

## EDITORIAL

# Theology's Unfinished Business

Professor Hiers' penetrating critique of what has been going on in the halls of academic theology deserves the widest audience. Our readers will not miss the extraordinarily interesting point he makes. Scholarly analysis of the Bible has demonstrated a remarkable ingenuity in its studied attempt to rid itself of the embarrassing fact that Jesus, as Messiah schooled in the Hebrew Bible, believed in a future apocalyptic Kingdom as a coming eschatological event.

Since the Kingdom of God is the principal and underlying concept in Jesus' and the apostles' presentation of the Christian Gospel, it is obvious that anything less than a candid treatment of our New Testament records in the matter of the Kingdom will inevitably veil and obscure the Christian message. But this is what scholarly treatment of the Kingdom of God has in fact achieved.

The eschatological Kingdom associated with the Parousia is in conflict with the dogmatic concerns of academic theology. A variety of techniques have conspired to neutralize the uncomfortable fact that Jesus believed that he would return to inaugurate the Kingdom as an apocalyptic intrusion on present world systems. Yet this promised event has not occurred. Was Jesus, therefore, mistaken?

The tension caused by the non-fulfillment of much of what Jesus anticipated drives scholars to ignore or bypass Jesus' consistent emphasis on his future apocalyptic arrival. In its place theology has substituted a much more innocuous "kingdom in the heart," the present life of fellowship with God.

When this escape route appears less than convincing, in view of the New Testament records, appeal is made to the dogma that the church must have read its own crude apocalyptic hopes back into the words of Jesus and thus misrepresented him. The failure is that of Jesus' closest disciples. If this evasion proves unacceptable, it is argued that Jesus spoke the language of apocalyptic while really meaning something else. That something else is the essence of Christianity, and we can agree to drop the useless apocalyptic husk.

The most recent attempt to avoid the future Kingdom of God in Jesus' teaching is to admit a present and future reference to the Kingdom. When this theory is proposed, however, it is the Kingdom of God as a "present reality" (but exactly what?) which overshadows the future Kingdom, which may be dismissed as "transcendent." "One can only wonder," says one academic, apparently sympathetic to Professor Hiers' thesis, "if this procedure could ever

have obtained the consent and advocacy of candid men in any other realm than that of theology.”

Remarkably, even modern Dispensationalist fundamentalists, who have faced up to the apocalyptic Kingdom of Jesus, diverted attention away from its relevance for Christians by limiting its application to a future group of Jews in Palestine.

By one means or another Jesus’ Gospel of the Kingdom appears to suffer the fate of the message sown in inadequate soil. A revival of intelligent faith in the Bible will occur when the Kingdom Gospel, with all of its apocalyptic implications, is faced with candor and courage.

Our journal makes this additional point. The ethics of Jesus will fit into place as the indispensable guide for Christian character during the extended interim until the great event, and as preparation for fitness to enter the Kingdom when it comes. Ethics, however, grow out of a fundamental faith-conviction about the coming Kingdom. Ethics without this undergirding belief in the apocalyptic Jesus cannot be said to be rooted in Christ. Such is the narrowness of the Gospel (Matt. 7:13, 14).

*Anthony Buzzard*