation today to resist any such weakening of Christian witness precisely by keeping its sails close-hauled into the strong winds of apocalyptic Paulinism.

*among the Postliberals*, and the wide-ranging and exploratory essays collected in Davis and Harink, eds., *Apocalyptic and the Future of Theology*.

14. J. Frey, "Demythologizing Apocalyptic?," 524, though I am perhaps less anxious than he is that such neutralization is, as he continues, "as dangerous as making apocalyptic the center of everything." For in the perspective pursued in this volume, apocalyptic discourse is precisely a medium by means of which to acknowledge and attest that (and how) God's saving advent in Christ is, in fact, the center of everything.

PART 1

# The Shape and Sources of an Apocalyptic Theology

# 1

# An Eschatological Dogmatics of the Gospel of Grace

> Do not be afraid; I am the first and the last, and the living One.
> I was dead, and see, I am alive for ever and ever
> and I have the keys of Death and of Hades.
>
> —Revelation 1:17–18

The present day ought to be the best of times for eschatological theology. Since the early years of the twentieth century, generations of theologians have struggled in various ways to "do full justice to the distinctive priority given to the eschatological future in primitive Christian eschatology."[1] And during the decades since Klaus Koch declared that we moderns are "baffled by apocalyptic,"[2] scholars have endeavored to explain it to us at length. The fruits of such efforts are by now conveniently distilled into encyclopedias and comprehensive handbooks.[3] Further, at hand we have the substantive legacies of Jürgen Moltmann, Wolfhart Pannenberg, Gerhard Sauter, and others whose labor since the 1960s has been to shift eschatology from being merely one dogmatic locus among others to being instead the decisive register in

1. Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 3:595. Helpful surveys of developments in eschatology over this period are offered by Sauter, *What Dare We Hope?*; Schwartz, *Eschatology*, 107–72; Runia, "Eschatology in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century"; Paulson, "Place of Eschatology in Modern Theology"; Schwöbel, "Last Things First."

2. Koch, *Ratlos vor der Apokalyptik*, translated into English as *Rediscovery of Apocalyptic*.

3. See Collins, McGinn, and Stein, *Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*; Walls, *Oxford Handbook of Eschatology*.

which all theological loci are set. There have been important impulses from the "theology of hope," from thinking of "revelation as history," and from receiving the "future as promise," as well as a honing of the valuable technical concepts of *prolepsis* (effective anticipation of the future in the present), *adventus* (arrival of the future), and *novum* (sheer, unanticipated novelty) that attend them. These impulses have in no small measure contributed to bringing us to wherever it is that we currently are theologically.[4] The enterprise of eschatological dogmatics may never have been as well capitalized as it is now.

And yet, at precisely this same juncture, there are other, strongly countervailing trends afoot in Christian theology, trends that aim to draw a closing parenthesis around the era of eschatological dogmatics. As the lead editorial of a major English-language theology journal has suggested firmly, "It is time to give eschatology a rest, a time-out."[5] Eschatological dogmatics, it is said, is rendered untenable by postmodern criticism of hegemonic master narratives; it is corroded by our despair of any progressive interpretation of history; and it is fatally undermined by the scientific view of the entropic nature of the cosmos.[6] Furthermore, a thoroughgoing historicism has recently reemerged as a serious program in contemporary theology, and it is as allergic to the eschatological as were its precursors. In English-language theology, it involves a vigorous "cultural turn" in which theology is to be understood, says Dutch thinker Mieke Bal, as "a specialization within the domain of cultural analysis that focuses . . . on those areas of present-day culture where the religious elements from the past survive and hence 'live.'"[7] While its intellectual mainsprings, including American neopragmatism and variants of postliberalism, are not altogether identical with those driving the current Troeltsch revival in Europe, the aspirations and form are similar.[8] Both these theological movements are historicist all the way down, operating on the assumption that in theology, as in all other discourses, there is "nothing but history."

