The rediscovery at the beginning of our century of the eschatological perspective of the New Testament effected a drastic and widespread re-orientation of biblical studies.\(^1\) Once the eschatological character of the person and ministry of Jesus was recognized, eschatology itself moved from the periphery to the center of the biblical message. Whereas once it was treated in isolation as a kind of doctrinal appendage on "last things," today it is the hermeneutical key to all biblical interpretation. And it will be generally conceded that this recovery has had a most stimulating effect upon biblical studies. It has made possible in turn the recovery of such valuable insights as the unity of the Old and New Testaments, the decisive character of Jesus' kingdom revelation in the salvation history of the Bible, and a clearer understanding of the nature of the Christian life and the Christian church. Not the least valuable of these insights is the recognition of the importance of eschatology for ecclesiology, and to that subject we now turn.

Lest too much be expected from the announced title of this study, let us make clear at the outset its quite modest limits. It is our purpose here to indicate in brief outline the bearing of eschatology upon the nature of the church, and on the existence and life of the church as it faces some of the perils of our time.

I

It is now a commonplace of New Testament studies that the church and the kingdom are to be understood as Christological, eschatological realities. As far as Christology is concerned, what this means for the church was effectively stated by the late Johannis de Zwaan, who showed that before the early Christians thought church, they had already thought Christ.\(^2\) If believers pictured themselves as branches, it was because Christ was the vine. If the church was a body, it was because Christ was the head of the body. If the church was a family, it was because Christ was the Son

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\(^1\)It has been said that the recognition of the eschatological character of the gospel of Jesus is the Copernican fact for modern theology, F. Heiler; quoted by J. R. Nelson, The Realm of Redemption, London, 1957, p. 213.

and elder brother. If the church was a household, a city, a kingdom, a people, it was because Christ was the king and messiah. Previous to every image and metaphor for the church, there was a corresponding conception of the Lord and Saviour of the church. But this determining Christology was in turn determined by an eschatology. Jesus Christ in his person, word and work indicates a full awareness of inaugurating a new time in the history of salvation, a time of fulfillment which is the correlate of the divine purposes and promises which constitute the heart of the Old Testament revelation. This eschatological nature of Christ's message and ministry find reflection in his followers. They constitute an eschatological community, the reality of which comes to expression in a variety of images and metaphors. They are the people of the new covenant of the end time (Gal. 5:16; 3:7, 9, 29), the little flock to whom God gives the kingdom (Luke 12:32; I Peter 5:2; Heb. 13:20), the new Israel (Gal. 6:15, 16; Eph. 2:12; Heb. 8:8-10), the new Jerusalem or holy city (Gal. 4:21-31; Heb. 12:22-24, 13:14; Rev. 21:2ff), the household of God (I Peter 4:17; Heb. 3:1-6), the body of Christ (Col. 2:18, 23; 3:9-13).

At the conclusion of a careful and stimulating study of over eighty New Testament images and metaphors of the church, Paul Minear says,

> Whatever the figure of speech, this society knew itself to be a Messianic community belonging to and dwelling in a living Jesus Christ whose sovereign rule marked the beginning and goal of the new age.³

As Minear has correctly observed, it is Jesus' kingdom revelation that gives Christological, eschatological form and shape to the various New Testament designations of the church. The church appears in the New Testament as the church of the kingdom, and therefore has an essential place in the salvation history of biblical revelation. If Jesus Christ is subject, then eschatology is the predicate of the various descriptions of the church.

