

On the "in principle/in fact" distinction, see especially the following:

"In . . . conceiving history after Christ as an interim between the disclosure of its true meaning and the fulfillment of that meaning, between the revelation of divine sovereignty and the full establishment of that sovereignty, a continued element of inner contradiction in history is accepted as its perennial characteristic. Sin is overcome in principle but not in fact. Love must continue to be suffering love rather than triumphant love. This distinction becomes a basic category of interpreting history in all profound versions of the Christian faith, and has only recently been eliminated in modern sentimentalized versions of that faith.

"One seemingly serious, but actually superficial, change in Jesus' own interpretation must be made. He expected the historic interim between the first and second establishment of the Kingdom to be short. In this error he was followed both by St. Paul and [by] the early church, with the consequent false and disappointed hope of the *parousia* in the lifetime of the early disciples. The error was due to an almost inevitable illusion of thought which deals with the problem of the relation of time and eternity. The *eschata* which represent the fulfillment and the end of time in eternity are conceived literally and thereby made a point in time. The sense that the final fulfillment impinges on the present moment, the feeling of urgency in regard to anticipating this fulfillment, expresses itself in chronological terms and thereby becomes transmuted into a 'proximate futurism,' into the feeling that the fulfillment of history is chronologically imminent.

"In reinterpreting the New Testament idea of the *parousia* (and . . . all other ideas dealing with the relation of history and super-history, such as resurrection and judgment) it is important to take Biblical symbols seriously but not literally. If they are taken literally the Biblical conception of a dialectical relation between history and superhistory is imperiled; for in that case the fulfillment of history becomes merely another kind of time-history. If the symbols are not taken seriously the Biblical dialectic is destroyed, because in that case concepts of an eternity are connoted in which history is destroyed and not fulfilled.

"This single adjustment in the New Testament view is defined as superficial rather than serious to distinguish the idea of 'interim' as here used from that of Albert Schweitzer. According to his conception the whole ethic and religion of

Jesus is based upon his illusion of his proximate return. The absolute character of this ethic is due, in the opinion of Schweitzer, to the belief that the 'time is short.' The real fact is that the absolute character of the ethic of Jesus conforms to the actual constitution of man and history, that is, to the transcendent freedom of man over the contingencies of nature and the necessities of time, so that only a final harmony of life with life in love can be the ultimate norm of his existence. Yet man's actual history is subject to contingency and necessity and is corrupted by his sinful efforts to escape and to deny his dependence and his involvement in finiteness. The idea that the time is short expresses Christianity's understanding that these limitations and corruptions of history are not finally normative for man.

"Thus reconstructed, the idea that history is an 'interim' between the first and the second coming of Christ has a meaning which illumines all the facts of human existence. History, after Christ's first coming, has the quality of partly knowing its true meaning. In so far as man can never be completely in contradiction to his own true nature, history also reveals significant realizations of that meaning. Nevertheless history continues to stand in real contradiction to its true meaning, so that pure love in history must always be suffering love. But the contradictions of history cannot become man's norms, if history is viewed from the perspective of Christ. For the Christian, the anticipation of a final judgment and fulfillment means an emancipation from the proximations of good and the concretions of evil which represent the 'standards' of history. Thus the absolute ethical and religious demands of the gospel are not irrelevant, though the expectation of Christ's imminent return has only occasionally been a living hope within the church since the second century. Even the idea of a proximate second coming is not irrelevant when understood symbolically; for it expresses the idea that every moment of time makes not only for the fulfillment of life, but hastens man towards the dissolution of death. This fact of death threatens life with meaninglessness unless man is 'saved by hope' and understands life in such a way that neither his involvement in history nor his transcendence over it destroys the meaning of life. To understand life and history according to the meaning given it by Christ is to be able to survey the chaos of any present or the peril of any future, without sinking into despair. It is to have a vantage point from which one may

realize that momentary securities are perennially destroyed both by the vicissitudes of history and by the fact of death which stands over all history.

"This faith is perfectly expressed in the Pauline confession: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? [etc., Rom 8:35, 37 f.]'" (*NDM*, 2: 49-52).

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