4. Moltmann, *Theologie der Hoffnung*; Pannenberg, *Offenbarung als Geschichte*; Sauter, *Zukunft und Verheißung*.

5. Steckel, "Confessions of a Post-Eschatologist," 144.

6. For careful and provocative exploration of this last particular point, see Tanner, "Eschatology without a Future?"

7. Bal, "Postmodern Theology as Cultural Analysis," 6; cf. the programmatic collection of essays in D. Brown, Davaney, and Tanner, *Converging on Culture*; Tanner, *Theories of Culture*.

8. See Rendtorff, *Theologie in der Moderne*; Renz and Graf, *Troeltsch-Studien*; Grab and U. Barth, *Gott im Selbstbewußtsein der Moderne*; and centrally Troeltsch, *Kritische Gesamtausgabe*. Translations of Troeltsch's *Christian Faith* and key essays in *Religion in History* have been followed by studies on Troeltsch: Chapman, *Ernst Troeltsch and Liberal Theology*; Pearson, *Beyond Essence*. More directly programmatic is the work of Shelia Greeve Davaney in *Historicism* and in *Pragmatic Historicism*. Contemporary North American historicists in this line acknowledge as a mainspring the theological project that Gordon D. Kaufman began in earnest in his *Systematic Theology*.

American theologian William Dean gave definitive articulation to the challenge of this new historicism:

> What would it mean if theology were to treat the event of history as that beyond which there was no recourse—and to treat the creatures of history as in new ways crucially powerful in shaping history—and to do that because all trans-historical imports, even the abiding reality of the modernists, have been embargoed? The interpretive imagination is utterly historical; it reinterprets nothing other than history; and it, and it alone, in human and nonhuman creatures, creates history. It is historical communication about historical communication, creative of historical communication. Might this imagination give to theology a somewhat different meaning?[9]

Indeed it might. Such historicism insists that theology exhausts its mandate in the practice of cultural analysis and criticism, being distinguished from other such efforts only by its concern with those tracts of human culture called "religious" or "similar cultural configurations that give meaning and direction to human existence." As such, it must be disciplined away from any misguided "pretensions of timeless truth" and immunized against "the assumption that in theology humans traffic with some nonhistorical realm."[10]

Of course, a previous explosion of eschatological dogmatics in the early twentieth century itself occurred on the playground of a self-consciously historicist theology. And now, as then, proponents of the latter complain that eschatological theology "severs the knot which centuries, with good reason, have tied"[11]—as Troeltsch once put it—unwinding the muddle of daily religious life with its complicated social and cultural entanglements and accommodations that constitute Christianity as an actual historical phenomenon.[12] Eschatological dogmatics, it is said, threatens to forget that while "the radical slaying of the 'the old man' corresponded to the birth of 'the new man,'" this new human being has "to work out his relationships to the 'world.'"[13] For the historicists, then, the very possibility of an intelligible Christianity trades on the essential continuity of the human person across this moment, and on the determinative priority given in Christianity's theological self-understanding to the history of the accommodation and mediation between faith and world, indeed of faith *by* and *to* world. The slaying and making alive, the death of the old and the birth of the new, the aeonic work of God to save, which constitutes so central

9. Dean, "Challenge of the New Historicism," 265.
10. Davaney, *Historicism*, 161–62.
11. Troeltsch, "Apple from the Tree of Kierkegaard," 314.
12. Cady, *Religion, Theology, and American Public Life*, 145.
13. Troeltsch, "Apple from the Tree of Kierkegaard," 313.

a part of the scriptural portrait of Christian faith—all this can only be taken to describe modulations within an order of things finally left undisturbed, a collection of dramatic tropes for "naming and symbolizing what we take to be of significance in existence" in an "outsideless" world that, for all its flux, is ever essentially just one damn thing after another.[14] If they were taken in any other sense, eschatological categories would simply have to be adjudged category mistakes, since on this view everything is and must be firmly knotted into the horizontal weave of human culture without remainder.[15]

