THE IMPLICATIONS OF THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST FOR ESCHATOLOGY

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In the first sermon of the Christian Church, Peter, in laying before his hearers the essence of the gospel message, concludes his description of Christ's life by saying that "God has made him both Lord and Christ." Small wonder that the earliest confession of the church became "Christ is Lord." This confession indicates neither a shallow understanding nor a lowest common denominator. Rather it shows the centrality of Christ's Lordship in the mind of the early Christian and the all-embracing nature of this concept. This being the case, we can do no better than to consider the implications of Christ's Lordship in the area of most vital concern in our day, that of eschatology.

Before we can spell out any eschatological conclusions we must fix clearly in our minds the biblical meaning of the Lordship of Christ.

The term "kurios" has as its basic meaning, "ruler" or "one having authority." Sometimes the word can mean "owner," as the master of a slave. It came in pagan Greek society to refer to deity as it was ascribed to kings and rulers. However, the New Testament usage must be abstracted, by and large, from the pagan Greek context and seen rather in the context of the Old Testament veneration for the divine name. For the weighty significance of the term "Lord" is to be seen primarily in that it is the Greek translation of the Old Testament tetragram, Jahweh. Christ's Lordship can be identified with his Kingship and indicates that Christ is the fully adequate representative of God. John Calvin, commenting on 1 Corinthians 8:6, says the appellation, "Lord" implies that "all things that are God's are assuredly applicable to Christ." The identification of Christ's Lordship with his Kingship may appear erroneous from one point of view, for the Kingship of Christ is usually conceived as only one of the three offices of his Messiahship while his Lordship seems to eclipse and swallow up all other offices, being identified with the essence of divinity. However, as Calvin indicates, the Messianic status of Christ had always a particular reference to his Kingship and in this sense Christ's Kingship or Lordship predominate from all points of view.

3 Ibid, p. 76.
In addition to the term "kurios," the Lordship of Christ is implied in such words as *kephale* (head) and *anakephalaiosis* (gathering up). The former, as used in Ephesians 1:22, implies the highest authority in the administration and accomplishment of all things. The latter term is used in Ephesians 1:10 with reference to Christ and indicates that in Christ, God has restored all things to order and the original created unity. Just as sin which disturbed the order is an active, positive negation of the creative purpose, so also the revelation of him who is to restore all things is a dynamic, continuing Lordship, a "heading up" of all things in Christ.

We turn now from the person of the Lord to the arena of his Lordship, the area of his kingly rule. The opening proclamation of the Messianic age was, "Repent for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Jesus himself reveals the centrality of this concept in all his teaching and gives it also to his followers as the essence of their message. Volumes have been written on the meaning of this crucial concept and it has been variously defined and delimited. The use of the term in this paper is only as it contributes to an understanding of the meaning of Christ's Lordship. From this point of view we might define the Kingdom of God in simplest terms as the expression of God's sovereignty in human affairs. This does not mean the earthly kingdom of the Jewish expectation. The early evidence of Christ's "intensive universalism" reveals that he never expected it to be such. In one sense the rule of Christ is an internal, hidden rule. Its fullest expression is in the heart of the believer. So it can be said, "Wherever Christ is Lord over man's heart, there the kingdom of God is . . . ." With Christ begins the internal rule of God of which Jeremiah spoke, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts." Thus the immediate sphere of Christ's reign is the *ecclesia*, over which he reigns as mind over body. However, Christ is also Lord of all creatures (Matthew 28:18), but this rule is yet a hidden rule, unasserted and unrecognized by the world. While "Christ rules over all things in heaven and on earth, the spacial center of this Lordship is the church, which constitutes his Body upon earth."

All of this leads us to the apparent paradox of the kingdom's being a present reality and yet a future promise. These two elements in Christ's kingdom teaching should never be taken as contradictory. They are rather two aspects of one great truth such as the two foci of an ellipse. The difference between the kingdom which is and that which is to come is not in that one is brought about by natural and the other by supernatural forces,

7Ibid, p. 204.
8Geerhardus Vos, *The Teaching of Jesus Concerning the Kingdom and the Church* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1951) p. 42.
10Ibid, p. 156.
but merely in the mode of operation and revelation of the supernatural force common to both.\textsuperscript{12} The reason for the paradox does not lie in the necessity of a human contribution to the consummation of the kingdom but only in the eternal decree of God. When Christ says, "The kingdom of God has come upon you," he refers to the divine activity which operates in spite of human contribution or opposition.\textsuperscript{13} So also Christ's statement to Pilate, "My kingdom is not of this world," should not be taken as a denial of the present reality of that kingdom. The meaning is rather, "My kingdom is not a mere earthly kingdom. It is not the sort of kingdom of which you, Pilate, are a part. My rule is not from the outside in upon men's lives but from the inside, from the hearts of men out into their lives." When one places this statement alongside such claims as "The Kingdom of God is in the midst of you," he can more clearly perceive the present reality of that kingdom.