This new eschatological conception of the church, however, is not sheer gain. The mistaken theology of the past is safely behind us, when the church was interpreted without reference to eschatology. The mistake of the new theology of the church is the false emphasis in eschatology. Discussion of eschatology in our time revolves about the views of Albert Schweitzer, C. H. Dodd and Rudolf Bultmann. It can be no part of this brief study to examine in detail these three divergent eschatologies, but some comment is necessary regarding their respective views in relation to the church. In his thoroughgoing or consistent eschatology, Schweitzer viewed the church as the mistaken substitution of the early believers for the kingdom which failed to arrive according to Jesus' expectation and

In the words of the celebrated remark of Alfred Loisy, "Jesus announced the kingdom, but what came was . . . the church." Since in Schweitzer’s view, Jesus was mistaken about the kingdom, he could have hardly foreseen or intended the church. Within the framework of radical eschatology, the church can never be anything more than a mistaken substitution for the transcendant order of the future kingdom. Against Schweitzer, C. H. Dodd contends that in Jesus Christ the eschaton arrived, and eschatology was realized as much as is possible in history. In his view, the kingdom has come, the prophecies have been fulfilled, and the church emerges clearly as the bearer of Christ’s Spirit. Nothing can happen in the future that has not in essence already happened. Speaking of the church, Dodd declares

There will be an end when the Church, or redeemed humanity, has grown into the stature of the fulness of Christ. But there will be nothing in the end which is not already given implicitly in the Church. Despite the fact that in more recent years Dodd has retreated somewhat from his earlier views, this retreat does not alter in any significant way his fundamental views of the kingdom and the church. In Dodd’s theology, the eternal quality and pattern of the kingdom is securely lodged within the church. The eschaton is housed within the church and the nature and life of the church correspond to the fixed pattern of the kingdom. Speaking of the eternal quality of the kingdom, Dodd has said,

That eternal quality is manifested in time by the continuous life of the Church centered in the Sacrament in which the crisis of the death and resurrection of Christ is perpetually made present. In this eschatology one may detect not only a Platonic tinge, but also a Greek and unbiblical view of time, which fails to deal adequately with both the kingdom and the church. In contrast, Bultmann has attempted something of a synthesis between Dodd and Schweitzer, but while he speaks of an eschatological present and future, the terms are never inter-

4English translations of Albert Schweitzer's pertinent works are as follows: The Quest of the Historical Jesus, London, 1911; Paul and His Interpreters, London, 1912; The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle, London, 1931.
8The Kingdom and History, p. 55.
preted literally or temporally. Neither the kingdom nor the church have any temporal dependence upon the first or second advent of Christ. Here eschatology is completely existentialized and reinterpreted in terms of man's new self-understanding and his authentic existence in faith.10

In view of these three very influential interpretations of eschatology, futuristic, realized and existentialized, it is not to be wondered that conservative scholars are somewhat reluctant to interpret the church eschatologically, and that considerable confusion obtains with respect to the eschatological nature of the church. These three eschatology-views are not so much false as false in their emphasis. We do well to learn something from all, but subscribe to none. We prefer to understand Jesus' kingdom revelation as embracing both a present and a future aspect.11 Indeed this is the mystery of the kingdom (Mark 4:11), that before the consummation and final victory of the kingdom, it appears in the person, word and work of Jesus with forgiveness, righteousness, joy and peace for those who believe. The kingdom is both present (Matt. 13:16-17; Luke 10:23, 24; Matt. 12:28) and future (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28, 29). This is the import not only of the parables and miracles and general teaching of Jesus, but particularly of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. The resurrection of Jesus marks the boundaries of the present and future kingdom. At the resurrection we see the old aeon opened to the powers of the new resurrection age.

The kingdom inaugurated by Jesus' ministry, established convincingly by his death, resurrection and ascension, and given continuing reality by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit among his people, attests the fact of its present reality. But the resurrection belongs to and points to the future also, for Christ is in heaven with our humanity as the first fruits of a great future yet to come. While the eschaton arrived in Jesus Christ, we still await the telos when all things will be subdued unto him (I Cor. 15:28). The interim between the two advents, far from being a solution of embarrassment, is integral to Jesus' kingdom revelation. The kingdom has been inaugurated but not consummated, and the delay of final judgment, the delay of the parousia, mark out the present kingdom as the kingdom of grace which will become the kingdom of glory.