Now, an eschatological dogmatics will inevitably press hard on precisely *this* neuralgic point, resisting historicism's seeming evacuation of genuine transcendence. Here in this first chapter I explore one particular example of such resistance, that offered by the work of American Lutheran theologian Gerhard Forde († 2005). Forde's theology is a bold defense of the transcendent radicality of divine grace. It discerns that the prospects for an eschatological dogmatics turn on whether the historicist knot can be persuasively cut at precisely the point Troeltsch himself identified: in the account of salvation being accomplished in Christ. For should we finally be forced to admit that salvation "can signify nothing other than the gradual emergence of the fruits of the higher life," then closing time will truly have come to the bureau of eschatology, and the world will be left—falsely—to suffer under the chilling laws of its own aimless contingency.[16]

## Justification and the Turning of the Ages

While other theologians have certainly noted the eschatological valences of a radically evangelical account of justification,[17] few have pursued their signal

14. Davaney, *Historicism*, 164. She cites (at 158) the term "outsideless" from Cupitt, *Life, Life*. Lord Stratford is credited with announcing the view that history is merely "a patternless succession of one damn thing after another."

15. The term "category mistake," coming from the work of Gilbert Ryle, denotes an instance where one thing is talked about in terms that are fitting only for something of a radically different sort. From a historicist perspective, thinking that eschatological claims are not fully exhausted by historical reference and explanation mistakes their logical form, on the premise that no form of discourse is simply reducible in this way. For a detailed and nuanced study of the interconnected careers of historicism and transcendence in early twentieth-century theology, see Wolfes, *Protestantische Theologie und moderne Welt*.

16. The citation is from Troeltsch, *Christian Faith*, 38, at which point he also alludes to his famous quip "The bureau of eschatology is generally closed these days."

17. Gerhard Sauter signals this in *What Dare We Hope?*, 166–69, identifying this as the sole place in which the Reformers were "revolutionary" in eschatological matters (168). The prominence of the theme of justification as "new creation" in the work of Oswald Bayer reflects a similar insight. See his "Theses on the Doctrine of Justification," esp. theses 4, 5, 24.

importance with such sustained attention and vigor as did Gerhard Forde.[18] In essence, Forde gives an account of justification that republishes the "microcosmic apocalyptic" discerned by Luther to be the heart of personal salvation.[19] Key is an appreciation of how the juridical language of justification is explicated materially by the description of salvation as strictly a matter of death and life: of the judgment of the old unto death, and in Christ the gift of life to the new. Paul's announcement that "if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new!" (2 Cor. 5:17) distills the point: reconciliation occurs by way of death and new creation.[20] The aim is to connect talk of justification so closely with talk of death and life along these lines that they become identified, as indeed they were by Luther.[21] As Forde contends, when we grasp that "justification by faith alone *is* death and resurrection, then one has a potent theological explosive."[22] Only with such an explosive can all moralism, legalism, and religious distortions of the freedom of the Christian life under the promise of the gospel be sapped. The ambition is to undercut what J. Louis Martyn in his work on Paul has styled the "two ways" or "two-step dance" view of salvation, a view that pivots around claims for the continuity of the self and unvitiated human capacity for choice of the good.[23]

The matter of justification properly arises against the dramatic-dualistic background of the New Testament witness. This certainly is not an absolute dualism of origin, yet it is marked by a "radical opposition between the forces of evil and the creator God." Set in this apocalyptic context, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ together constitute an event by which the new age breaks in on the old: God's decisive and salutary contradiction of all that is opposed to him.[24] Death and resurrection are not merely fanciful tropes

18. In what follows I draw on a number of Forde's writings: *Law-Gospel Debate*; *Where God Meets Man*; *Theology Is for Proclamation*; "Work of Christ"; *Justification by Faith*; *More Radical Gospel*; *Captivation of the Will*; and *Preached God*.

