A NEGLLECTED FACTOR IN THE INTERPRETATION
OF JOHANNINE ESCHATOLOGY

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I am grateful to be allowed, in honour of a scholar whose work I have admired and whose friendship I have enjoyed for many years, to offer this note in which I take up some observations I made some years ago,¹ and develop them a little further in one direction.

For many years I have been of the opinion that a difference often alleged to exist between the eschatology of the Fourth Gospel and that of the Lucan writings is, to a considerable extent, imaginary. It is usual—so usual that there is no need here to quote examples—to regard Luke as the one who, more than any other New Testament writer, developed a temporally-conditioned 'literalistic' eschatology; whereas John, it is held, is the profound theologian who sets out the themes of Christian belief not in a linear succession of temporally-related points, but as a theologically integrated single whole; and it is by the Johannine eschatology, in particular, that this tendency is exemplified. The Fourth Gospel contains such striking formulations of 'realised' eschatology that it is often alleged that, in the coming of the Paraclete, John saw the coming of Jesus consummated. The two are one. A crude, futurist, piecemeal eschatology—so the theory runs—is here transcended and obviated by this unified Johannine doctrine. Luke, by contrast, is regarded as dividing up the story, narrator that he is, into successive epochs—the Old Testament era, the period of the ministry of Jesus, the period of the resurrection appearances, and the era of the Church, from the ascension to the return of Jesus.

¹ 'The Individualism of the Fourth Gospel', Nov. Test., V. 2/3 (1962), 171 ff. The main theme of this paper was earlier formulated in a lecture delivered in Utrecht, Amsterdam, and Groningen.
Such an account of the respective tendencies of the two Evangelists encounters, it is true, certain obstacles. On the Johannine side, these obstacles consist of those phrases which still contain the future tense of Jewish apocalyptic eschatology. The most conspicuous example is v 28b, 29: 'the time is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come out—those who have done good for the resurrection to life, those who have done evil for the resurrection to condemnation'. But such obstructive passages are few, and are generally treated either as vestigial relics clinging on from a tradition which the Evangelist himself has outgrown, or as alien interpolations, or, at most, concessions to popular ideas. Conversely, on the Lucan side, there are, of course, certain marks of a realized eschatology. In the ministry of Jesus (though this, indeed, is something essential to any Gospel) the kingdom of God has already overtaken them (Luke xi 20, parallel to Matt. xii 28) 1; and in the Acts, the Joel apocalypse is hailed as already realized in Pentecost (Acts ii 16). But, again, these are outweighed by the 'standard' Lucan scheme, and are generally, for the purposes of this sort of argument, ignored.

My contention, by contrast, is that—quite apart from the fact that it would be false to the inherent tension of an incarnational faith ever to reach a one-sided resolution in either direction—there is a vital consideration that needs to be watched, namely, the difference between individualistic and collective eschatologies. It is always possible to attach terms of realized eschatology to a single individual, in so far as a single individual can, with some degree of realism, be considered as fully committed to God: '... whoever hears my message and believes the one who sent me has eternal life, and is not coming to judgment, but has made the transition from death to life' (John v 24). The well-known rabbinic phrase for this is 'taking upon oneself the yoke of the kingdom'. 2 But when the individual is viewed in the context of the society to which he belongs—a corpus permixtum of persons at various stages and in varying degrees of commitment—the degree of resistance to the reign of God is indefinitely multiplied, and one

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1 I do not include Luke xvii 21, τὰ βαπτιστήρια τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν τῷ στοίχεῳ ζωῆς ἐστιν, because it is often interpreted in a futurist sense (though whether rightly or not is another matter).

2 References in H. L. Strack und P. Billerbeck, Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrash (München 1922), i. 608 ff.