In Jesus' kingdom revelation an integral place is assigned to the ekklesia. This follows not only from the acceptance of the authenticity of the disputed Matthean passages (16:18; 18:17), but from the messianic

character of the kingdom. As the Messiah, Jesus represented God’s people as the Lord’s Servant and the Son of Man. A messiah without a messianic people simply makes no sense. The calling of the twelve, the appointment of the seventy, the institution of the Last Supper, the rejection of unbelieving Israel as the people of the covenant and the formation of a new covenant people, these constitute but a part of the data that the kingdom embraces not only a gracious redemptive rule, but a realm, order or community in which grace and redemption are realized.

And yet nowhere does the New Testament encourage us to confuse or identify the basileia and the ekklesia.\(^\text{12}\) The church is not the kingdom. It does not control the kingdom, and it does not bring or build the kingdom. The kingdom, as has been well said, “is God’s seed not man’s deed.”\(^\text{13}\) It is God’s gracious activity and gift and looks to the restoration of the divine rule over all things in heaven and on earth. Already in the ministry of Jesus we see something of its dimension and scope, as he drove back the forces of sin, suffering, death, and exercised lordship over the destructive forces of nature and even the hidden powers of darkness. The kingdom has cosmic dimensions and in its consummation will fill both time and eternity. The ekklesia, on the other hand, constitutes the people of the kingdom, those gathered by the proclamation of the good news to inherit the gifts and promises of the kingdom now and in the future. The church is the fruit and result of the kingdom, the sociological, visible result of the kingdom, but still under the grace and judgment of the kingdom. It is clear, however, that as a correlate of the basileia, the ekklesia bears an essential eschatological character. As people of the kingdom, the soteriological fruit of the kingdom, the ekklesia shares in the paradoxical nature of the kingdom as both present and future. The church also has a twofold life, “an already” and a “not yet.” In Christ the church has entered upon the life of the new age, and embraces by faith the powers of the new age through the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. But the indwelling of the Holy Spirit bestowed upon the church at Pentecost is only an aparche (Rom. 8:28) and an arrabon (2 Cor. 1:22; 5:5; Eph. 1:14) of the life that is yet to be. It is as the people of the kingdom that the church discovers its true nature and legitimacy. Here it finds also its true unity and catholicity. The Old Testament people of God, the Qehal Jahwe, pre-formed in Israel now comes into the light of the kingdom that knows no barriers of Jew or Gentile, color or class, the kingdom that overarches the centuries and continents. The church of the kingdom confesses Christ’s kingship to the ends of the earth, to the end

\(^{12}\) Ridderbos, op. cit., pp. 347ff.

\(^{13}\) Rudolf Otto, The Kingdom of God and the Son of Man, Grand Rapids, 1939, pp. 113ff.
of the world. It lives, moves, and has its existence in him who was, who is, and who is to come, even Jesus Christ.

II

The bearing of the eschatological character of the church upon its existence and life should be self-evident. The only existence of the church described in the New Testament is an eschatological existence. In union with its ascended, living Saviour and Lord and sharing by the Holy Spirit in the powers of the new age, the church lives with a twofold orientation. Its whole life is marked out by two boundaries, "the already" and "the not yet." The church’s existence and life oscillate between realization and expectation. For this reason, the life of the church is one of precarious balance and unceasing tension. All attempts to confuse, eliminate or over-emphasize one pole of its life to the neglect of the other, leads to inevitable ecclesiological docetism. The maintenance of this balance is always the major challenge facing the church, as over 1900 years of church history convincingly demonstrate. That is why the church of the kingdom is always ecclesia reformata semper reformanda, "a Church reformed and ever willing to be reformed." The church constantly stands under the grace and judgment of the kingdom. And when the church sins, then it must not despair of God’s mercy or continue in sin, but redress its position with respect to its divinely determined boundaries. It possesses eternal life but still seeks it. It shares in the first fruits of the new age but still looks for the final harvest. The church, as the individual believer, lives by faith in hope. Perhaps the most simple way to spell out the implications of this for the present life of the church is to say that the church must constantly evidence both a pilgrim and a servant life.