19. I take this phrase from Jones, "Apocalyptic Luther," 312.

20. Forde also looks to Rom. 6:1–11 as a concise statement of this, observing that Paul meets moralistic incredulity at the radical nature of grace—"Should we continue in sin in order that grace may abound?" (Rom. 6:1)—precisely by commenting at length on the sinner's dying and rising in and with Christ.

21. "Baptism signifies two things: death and resurrection, that is, full and complete justification" (Luther, "Babylonian Captivity of the Church," 67). Cf. Forde, *Justification*, 16–18.

22. Forde, *Justification*, 4.

23. Martyn contends that such a view is at the heart of the message of Paul's opponents in Galatia (the "Teachers") and is met by Paul's proclamation of the apocalyptic gospel; see Martyn, *Galatians* and *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*. For a summary statement of the position see Martyn, "Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians."

24. Forde, "Work of Christ," 36–37, 40.

for other processes that are really taking place within the stable ambit of the self. Rather, as Forde explains,

> Death and resurrection is the primary reality, . . . [and this] posits a radically different understanding of the way of salvation. Under the legal metaphor, the subject is a continuously existing one who does not die but is merely altered by grace. Salvation, you might say, is something of a repair job. . . . Death and resurrection as a real event, however, proposes quite a different way. . . . The subject does not survive intact on its own steam, undergoing only certain "alterations." What is involved is rather a matter of death and life. There is new life. That the subject is made new is due to the action of God, the resurrection in Christ, not to repairs made according to the legal scheme.[25]

In keeping with such a view, Forde cannot do enough to emphasize the radical *discontinuity* that salvation entails. As another later statement makes plain, the event of Christ's cross and resurrection is not

> "just one of those things" because it is God who is at work here, who intends to bring us to our end, to put all things "out of joint," and make a new start. It means that everything and everyone stands under the judgment, that God has found a way here, so to speak, to do what he would not quite do in the flood—wipe out everyone and start anew. Here he has found a way to do it so as truly to save and not to destroy. There is a new creation in Jesus, the risen one. . . . So it is that the accident becomes the point of departure . . . for something absolutely new: faith in the God who calls into being that which is from that which is not.[26]

With this emphasis, Forde stands in close continuity with the early Barth, who insisted that the *eschaton* is "*not* the extension, the result, the consequence, the next step in following out what has gone before, *but* on the contrary, it is the radical break with all that has gone before, but also precisely as such its original significance and motive power."[27] Notice how both Barth

25. Forde, *Justification*, 17–18; cf. "Work of Christ," 96: "If, however, atonement is the actual event, the accident that happens to us from without, it affects us profoundly subjectively. It ends the old life and begins a new one. It means death and resurrection. The old subjective views [of atonement] were partially right. They simply were not radical enough. They thought of a modification of the subject, not its death and resurrection." With the word "accident," Forde emphasizes the contingent, eventful, uncontrolled, and uncontrived character of salvation that befalls us from beyond our own willing and doing.

26. Forde, *Theology Is for Proclamation*, 128–29.

27. My translation of K. Barth, "Der Christ in der Gesellschaft," 35, emphasis original. Cf. K. Barth, "Christian's Place in Society," 324. The congruence is also noted in Mattes, "Gerhard Forde on Revisioning Theology," 376.

and Forde locate the salutary character of the eschatological in its *discontinuity*: it is from this discontinuity that eschatology draws its significance and power to move events, as Barth says; or in Forde's idiom, when Christ, who is killed, is then raised to new life by God for the sake of his slaughterers, "something else happens: ultimate judgment, a full stop, and grace."[28] The cross of Christ is not, as Albert Schweitzer once styled it, just another turn of the bone-crushing wheel of history.[29] It is rather the start of "something else," another kind of turning in which an unfathomably gracious Divinity accomplishes the salvation of the world. For Forde, the cross is the instrument by which God brings to naught that which is, certainly; but more important still, it is at the same time the instrument by which God brings into being that which has not yet been: it is the instrument of the new creation in Christ. For this reason we must acknowledge that Christ dies, Forde argues, not "instead of us" but rather "*ahead of us*," drawing sinful flesh into and through his own death to the place it must die, so as to remake it anew.[30]

