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Ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ. In Johannine and Synoptic Tradition*

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1. Introductory: Recent Studies on the Kingdom of God

The past decade and a half since the appearance of the symposium volume, *John and the Synoptics*,¹ have seen very few studies on the Kingdom of God (= KG), particularly in connection with John and the synoptics. In that volume the only pertinent studies were those by M. de Jonge² and myself³, while in 2001 the only study in *Jesus in Johannine Tradition*⁴ was again one by the present author.⁵ A search in bibliographical tools produced very meagre results⁶, and this was confirmed by the extensive bibliographies in J. Frey's great work on Johannine eschatology.⁷ Thus, although commentaries on John continue to appear⁸, there has been a noticeable dearth in KG discussions. Frey's study is mainly concerned with the *Eschaton*, not with the KG as such. Particularly his second volume, which refers to such linguistic studies as Rydbeck⁹ and Mandilaras¹⁰, devotes much attention to grammar, especially to recent aspectual studies (utilizing the problematic work of Porter¹¹, Fanning¹², and McKay¹³).¹⁴ What is determinative for Frey's view of eschatology is the Johannine

* I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to Professor Christos Karakolis, who invited me to contribute to this volume in honor of a very worthy scholar, who has been my friend ever since our first meeting at the Uppsala SNTS-Meeting in 1974.

¹ Ed. A. Denaux (BETL CI), Leuven: Peeters, 1992.

² "The Radical Eschatology of the Fourth Gospel and the Eschatology of the Synoptics", pp. 481-87.

³ "The Kingdom of God in John and the Synoptics: Realized or Potential Eschatology?", pp. 473-80.

⁴ Ed. R. Fortna and T. Thatcher, Louisville-London-Leiden: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

⁵ "The Kingdom of God: Common and Distinct Elements Between John and the Synoptics", pp. 125-34. The above study was inadvertently mutilated and the text was changed so that the printed text does not represent my thesis correctly. The present study, wholly rewritten and updated, is a replacement.

⁶ E.g. S. Voorwinde, "The Kingdom of God in the Gospels—Complementary Perspectives" *VoxRef* 64 (1999), 21-62. M.A. Beavis, "The Kingdom of God, 'Utopia' and Theocracy", *JournStudHistJesus* 2 (2004), 91-106 is not germane to the present issue. Mention should be made of J.D.G. Dunn's *magnum opus*, *Jesus Remembered*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003, which devotes one long chapter (383-487) to the KG in the Synoptics.

⁷ J. Frey, *Die Johanneische Eschatologie*, 3 Vols. (WUNT 96, 110, 117), Tübingen: Mohr 1997-2000.

⁸ E.g. T. Brodie, *The Gospel According to John: A Literary and Theological Commentary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997; M.W.G. Stibbe, *John. A Readings Commentary*, Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993; A.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4), Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998; U. Schnelle, *Das Evangelium nach Johannes* (THNT 4), Leipzig: Evangelischer Verlagsanstalt, 1999; K. Wengst, *Das Johannesevangelium* (TKNT 4), Stuttgart, etc.: Kohlhammer, 2 Vols. 2000-2001 (Vol. I, 2nd ed. 2004); C.S. Keener, *The Gospel of John. A Commentary*, 2 Vols., Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2003; J. Painter, a new revision of C.K. Barrett's commentary on John ??

⁹ L. Rydbeck, *Fachprosa, vermeintliche Volkssprache und Neues Testament*, (AUU:SGU 5), Uppsala: Almqvist & Wiksell 1967

¹⁰ B.G. Mandilaras, *The Verb in the Greek Non-Literary Papyri*, Athens, 1973

¹¹ S.E. Porter, *Verbal Aspect in the Greek of the New Testament with Reference to Tense and Mood*, New York: Peter Lang, 1989

¹² B.M. Fanning, *Verbal Aspect in New Testament Greek*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990.

¹³ K. L. McKay, "The Perfect and Other Aspects in New Testament Greek" *NovT* 23 (1981) 289-329 and *A New Syntax of the Verb in New Testament Greek. An Aspectual Approach*, New York: Peter Lang, 1994.

¹⁴ For a severe criticism of such work on aspect, see Caragounis, *The Development of Greek and the New Testament. Morphology, Syntax, Phonology, and Textual Transmission* (WUNT 167), Tübingen: Mohr, 2004, esp. pp. 316-36.

saying ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν (Jn 4:23; 5:25). This is understood as proving “Realized Eschatology” (e.g. Frey, Vol. II, 2-22, 144-46).