As the pilgrim people of God, the church knows that it is not now all that it is to be. Now it is a colony of heaven which waits with longing expectation for the coming from heaven of its Saviour and Lord who will then present the church to himself "without spot or wrinkle or any other defect" (Eph. 5:27). Its hope is grounded in Christ, "that he who began a good work in us will go on to perfect it in preparation for the day of Jesus Christ" (Phil. 1:6). As the church looks ahead, it also looks back, and its expectation is from God who at the end will disclose fully what he already has done in Jesus Christ. Although the people of God have been brought out of darkness into marvelous light, they do not easily forget that their present position and possession is only a foretaste of the inheritance laid up for them.

A constant awareness of its pilgrim character will safeguard the church from two serious dangers or temptations, those of humanization and secularization. A fully realized or completely existentialized eschatology can never provide the church with an authentic existence. The church which
appears in the New Testament is, for the most part, a church which knows its existence and life to be incomplete. The church at Corinth, which took its existence into its own hands, was soon disabused of its *hubris* by the Apostle Paul. This means that the church while a visible sociological reality, a society, may never "settle down" as though it were at home with other secular societies, and rest content with its achievement, influence and reputation. A pilgrim church will not confuse its life with that of any particular culture or nation. It will be in a position of mobility when drastic revolutions take place in cultural traditions of long standing.

This has pertinence to the crisis which now faces the church in our modern world. The alliance of the church in years past with certain patterns and structures, economic, social and political, constitutes a real dilemma for the church both in America and on the Continent. As cultural structures undergo rapid dissolution in the modern world, new agony and suffering are in store for the church that is more firmly rooted in culture than in Christ. Even in our own country where Protestantism has enjoyed for centuries a favorable climate, and even a protected status under law, there are growing evidences of new strain and separation between church and state.

After a ruthless, searching examination of western culture and church life, Gabriel Vahanian concludes "God is Dead." It is not uncommon to hear our time described as "the post-Protestant era," and even "the post-Christian era." Some of the critics busy with all of this "breast-beating" and "hand-wringing" over the church are better social analysts than biblical theologians, and others seem more interested in developing some new kind of nebulous "community" or "fellowship" than in the renewal of the church. But irrespective of slogans and of the motives of those who make them, it cannot be denied that the church is caught in the midst of a cultural revolution that threatens Christianity itself. Paul Ramsey says bluntly, "Ours is the first attempt in recorded history to build a culture upon the premise that God is dead."

As all illusions about our so-called Christian civilization are now being shattered, the question arises how far the church based on old assumptions and structures can serve the needs of our time. As new religious movements arise, as the sects multiply and thrive, as the Younger Churches overseas display new spiritual vitality, we may well ponder the effectiveness of many of the forms and structures of the church's life which were formed in another time when societies were more stable. The forms and patterns of the church's life can be useful instruments of God's redeeming

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15 Paul Ramsey contributed the "Preface" to Vahanian's *The Death of God*, p. xiii.
purposes if they are flexible and adaptable to the needs of our time of cultural revolution. But they can also get in the way of God's purposes, whenever they are inflexible and revered more highly than the Saviour and Lord of the church.\textsuperscript{16} To the extent that the church is untrue to its pilgrim character, it will face in the years ahead great agony, humiliation and suffering. In fact Dietrich Bonhoeffer interprets the present distress of the church as the call of God to watch with Christ suffering in Gethsemane, and to share his suffering as once again he is rejected by a world which is accepting a theology of secular culture.\textsuperscript{17} But to the extent that the church recognizes and re-appropriates its pilgrim character and life, it will position itself for a more successful confrontation with the modern cultural revolution.