There is more than a touch of apocalyptic sensibility in an account of salvation that so stresses the salutary power of radical disjunction. The eschatological word of the cross saves precisely because it "kills the old Adam and Eve." This is salvation by catastrophe—like the flood of Noah, but salutary. Its very unconditional character contains "the uncompromising apocalyptic 'no' to all human religious aspiration within itself."[31] Forde is of the view that God inaugurates a new reality in the present through "creative negation" when, by cross and resurrection, the vital eschatological future invades the passing age and conquers it from within, effecting a "neo-genesis beyond the last negation of life."[32] When Christ is understood in his work, as he is here, as the inbreaking of the eschaton, and the love of God is identified as "the *power* which in resurrection wins the victory in the actual historical battle on the cross," then the cry of the Crucified, "It is finished" (John 19:30),

28. Forde, "Work of Christ," 94. Cf. Minear, *Kingdom and the Power*, 119: "The new Day with this new opportunity is not simply the third factor in the succession of tenses—past, present, future. It is a new creation which permeates and interrupts the apparently self-perpetuating series of days. The new Day is a projection of God's purpose from the future into the present; it is a heavenly future that judges and redeems whatever the earthly future may hold."

29. Cf. A. Schweitzer, *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, 370–71.

30. Forde, *Where God Meets Man*, 28. Cf. Mattes, "Gerhard Forde on Revisioning Theology," 279. This line of argument is central to Forde's critical evaluation of the Anselmic tradition of atonement theology set forth at length in "Work of Christ" and *Theology Is for Proclamation*. Christoph Schwöbel notes that acknowledgment of a discontinuity countered only by the continuity provided by the "faithfulness of God who raises Jesus from the dead" is a pattern that "forms a central part of the gospel"; see Schwöbel, "Last Things First," 239–40.

31. Forde, "Apocalyptic No and the Eschatological Yes," in *More Radical Gospel*, 31.

32. See Braaten, "Significance of Apocalypticism for Systematic Theology," 491, 493.

becomes the epitaph of the old age, while the angelic word that "He is not here; for he has been raised" (Matt. 28:6) stands as the rubric over the advent of the new.[33] In these events, and by way of their subsequent proclamation, God "who is our end . . . does it to us": God does this by putting "an end to us both negatively and positively" as the salvation brought by the gospel both "ends us as old beings and gives us a new end."[34] This new thing that the Lord does proves definitive; it will not forfeit its novelty because, as an incursion of God's future, it stands as the unsurpassable basis of everything for which faith now hopes and waits, the permanently sharp edge of the coming age set against our present.[35]

In a late essay Forde himself summarizes very nicely the way in which soteriology is thoroughly eschatological. Eschatology, he writes, concerns

> how the future will come to us in Jesus, how the end and the new beginning breaks in upon us in Jesus' life and deeds among us, especially his death and resurrection. Here, the end comes to meet us. The eschatological "yes" invades our present. To be sure, it is clothed in the "no," in the hiddenness of the cross and even the utter unconditionality of its graciousness. It is the story of how God's sovereign future invades our present, ending the old and the beginning of the new. The apocalyptic clash of ages remains, but is now christologically anchored and done to us in the living present.[36]

We noted above that eschatological dogmatics pitches itself into a struggle for transcendence in theological reflection. We are now in a position to specify this rather broad claim further. What makes Christian dogmatics eschatological is, first, a proper preoccupation with understanding salvation as the advent of the radically new, and only thus as a *divine* act. An eschatological grammar is required to explicate the sense of the Christian gesture of pointing to Jesus and uttering, "*God*. *God* did this new thing for us." This is the abiding truth in Barth's assertion that Christianity must be utterly eschatological if it in fact arises from the *coming of God* to save.[37] Forde concurs, claiming that the cross is a saving event because, and only because, in it *God* conquers our dissolution and "ends it *for us* by *coming*."[38] We might say that dogmatics

33. Forde, "Fake Theology," in *Preached God*, 215; Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 189.

34. Forde, "Karl Barth on the Consequences of Lutheran Christology," in *Preached God*, 85.

35. For the eschatological logic of this, see Jüngel, "Emergence of the New," esp. 49–58; Forde, *Law-Gospel Debate*, 207.