It appears, therefore, that while the theme of the KG has not received any substantial developments lately, yet in as much as God’s Reign is an integral part of the *Eschaton* in John’s presentation, Frey’s magisterial *opus* is assuredly relevant even if indirectly.

2. Common Elements Between John and the Synoptics

To what extent John shares with the Synoptics the Jesus tradition while at the same time offering a variation of it can be readily exemplified by the theme of the KG:

1. Among the clearest examples of common tradition are John’s sayings of “seeing” or “entering” the KG (3:3, 5). This has an obvious synoptic parallel in such texts as Mt 5:20; 7:21 // Mk 10:23-25 // Lk 18:24-25; Mt 18:3 // Mk 10:15, all of which speak of “entering” the KG. As for Jn 3:3: “seeing” the KG, it probably finds an adumbration in Mk 9:1 // Lk 9:27; 13:28: “seeing Abraham in the KG”.

2. More frequently than any of the synoptic gospels, John presents Jesus as King (1:49; 6:15; 12:13, 15; 18:33, 37 (2 x), 39; 19:3, 14, 15a, 19, 21 (2 x) as against Mt (8 x), Mk (6 x), and Lk (4 x).

3. In spite of differences in conception and presentation, John’s presentation of Jesus as Son of Man (= SM) has a number of similarities with the synoptic SM. For example, the attendance upon the SM by his servants and his royal authority to execute judgement (5:19-27) as well his vindication and exaltation by God (12:23-26; 13:31-32) have their nearest synoptic parallels especially in Mt 25:31-46.

4. However, the common traditions between John and the Synoptics about the KG take us further. The rare synoptic expression “eternal life” (Mt 19:16, 29 // Mk 10:17, 30 // Lk 18:18, 30; Mt 25:46; Lk 10:25) has in John taken the place of the concept of the KG. For example, the composite term “eternal life” meets us in the Fourth Gospel seventeen times, while the simplex “life” is found nineteen times—though not always referring to eternal life¹⁵.

5. The Johannine idea of the *Eschaton*, which is impossible to disassociate from the concept of the KG, easily recalls the connection that exists between the End-Time and the KG in the Synoptics (e.g. Mt 24-25 // Mk 13 // Lk 21:7-36).

The above contact-points between John and the Synoptics demonstrate in a general way that the Synoptics and John build on common traditions. From this point on the matter of paramount importance is to explore the variation, the curve, the angle of handling of these themes by the Fourth Evangelist, and how this handling corresponds to that Gospel’s ideology in general. This will be the concern of the following discussion.

3. John’s Kingdom of God Logia

John’s only two KG logia are found in Jesus’ conversation with Nikodemus. The verbs used in connection with the KG are those of “seeing” and “entering” it. We may then say that the great variation of the Synoptists’ presentation of the KG,¹⁶ fails in the Fourth Gospel. The connection between John and the Synoptics can be established only by means of those synoptic texts that speak of “seeing” and “entering” the KG.

“*Seeing*” the Kingdom of God. Here, for the sake of argument (and with most scholars), I am assuming the priority of Mark. Mk 9:1: εἰσὶν τινες ὧδε τῶν ἐστηκότων

¹⁵ For statistics, see Caragounis, “Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven”, p. 476

¹⁶ See e.g. the discussions in G. E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, esp. 101-300 as well as Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, esp. 71-337.

οἵτινες οὐ μὴ γεύσονται θανάτου ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐληλυθυῖαν ἐν δυνάμει (“there are some of those who are standing here who will not taste of death till they see that the KG has come in power” (my tr., as always in this article)) was perhaps too much for Luke, who altered it to ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ (“till they see the KG”) (Lk 9:27). The logion of Mark directs attention to the *Eschaton*, the ‘when’ of the KG. Although Luke omits the Markan ἐληλυθυῖαν ἐν δυνάμει, he, too, must have had in mind the coming of the KG. Consequently, in spite of the above omission, the problem of what precisely is signified is not solved. This may explain Matthew’s procedure in changing the logion to ἕως ἂν ἴδωσιν τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐρχόμενον ἐν τῇ βασιλείᾳ αὐτοῦ (“till they see the SM coming in his kingdom [or royal rule]”) (Mt 16:28).