It is equally crucial, however, that the existence and life of the church find suitable expression as God's servant people. The church as the church of the kingdom lives out of the kingdom already come fully as much as out of the kingdom yet to come. Realized eschatology is certainly correct when it stresses that the church lives from the pivotal center of the events which have already happened in Jesus Christ. He who will come again in glory, came to us in his first advent in the form of a servant. Jesus Christ is both the Lord who serves and the Servant who is Lord (Phil. 2:5ff). The service of the Servant obviously transcends that of his people. "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and give his life a ransom for many" (Mark 10:45). By his life, death, resurrection and ascension, Christ brought to his people righteousness and the gift of his indwelling Spirit. Because they are God's redeemed people, they serve him in the totality of their life, witness, worship and work. While the service of the Servant transcends that of the church, nevertheless his service defines and describes that of the church and determines its role in the world.\textsuperscript{18}

When the Servant came, he entered into human life, girded himself with a towel, knelt down, and washed his disciples' feet, and then said, "I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them" (John 13:15-17). The relation

\textsuperscript{16}Arnold Toynbee \textit{A Study in History}, Oxford, 1939, IV, 133ff, describes this "intractability of institutions" and his discussion is recommended to all churchmen, especially those charged with attempted revisions of existing confessions and liturgies. It will give them small comfort, but added stimulus.

\textsuperscript{17}Dietrich Bonhoeffer, \textit{Letters and Papers from Prison}, Glasgow, 1962, pp. 122ff.

\textsuperscript{18}The servant nature and life of the church is worked out in some stimulating studies by Lewis S. Mudge, \textit{In His Service: The Servant Lord and His Servant People}, Philadelphia, 1959; and Anthony T. Hanson, \textit{The Church of the Servant}, London, 1962. Readers of \textit{The Reformed Review} will also recognize that "The Servant Lord and His Servant People" was the theme of the World Presbyterian Alliance of 1958-59.
of this private act of washing to what Jesus did publicly at the cross must be firmly grasped, of course, or else the episode loses its significance. Any failure to grasp firmly redemption through the cross of Christ will eventually emasculate the mission of the church; indeed, it will emasculate the whole eschatology of the New Testament. On the other hand, in this episode there is also clear intimation of the mission of the church as a redeemed people. In grateful obedience to its Lord and Saviour, the church expresses its servant form in its life, confession, witness and work.

The full implications of this statement cannot be worked out here in deserving detail. These implications would embrace every aspect of a full theology of the church, the foundation and ordering of the church’s life, the development of such forms and patterns of witness and worship as will best express God’s redeeming deed in Christ. They would affect the church’s theology, its preaching and teaching offices, its worship and service, the life of the local congregation and the life of the church at large. And one of the not least salutary implications would be the recovery of the priesthood of all believers, and the invigoration of the laity of the church. The complete neglect of this New Testament truth in our own Reformed tradition, of all places, is too obvious to need extended commentary. In our Reformed Church in America, the laity have been reduced to an excessively passive role both in worship and in service. Too often we consider our churches successful when they have a popular preacher, a goodly number of representative missionaries financed by the church, and an impressive number of church organizations that keep people busy in the church building. But what is needed is a clearer pattern of life which will concrete for the whole church its servant-life.

Every member of the church is called to be militantly missionary, a servant of Christ out in the world of art, labor, science, industry; in the world of work, property, taxes and government. Both vocation and stewardship would become larger realities among us, if all of God’s servant people were engaged in the two kinds of service spelled out clearly in the New Testament, leitourgia and diakonia. Both are the work of the people of God. On Sunday there is leitourgia which provides the proper setting for the service of God in praise, thanksgiving and dedication. But the leitourgia on Sunday properly concludes with the response of the people, in order that they may go forth during the ensuing week to continue their diakonia, in their respective vocations. We can still profit immensely from the positive directions which John Calvin gave to Christian service in Geneva through his principle of the kingship of Christ in all things. In a pointed and succinct manner, Dr. T. F.