36. Forde, "Apocalyptic No and the Eschatological Yes," in *More Radical Gospel*, 21.

37. K. Barth, *Epistle to the Romans*, 314: "In Jesus Christ the wholly Other, unapproachable, unknown, *eternal power and divinity* (1:20) of God has entered into our world."

38. Forde, "Work of Christ," 73.

is eschatological first and foremost because it conceives of and emphasizes salvation as God's very own action.

Second, Christian theology requires an eschatological grammar because the outworking of salvation in Christ is a matter of *ends*. Following the contours of Paul's apocalyptic gospel rather closely,[39] the cross, for Forde, proves to be the axis for the turning of the ages, a macrocosmic revolution that is also iterated in the microcosm of human being. The *finality* of this revolution and the creative *force* of the new thing it inaugurates can only come to full expression in an eschatological register, for when "God quickens, he does so by killing," as Luther famously put it.[40] So too, it seems, must the once-for-all character of salvation's accomplishment—what Forde denotes as its "christological anchor"—be articulated in eschatological terms. For only if what takes place in cross and resurrection is unsurpassable in time—only as Christ's person and work is the "unsurpassably new which does not grow old and which therefore makes all things new"[41]—can it be the final ground of Christian faith and future hope.[42] The decisiveness of the passion and resurrection of Christ is signaled fully when set forth as the "invasion of God's sovereign future" into time, the preemptive deliverance unto a destiny not of creation's own making. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is truly "a first swing of the sickle" (cf. 1 Cor. 15:23).[43] Dogmatics is also eschatological in that it acknowledges and bespeaks the finality, singularity, and unsurpassable effectiveness of the saving judgment that God renders in Jesus Christ.

Third and finally, Christian dogmatics must be eschatological if it is to do justice to the very logic and form of divine grace as such. This is a particularly strong emphasis in Forde's work: "The question about grace—whether it is a quality in the soul or the sheer divine promise—is a question of ontology versus eschatology. Is 'grace' a new eschatological reality that comes *extra nos* and breaks in upon us bringing new being to faith, the death of the old and the life of the new, or is it rather to be understood in ontological terms as an infused power that transforms old being?"[44]

It is the very *graciousness* of grace that is at stake here. The full force of the classical Reformation devices that serve to emphasize this—for example,

39. See de Boer, "Paul, Theologian of God's Apocalypse."

40. Luther, *Bondage of the Will*, 101. Luther himself sets 1 Sam. 2:6 as a superscription over the gospel of salvation in Christ: "The Lord kills and makes alive; He brings down to the grave and raises up."

41. Ebeling, *Dogmatik des christlichen Glaubens*, 3:129.

42. For extended reflection on this point, see Kreck, *Die Zukunft des Gekommenen*, 187–88, 203–20.

43. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit*, 159.

44. Forde, "Apocalyptic No and the Eschatological Yes," in *More Radical Gospel*, 32.

the logic of imputation, the alien character of the righteousness that grace delivers, the *unconditional* character of the divine promise that "while we still were sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8), the insistence that grace comes on us from outside (*ab extra*) so that we are justified by *faith alone* (*sola fide*)—is only fully acknowledged when they are understood eschatologically. Nothing militates against synergism as fully and finally as the reality of the death of the sinner; and nothing affirms the divine monergism of salvation as fully and finally as its designation as "new creation." If, as Forde discerns, God's grace is pronounced in Christ so as to "establish an entirely new situation," if it is nothing less than "a re-creative act of God, something he does precisely by speaking unconditionally,"[45] then such a thing must be set forth in an eschatological discourse or not at all. Dogmatics is finally eschatological because and as it admits and articulates the victorious grace of the God of the gospel.