The arena of Christ's Lordship then is the Kingdom of God. In reality this includes all authority in the whole universe but at present it is a hidden rule in the hearts of believers.

Before we leave our consideration of the biblical meaning of the Lordship of Christ, we must fix our attention on one other aspect of Lordship which bears an especially vital relationship to eschatology. I refer to the nature of Christ's rule. The somewhat overworked expression of our day, "personal Lord and Savior" carries a great and profound truth. The early Church's confession of Christ as Lord never referred to a potential power standing over them as destiny or fate.\textsuperscript{14} It was always conceived as a real and personal Lordship, known and experienced. The fulfillment of the law by Christ means one thing: nothing stands between God and his people. The basis of the Kingdom of God lies now in a personal relationship, a relationship of love. Yes, the Kingdom of God is the expression of his sovereignty in human affairs but that sovereignty is truly remarkable in character. As Brunner says, "He communicates Himself to us, as though He had need of us; He runs after us as though He could not do without us," like the king who wrapped himself in the clothing of a beggar and implored the beggars to befriend him. Not only does God wish to be personal himself but he also desires to make us truly personal like himself.\textsuperscript{15} All of which points toward a great truth of God's Word which I would like to denominate "the desire for relationship." Geerhardus Vos defines the essence of the Kingdom as the supremacy of God in the sphere of saving power, the sphere of righteousness, and the state of blessedness.\textsuperscript{16} The importance of God's "desire for relationship" is immediately

\textsuperscript{12}Vos, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 45.
\textsuperscript{14}Karl Barth, \textit{Dogmatics in Outline} (London: SCM Press, 1949) p. 90.
\textsuperscript{16}Vos, \textit{op. cit.}, pp. 48-76.
seen in these three categories. For, apart from a personal relationship with God through Christ, these benefits of the Kingdom are meaningless and can have no existence.

Christ is the ultimate expression of God's "desire for relationship." This fact is reflected in the Greek word *krino* as applied to Christ. The basic meaning of the term is not that of negative judgment or condemnation. Rather it means "to separate" or "choose," that is, to give a decision positive or negative. Hence Christ is the judgment of all mankind. As Karl Barth says, "Christ is the sovereign decision made upon the existence of every man."17 In him all men are separated into those who are "in Christ" and those who are "outside" of Christ. Relationship to Christ is the one determining category of human existence. The formula *en Christo* expresses a Christocentric theology of history. In Christ we enter into a new historical situation.18 The Christian hope is based on the fact that the God-man Jesus has triumphed over sin, death and the powers of evil, representa­tively.19 Those who are "in" him share in this victory. The very basis of Christ's Lordship lies in that he "stands for all."20 For this reason the Church must at all times and in all things be in living contact with Christ. "The church exists only in permanent dialogue with its Lord." It must listen to him, answer him, be renewed by him and be judged by him.21 So also the condemnation of the world is seen precisely in that it does not sustain this living relationship to the Lord of the universe. The nature of the Lordly rule of Christ is relationship. For every man a relationship is inevitable, for either we embrace him as our King or we face him as our Judge.

Having established something of a biblical notion of the meaning of Christ's Lordship, we shift our focal point to the specific eschatological implications of that Lordship. The fact that much of what we have already discussed has bordered on the area of eschatology reveals the truth of Brunner's statement, "Eschatology is not merely an appendix to Christian doctrine. Rather faith makes no affirmations but such as ever imply the Christian hope for the future."22 As opposed to all other attempts to give meaning to human life, the Christian hope alone gives this meaning not only for the individual life but also for the history of humanity as a whole. It is a most personal meaning and at the same time the most universal meaning.23 This broad application of Christian eschatology has not always been treated adequately. Men seemed to be in doubt about the answers to such questions as, Does the Christian faith have any cosmological refer-

17Barth, *op. cit.*, p. 88.
18Visser't Hooft, *op. cit.*, p. 93.
20Barth, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.
21Visser't Hooft, *op. cit.*, p. 100.
23Ibid, pp. 84-85.
ence? and, Just because Christ is the ultimate personal revelation of God, does this imply anything for world history? But we must clearly proclaim the truth that in Christ, the Creator-Savior of the universe, we find revealed the God who is not only the whence of our being but also its whither. And if this is true for us as individuals then it is also true for the world as a whole. In Christ I see my history to be world history and world history my history.  

In him we also learn the cosmic significance of human history. We see that the universe is nothing more than the vast stage of human history. The very fact that this cosmic God has broken into human history implies clearly the uniqueness and the value of human history. In this light we see the all-encompassing nature of Christian eschatology.