Of the two versions of this logion in Mk and Lk, Luke’s form is closer to John’s. This is, however, so only superficially. The Synoptics and the Fourth Gospel use quite different contexts for the “seeing” of the KG. In the former it is a matter of the imminence of the KG, i.e. it is an eschatological issue. In John, on the other hand, the issue of eschatology does not arise. The “seeing” is not affected by any time factor, the ‘when’ of the KG—an issue that has caused so much debate during the past hundred years or so¹⁷—but by the basic presupposition for catching a glimpse of it, that is, what conditions are laid down for being able to see the KG at all. Accordingly, though both John and the synoptics speak of “seeing” the KG, they have hardly any common ideological ground for their respective logia. In John “seeing” is an empirical term. All those who are “born of God” “have beheld” (ἐθεασάμεθα) his glory (Jn 1:13-14); no one has ever “seen” (ἑώρακεν < ὁράω) God, God’s only Son has divulged (or explained, interpreted [ἐξηγήσατο]) him to men; unless a man be born again, he cannot “see” (ιδεῖν, aorist of ὁράω) the KG.

“*Entering*” the Kingdom of God. The second KG-saying in John, which speaks of “entering” the KG, has from the outset a broader basis in the synoptic tradition. The verb “to enter” with KG as its object, is met four times in Mark, five times in Matthew, and three times in Luke, comprising altogether seven different logia. Mt 5:20, which demands surpassing the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees in order to qualify for entrance into the KG, as well as 7:21, which makes the performance of God’s will the basis for entrance, are irrelevant here. The three instances of Mk 10:23-25 (// Mt 19:23-24 // Lk 18:24-25) dealing with the exclusion of mammon’s servants from the KG, have no connection with the Johannine logion. We are thus left with Mk 10:15 // Lk 18:17 // Mt 18:3.

The first of these sayings is spoken at the time certain parents brought their children to Jesus to receive his blessing, whom the disciples tried to turn away. This elicited Jesus’ words: ὃς ἂν μὴ δέξηται τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ Θεοῦ ὡς παιδίον, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθῃ εἰς αὐτήν. The parallel logion in Matthew (19:14) takes up the KG, but makes no reference to it being “entered”. The second passage (Mt 18:3) gives the text: ἐὰν μὴ στραφῆτε καὶ γένησθε ὡς τὰ παιδιά, οὐ μὴ εἰσέλθητε εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τῶν

¹⁷ See e.g. the identically entitled and simultaneously published surveys on the scholarly discussion by G. Lundström, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, Edingburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1963 and N. Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, London: SCM, 1963 (Lundström’s book had actually been published in 1947 in Swedish, but his was unknown to Perrin). See also Perrin’s new position in N. Perrin, *Jesus and the Language of the Kingdom*, Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976. Other studies include H. Ridderbos, *The Coming of the Kingdom*, Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1962; R. Schnackenburg, *God’s Rule and Kingdom*, New York: Herder and Herder, 1963; R.H. Hiers, *The Historical Jesus and the Kingdom of God*, Gainesville, FL: University of Florida Press, 1973, and W. Willis, *The Kingdom of God in 20th-Century Interpretation*, Peabody, MA: Hendrikson, 1987. Two contributions to our theme in Greek, are: Γ.Π. Πατρῶνος, *Σχέσις παρόντος καὶ μέλλοντος εἰς τὴν περὶ Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ διδασκαλίαν τῆς Ὁρθοδόξου θεολογίας*, Ἀθῆναι 1975 and *Ἡ Βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ ἐν τῇ συγχρόνῳ δυτικῇ θεολογίᾳ. Σύντομος ἱστορικὴ ἐπισκόπησις*, Ἀθῆναι 1977.

οὐρανῶν. The parallels to this text in Mk (9:37) and Lk (9:48) do not contain the thought of “entering” the KG.

Thus the above two logia, which connect the ideas of conversion and becoming like a child (Mt 18:3) and of receiving the KG as a child (Mk 10:15 // Lk 18:17), constitute the nearest conceptual parallels to John’s gospel, which makes “being born again” (ἄνωθεν, “from above”) the condition to entering the KG. The Synoptic logia were built on the model of a little child as naturally representing qualities necessary for entering the KG, e.g. openness, unquestioning acceptance, simple trust. In a more radical way, the Fourth Evangelist, using an oxymoron, demands of an old man not only returning to his simple childhood outlook or mentality of unquestioning faith, but more than that, that he should be born again. This demand is not simply a requirement to assume something, to put on something external, but a demand to start all over again, to come into a new existence, to become something new and different. John’s thought could not have been expressed more radically.

The association of the concept of regeneration with the KG reveals John’s concerns. Here we may note the frequent occurrences of the verb γεννάω in both the Gospel and the First Epistle of John. The theme of being born of God is already adumbrated in the Prologue (Jn 1:12-13). This divine birth seems to have its ultimate ground in the Johannine idea of the Logos becoming “flesh” (1:14). Precisely as the eternal Logos comes to live among men by being incarnated, that is, by participating in human nature, so, too, human beings can enter the KG by being born of the Water (i.e. the Word, cf. 13:5-10; 15:3) and Spirit of God (3:6: τὸ γεγεννημένον ἐκ τοῦ πνεύματος πνεῦμα ἐστίν), that is, by participating in the divine nature (the expression is found explicitly in 1 Pt 1:4, the idea, however, is implicit in Jn 1:13 and 1 Jn 3:9).