## Concluding Remarks

What might be learned about the eschatological character of Christian dogmatics from all this, and what precisely is at stake in the contest with other contemporary options in theology generally, and resurgent historicism in particular?

First, we may ask whether it is possible to uphold the affirmations involved in Forde's account of the work of salvation that we have enumerated—summarily, that salvation worked out in Christ's cross and resurrection is an unsurpassable and utterly gracious act of God—in anything other than an eschatological register. Forde clearly thinks not; he sees his program as a contemporary reiteration of Luther's own combat against theologizing *ad modum Aristotelis* (in the speculative manner of Aristotle), which is to say attempting to think the gospel in categories antithetical to its very character. Might we agree that the eschatological categories provided by the New Testament—casting forward to the future while anchored christologically—are finally the only ones adequate to trace the lineaments of the gospel and to "render to reality its due," as Käsemann once put it?[46]

Second, an eschatological dogmatics situates its practitioner in a peculiar way. To say that theology done in this mode is self-involving is too weak an assertion. Any account of salvation in Christ unfolded in an eschatological mode involves claims about the very constitution of present reality itself; it seeks to answer the questions "Where am I?" and "What time is it?" in ways

45. Forde, *Justification*, 29–30.
46. Käsemann, "On the Subject of Primitive Christian Apocalyptic," 137.

that simultaneously acknowledge that the theologian is decisively placed—not only conceptually, but also actually—by the gospel.[47] An eschatological dogmatics traffics in a new "definition of situation" that orients faith, life, and thought in view of God's "redefinition of reality despite the paradoxes of life."[48] The theologian qua believer is found in the world so described. One lives in the present under the promise and in the expectation of new life, acknowledging that one has been "inserted into the situation before God that is opened up by God's condemning and saving judgment." The world remade by the saving action of God simply *is* the site of this human life. And as Gerhard Sauter puts it, its reality is for us a "categorical indicative": "Your life *is* hidden with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).[49] Sauter's use of the term "categorical" signals that the events of the cross and resurrection, the God of Jesus Christ who is their prime agent, and the situation they inaugurate are together absolutely *normative* for Christian faith and life, and so also for the reflective and critical work of Christian dogmatics. And they do not simply exercise the formative claim of a historical past received in the present as a compelling tradition or inheritance; rather, their normativity is a function precisely of their eschatological character: as events that are "unsurpassably new," they continually render the form of the old age past as they make all things new.[50] "This invisible pull of God's future," Paul Minear argues, determines the potential meaning of every other prospect that stands open to human beings, bringing to bear upon the present "an order of priorities that the world would reverse."[51]

Third, and finally, important epistemological matters are raised by the practice of eschatological dogmatics. Insisting that salvation in Christ entails a graciously sovereign incursion of God's future of unsurpassable consequence, an eschatological dogmatics demands a particularly robust concept of divine revelation. Indeed, because he characterizes the cross–resurrection sequence in eschatological terms, Barth identifies it *as* revelation: "This triumph, this act of victory in which the victor already exists and the vanquished likewise still

47. See Lowe, "Prospects for a Postmodern Christian Theology," 23: "Reason spontaneously seeks to contextualize that with which it deals. But Christian theology proceeds upon the quite different premise that we ourselves have been contextualized; and not just conceptually, but actually. It is we who have been inscribed."

48. C. Frey, "Eschatology and Ethics," 74.

49. Sauter, *Eschatological Rationality*, 197–98.

50. When historicism despairs of the authority of the past because of its inescapable "contingency and fallibility (and with these plurality, diversity, and contestability)," it is left to take the present as "the normative site for decisions" and to appeal to pragmatic norms and criteria tuned to consequences—so Davaney, *Historicism*, 158.