Turning from this broad consideration, we want to deal first with the dialectic implied in the very fact of Christ’s Lordship. This dialectic, paradox, or tension, whatever one wishes to call it, is not a philosophic category superimposed upon the New Testament. Rather it is a part of the very atmosphere of New Testament thought. More than this, I hope to show that it is the necessary foundation of the New Testament revelation.

In that powerful chapter on the resurrection, I Corinthians 15, Paul presents clearly the dialectic implied in Christ’s Lordship. In verse twenty-five he says, “For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet,” and in verse twenty-eight, “When all things are subjected to him, then the Son himself will also be subjected to him who put all things under him . . . .” We see that the fact of Christ’s Lordship during this period means that we live in tension between the “already” and the “not yet.” God has made Christ to be Lord, the victory necessary to his Lordship has been accomplished, yet he remains Lord only until all things are subjected to him, that is, only until he becomes Lord indeed. Therefore, as long as Christ remains Lord he will not truly be the Lord, and as soon as he becomes the Lord in reality he will give up his Lordship to God the Father. In the words of our creed we proclaim to the world that Christ has “ascended into heaven” and now sits “on the right hand of God the Father, Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.” Thus we announce to all, that the ascension and exaltation of Christ has initiated or rather corroborated his Lordship. Yet, just because it is established through ascension, removal to another realm, Christ’s Lordship must now be ascertained by faith.

The whole New Testament reflects various aspects of this one great dialectic. In the parables of the wheat and tares and the draw net, Christ clearly teaches that in the area of his rule, the Kingdom, there is a present reality and a future consummation—“already” but “not yet.” The para-

26 Vos, op. cit., p. 35.
bles and miracles of Jesus, indeed all of God’s Word, are at the same time revelation and concealment—“already” but “not yet.” I am at the same time righteous and a sinner—“already” but “not yet.” I have died with Christ and risen with him to newness of life, I have been judged and found “in” him and yet my resurrection and final judgment lie in the future—“already” but “not yet.” Colossians 2:15 speaks of the conquering by Christ of the powers of evil, as does Matthew 12:29. We often explain these passages by picturing Satan as conquered but chained and retaining some freedom but we ought never to think that we have thereby resolved the dialectical tension here implied. The question still comes back, if Christ has truly conquered Satan, if his cross is really the standard of victory, then why is the power of evil still so rampant in the world?—“already” but “not yet.” I believe that the dialectic with which we are dealing is a part of or coterminous with the great dialectical tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility. The Kingdom of God, as the expression of divine sovereignty in human affairs, has already come in Christ and yet awaits the consummation of the age to come. In like manner this age involves a tension in our lives between God’s sovereignty expressed in Christ and our personal responsibility expressed in faith.

How can this dialectical tension be resolved? I believe that this question is ultimately unanswerable. I feel that this basic tension cannot be satisfactorily resolved. Furthermore, I propose that we cannot do without this tension. It is the gracious gift of God, given to keep our lives in fruitful tension between meekness and boldness, between praise and productivity, between humility and initiative. All of these virtues can become vices if the proper balance is not maintained. We must rest assured in the knowledge of the “already” but work with faith towards the “not yet.”

More than this, I believe, as before stated, that this dialectic is essential to the New Testament revelation. In it we see the profound truth of the divine “desire for relationship.” Calvin speaks of the ascension of Christ as the beginning of his reign and the opening of the way into the Kingdom of God, for Christ continually appears before God as our advocate and intercessor. Here we see the reign of Christ as the expression of the divine desire for relationship. Christ ascends, leaves us, to allow room for such relationship and to insure that relationship by intercession. His ascension is in reality nothing more than the continuation and crystallization of the “Incognito” of his earthly life. This Incognito cannot be explained solely in terms of the awful, unapproachable majesty of God. To say that Christ was veiled so that men would be able to behold his face does not explain the fact that many men saw in him no divinity at all. No, the veiling of Christ is a part of God’s plan of redemption motivated by the desire for relationship. Why did he not call upon the legions of angels in Gethsemane? Why does not God overwhelm men with his majesty and

power? Simply because that would defeat the whole purpose of the revelation of his Son. God desires to be our personal God and we his personal people. To overwhelm us with his power would obliterate our personalities and obviate the relationship which he desires. The divine desire for relationship is seen in the very idea of faith. Faith is never that which stands between persons. It is that which binds persons together. An overpowering demonstration of divine majesty would not allow for any possibility of response through faith and that very demonstration would constitute a barrier to relationship. As Barth declares, Christian faith must be regarded as absolutely man's decision, which is made in view of a divine decision.28 Just because faith is that, God must withdraw his majesty so that the decision is possible. Then too the idea of faith necessitates the dialectic between the "already" and the "not yet" because its very nature implies an imperfect present and a future hope. For when that toward which faith points is realized then faith too must be done away. We conclude then that, if the essence of Christ's rule in men's hearts is found in relationship, a two-way personal encounter, the dialectic of the present age is the necessary concomitant of continuing redemptive history. If Christ's Lordship had been manifested in all its glory, the possibility of Lordship through relationship would have disappeared, the human component would have been inundated.