19Pertinent data will be found in the articles on diakonia and leitourgia in G. Kittel, Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament, Stuttgart, 1933—.
Torrance summarized Calvin’s prescriptions as follows:

Calvin thought of the activity of the Church under this eschatological impulse in three ways. (1) All members of the Church engaged in the work of gathering the Church together on every side; everyone striving to lead others to the truth, to restore the wandering to the right way, extending a helping hand to the fallen, and to win over those that are without. (2) It is the business of the Church to be continuously restoring its true face, and in making that face public both in a godly life and in a form and order of the Church on earth through which by Word and Sacrament God may be known familiarly and face to face. (3) The Church should ever be engaged in ecumenical activity, which the whole idea of the Regnum Christi and the facies Ecclesiae carries with it. 20

A more alert awareness of the church as God’s servant-people will safeguard the church from two other serious dangers or temptations, those of irrelevance and introversion. A truly biblical eschatology has never diverted the attention of the church from either ethics or mission.21 On the contrary, the fact that God inaugurated the kingdom in the person and work of Christ and will bring it to full consummation in his parousia is the very warrant whereby the church proclaims the word of the kingdom and witnesses to Christ’s kingship in the whole of life, to the ends of the earth to the end of the world. When the church enters meaningfully upon its servant-life, it will become more than what Emil Brunner critically designates as a “Sunday church” and even “a preaching church.” 22 It will then begin to ponder in the light of the gospel the bearing of the kingship of Christ on the denials of civil and religious freedom, on the threat of total warfare, the peril of radioactivity upon generations yet unborn due to continued testing of hydrogen bombs, the threat of secularism, the danger of the omnicompetent state. The church will do more than ponder; it will assert its apostolic and prophetic character and speak out unashamed and unafraid.

The church which spells out its existence and life in terms of God’s servant people will also be safeguarded from a second equally serious danger, that of an undue introversion. In our particular Reformed theo-

20 Thomas F. Torrance, Kingdom and Church, A Study in the Theology of the Reformation, Edinburgh, 1956, pp. 163ff.
logical tradition, we are peculiarly susceptible to this danger because everyone of our doctrinal standards, the Heidelberg Catechism, the Belgic Confession and the Canons of Dort have a pronounced introverted character. They turn the gaze of the church inward upon itself, and its own faith, life and nurture. Now this does not mean that we must run pell-mell in the direction of an all-out extroversion. The church has a solemn obligation to nurture the life of the elect, to train and teach the meaning of covenant life, to admonish and discipline, to strengthen in every way possible the vitality of its fellowship. Duties other than evangelism, and just as important, were laid upon the church by Christ in his final commission (Matt. 28:18ff). It is undue introversion against which the church must protect its existence and life.

This excessive preoccupation with itself takes many forms: When the church becomes hypochondriac, forever engaged in taking its own pulse and temperature, but unresponsive to the lostness and plight of others on its very door-steps,—when the local congregation becomes so self-absorbed and self-contained that it conducts its life without reference to the total life of the denomination,—when the denomination shows neither concern nor fraternity for the church catholic,—when the church becomes more interested in its own piety than its Lord and Head, more interested in its dogmatics than its God, when it becomes too important in its own self-estimation, protecting its historical existence rather than justifying it. How can the church overcome this temptation? By becoming more aware that it is God’s servant people.

The church in the New Testament is the church of the kingdom, God’s pilgrim and servant people. The whole life of the church is eschatologically defined, both in terms of its nature and existence. The faith to which it witnesses is a faith which extends itself in hope (Rom. 8:24f), and a faith that works by love (Gal. 5:5, 6). For the very reason that its nature and existence is eschatological, the church has much to do in the contemporary world. And its life and work are determined both by the past and the future of salvation history. Perhaps this brief for relating eschatology to the church will stimulate some of our younger theologians to work out more fully the bearing of a scriptural eschatology upon the doctrine of church. The need for such an exposition is more than academic and theological. It is almost mandatory if the church is to be the church of the kingdom in the sombre world of today.