51. Minear, *Kingdom and the Power*, 117.

exist, this transition . . . from the old aeon that ends with the cross of Christ to the new one that begins with His resurrection—this transition is *revelation*, . . . the light of fulfilled time."[52] The catastrophic invasion of God's saving love from the future must register epistemically. The category of "revelation" is admittedly a rather abstract cipher on which to hang the full implications of such a claim, implications that Paul himself, at significant points in his letters, was working out in detail (e.g., Rom. 12:1–2; 2 Cor. 5:16–17).[53] But the term "revelation" does announce the very peculiar character of theological knowledge considered within an eschatological rendering of the gospel. The thought experiment with which Kierkegaard opens *Philosophical Fragments* has abiding value in signaling some of the epistemic issues ingredient in an eschatological account of Christ as the advent of divine and saving truth, and only just so as revelation.[54]

Last, it is also theology's duty to observe that just such epistemic issues accompany the work of biblical exegesis itself. The matter was winsomely explored by Minear in a volume titled *The Bible and the Historian: Breaking the Silence about God in Biblical Studies*.[55] Minear puts the central question in this way:

> What happens, then, when we discover in the Bible attitudes toward time which not only claim to be true, but which also commend themselves to us with increasing power? The entire hermeneutical system is placed in question. . . . The conception of endless, unilinear, one-way time must be modified if we are to accept the apostolic testimony. . . . If the end has actually been inaugurated, then historical time is capable of embracing simultaneously both the old age and the new. No methodology whose presuppositions on time are limited to the old age will be adequate to cope with the historicity of the new age or with the temporal collision between the two times.[56]

What should follow for historical study of the Scriptures and for hermeneutics when one is overpowered by the evangelical claim that the cross is "simply that

52. K. Barth, *CD* I/2:56.

53. See Martyn, "Epistemology at the Turn of the Ages" and "Apocalyptic Antinomies," in *Theological Issues in the Letters of Paul*, 89–120, 111–24.

54. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments, Johannes Climacus*, 7–36. The prominent place of eschatological categories is notable here, e.g., the Teacher brings about a "break" within the life of the student (19): the "moment" of teaching effects and makes one aware of having undergone a "new birth" from nonbeing to being (21–22); as the moment of permanent necessity and significance, the Teacher represents nothing less than the "fullness of time" (18).

55. Minear, *Bible and the Historian*; cf. Deines, "God's Role in History"; S. Adams, *Reality of God and Historical Method*.

56. Minear, *Bible and the Historian*, 54–55.

apocalyptic event which changes both the world and our perceptions of it"?[57] Such questions must forthrightly be put to all our labors over the Scriptures.

We can safely say that a thoroughly historicist theology will finally consider eschatological dogmatics nothing but a sustained and elaborate misconception, or perhaps at best an extended exercise in "strong poetry."[58] Either way it will be intellectually suspect. Conversely, a properly eschatological dogmatics will consider historicism to be an intellectually sophisticated mode of unbelief, and precisely for that reason also, if differently, rationally suspect. Is the relation between eschatological and historicist theology then an either-or, the former committed to seeing history as a function of revelation, the latter to understanding revelation to be a function of history?[59] As Christian theology pursues these matters in an eschatological or apocalyptic key—as does Gerhard Forde in his provocative and wayfinding work—its content and its form must be unfolded in a way that makes patent faith's venture that "what is going on in what takes place"[60] in Jesus Christ is in fact the Archimedean point of divine salvation and the axis on which the ages are turning. For if it is not, then it is really nothing with which we need trouble ourselves (1 Cor. 15:14).

57. See Duff, "Pauline Apocalyptic and Theological Ethics," 281.

58. The term is from Richard Rorty in his *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, 7.

59. The particular terms here are Karl Barth's: "Revelation is not a predicate of history, but history is a predicate of revelation" (*CD* I/2:58).

60. The phrase is from John Marsh, *Gospel of St. John*, 19–20 and 118, where it is used to characterize the particular form of Johannine historiography.