Our last major consideration is the telos of Christ's Lordship or what is sometimes called eschatology proper. This latter term is really a misnomer unless one defines the word "eschatology" solely in terms of time. If it is thought of, more properly I believe, as the ultimate issues of history, then the tension of which we have been speaking necessitates two terms such as "realized eschatology" and "consummate eschatology." We have taken the title of this section, "the telos of Christ's Lordship," from Paul's statement in I Corinthians 15:28, where he indicates the end and purpose of the Lordship of Christ. The telos of the Lordship of Christ is here seen to be also the telos of history and of the whole universe. Christ, as the revelation of the meaning of history, releases us from the antimony of philosophical thought which is either cosmocentric or egocentric.29 The Creator-Savior of the world relinquishes his Lordship to God when all things have been restored to their original place under the sovereignty of God. In the person of the Creator-Savior we see the original intent of creation and its ultimate goal. His creation must necessarily be in accord with his person and the revelation of himself in his saving act indicated that the goal of history is righteousness and fellowship with God. These two intents of creation, which in reality are one and the same, are also the basis and purpose of the consummate activity in resurrection and judgment.

28 Barth, op. cit., p. 89.
29 Brunner, Eternal Hope, p. 198.
As was mentioned above, the final resurrection and judgment are nothing more than the revelation of the separation which has in principle already been decided in Christ. In 1 Corinthians 15:12ff, Paul reveals the centrality of Christ’s resurrection to the whole of Christian faith. In Christ’s resurrection we see a fitting symbol and an overt manifestation of the truth that the redemption wrought in him includes the whole natural order.\(^{30}\) Death is the visible aspect of sin. A redemption which does not remove death is by that fact an illusion. For this reason the full realization of our redemption from death must be coterminous with the end of history, since death is an integral part of human history.\(^{31}\) In this light it can also be seen that the Christian’s hope in resurrection is not a hope in life after death but in a life from which death has been removed.\(^{32}\) “If a man is in Christ he is a new creature” but this new life is not outwardly visible. It is concealed under the husks of the old deathly existence—the being unto death. However, life for that man is no longer a journey unto death, but unto eternal life and death is only a transitional stage in the journey.\(^{33}\) Thus it is that in Christ’s resurrection the meaning of my own death is made known to me.\(^{34}\) Being “in Christ” I can look forward to my own resurrection and my own going to be with the Father.

Turning to a consideration of the final judgment, we refer again to the basic meaning of \textit{krino} or \textit{krisis}. It does not mean only condemnation but rather separation. Christ clearly shows this in that great dissertation in Matthew 25:31ff. Since this separation involves salvation on the right hand and condemnation on the left, it is inevitable that the Savior of the would should also be its Judge. Again we would do well to note, that, although Christ speaks of a final judgment of a forensic nature, the true judgment of God on the world was accomplished in the incarnation, as John so vividly shows (e.g. 3:19; 9:39; 12:31). This was the \textit{krisis} of human history. The final judgment is nothing more than the open revelation of every man’s true relation to Christ and the eternal implications of that relationship. The meaning of judgment for those “outside” of Christ is that the \textit{krisis} on their lives was a choice of separation from God. Eternity for such will confirm their chosen separation in hell. But for those who are “in Christ” it is a source of particular consolation to know that Christ will preside at the judgment.\(^{35}\) This is like having my defense counsel also as my judge, he who pleads for me is the same as he who is to pass sentence. And since this counsel and judge is a personal friend of whose love I am certain, my hope in Christ can be a joyous expectation.

\(^{30}\)Richardson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 194.
\(^{32}\)\textit{Ibid}, p. 570.
\(^{33}\)Brunner, \textit{Eternal Hope}, p. 111.
\(^{34}\)\textit{Ibid}, p. 104.
Before closing this paper, I would like to make a few concluding observations. The whole purpose of the Lordship of Christ is the glory of God. That means that the Church of Christ is not a means to an end but is an end in itself.30 We who recognize the Lordship of Christ must also recognize and implement its purpose: the glory of our heavenly Father. This is connected with another implication of Christ’s Lordship and that is our oneness. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

One Lord, one King means one Kingdom, one people. We must be willing to face this inescapable conclusion and to show forth the glory of God in our struggle toward that goal. The message of the church in our day must again center around the victory of Christ—the victory which made him our King and we his people. We must be ready to embody the implications of that victory for our individual lives and for the universe in the age to come, when the “kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever . . . King of kings and Lord of lords.”