

EDITORIAL

The Scandal of the Apocalyptic Jesus

Historically Adventists and our evangelical counterparts, dispensational premillennialists, have not been well known for our positive approach to social and political questions. Whether the failure be right-wing politicking or apolitical quietism, the charge usually sticks. Indeed simplistic approaches to premillennial eschatology often lead to irresponsible political attitudes. It is little wonder that Jesus' apocalyptic message is such a scandal for modern theology! Nevertheless, as Richard Hiers demonstrates in such lucid detail, we cannot just wish away the prophetic challenge of the historical Jesus. He remains in the pages of canonical Scripture calling us to repentance and responsible living in the shadow of the coming Kingdom of the Son of Man. The problem of the delayed parousia notwithstanding, we have a theological responsibility to pick up where Hiers leaves off and to explicate our position in the twilight of the End of the Age. True, the Jesus who did not know the day or the hour seems to have believed that the eschaton would arrive shortly after his own departure, and his earliest followers similarly expected his return within their own lifetimes. As we reflect on their experience, how can we appropriate their anticipation? That is one of the challenges we face as twentieth-century Adventists and Radical Reformers.

Once we have captured that eschatological tension and made it our own, we can begin to explore what it means to be socially responsible apocalypticists. Is there such a thing? If in the Christ-event the motif of Jewish apocalyptic was transformed into something far greater, then perhaps there is. In that case, we can follow Ray Mattera in integrating "the Adventist emphasis on the eschaton." As he put it so well last year:

The eschatological coming of the kingdom of God is a pervasive theme in the Synoptic Gospels. The eschaton is the victory of God's kingdom over the structures of evil. Jesus' resurrection is its surety. Rather than encouraging quietism, the eschaton, when seen in light of Christ's ministry and resurrection, is the impetus for kingdom work Thus the kingdom community embodies the life Christ lived — proclaiming the kingdom, living its ethic, ministering to the helpless, and opposing dehumanizing,

authority-centered, violence-oriented structures — with faith in God’s will to incarnate the kingdom in the present and with full confidence in the future triumph of the kingdom.¹

— *Mark M. Mattison*

¹ “Kingdom Theology in the Synoptic Gospels: Towards a Socio-Political Ethic,” *A Journal from the Radical Reformation*, Spring 1995, Vol. 4, No. 3, 31, 40, 41.