4. *The Grammatical Construction*

If the Gospel of John differs from the Synoptics both in its presentation of the KG and the ideology behind it, they have in common at least one important underlying agreement: the identical use of the ‘idiomatic’ aorist for the time perspective.

No doubt the most significant synoptic logion on the imminence of the KG is Mt 12:28 // Lk 11:20: εἰ δὲ ἐγὼ ἐν πνεύματι Θεοῦ (Lk: ἐν δακτύλῳ) ἐκβάλλω τὰ δαιμόνια, ἄρα ἔφθασεν ἐφ’ ὑμᾶς ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ Θεοῦ (“But if I drive out the demons through the Spirit (Lk: finger) of God, then the Kingdom of God is about to break in upon you”).

Dodd¹⁸ took the aorist indicative ἔφθασεν in its usual sense of denoting a past or completed action, and, consequently, rendered it by “has come / arrived”. This text was, then, made the pillar of his doctrine of “Realized Eschatology”. His interpretation has been accepted by many scholars. The Versions, too, unaware that this was an idiomatic figure representing a special usage, missed the real significance of the saying and translated it accordingly. To this day no scholar has detected the idiomatic character of the saying and all discussions to date have been based on a misunderstanding. The misunderstanding concerns both the meaning and function of the aorist indicative.

One of the special functions of the aorist (as also the perfect) is that it can be used of actions that have not yet occurred but lie in the future. In these cases the aorist takes the place of the future. However, this occurs only under certain conditions and in order to highlight certain aspects which are missed by the future. The aorist does not encroach on the ordinary usage of the future, i.e. when it expresses strictly future action.

¹⁸ C.H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom*, 1935, rp. Glasgow: Collins, 1961, pp. 91-94. See also Dodd, “The Kingdom of God has Come” *ExpT* 48 (1936/7) 91-94.

Whenever the aorist appears in contexts where the future indicative might have appeared, it is for the purpose of emphasizing either the *certainty* or the *imminence* of an action that will take place at a future point of time, or both. The aorist indicative highlights the certainty and imminence of an action in a way that the future indicative could never emphasize it. But as already pointed out, this aorist usage does not obviate the future nor is it in conflict with it. Whenever the aorist or perfect is used, there is always a special reason for it. This means that, although the time perspective from the speaker's viewpoint is future, the use of the aorist rather than the ordinary future gives the action a perspective that is far more vivid than would have been the case if the action had been expressed through the future tense. The aorist indicative emphasizes the high level certainty and imminence which would have been absent if the future indicative had been used.

This peculiar function of the aorist occurs throughout the history of Greek. It is witnessed from the time of Euripides and Aristophanes to Neohellenic (in which it occurs quite frequently). The evidence for this has been presented at length in my Tyndale lecture¹⁹ and especially in my *The Development of Greek*, etc.²⁰ Here I can only take up one or two examples. When Alkestis, who has offered to die for her husband, Admetos, is about to breathe her last, Admetos wails: ἀπωλόμην ἄρ', εἴ με δὴ λείψεις, γῦνοι (Euripides, *Alkestis*, 386) (“Oh my wife, I am (have been) lost—if you leave me”), meaning “*I shall be lost, if you leave me*”. The certainty about his miserable state consequent on his wife's death, leads Admetos to express the bitter truth as though it were a fact already. For this reason he deems the future indicative too weak and colorless to express the full depth of his intended meaning. This can only be expressed by this peculiar use of the aorist. Dan (Theodotion) 4:24-25 expresses the coming judgment of God on Nebuchadnezzar not through the future indicative—as would have been expected—but with the aorist indicative, as if it were already an accomplished event: σύγκριμα ὑψίστου ἐστίν, ὃ ἔφθασεν ἐπὶ τὸν κύριόν μου τὸν βασιλέα, καὶ σὲ ἐκδιώξουσιν ... (“it is the judgment of the Most High, which *has come* (ἔφθασεν, aorist) over my lord the king, and *they will drive you away* (ἐκδιώξουσιν, future).²¹ This special usage of the aorist has escaped the attention of scholars, and this has led to many misguided arguments and conclusions.

In the light of the above findings, we have to conclude that the force of the saying is not that “the KG has come upon you”. Its gist may be paraphrased: “But if I drive out the demons [i.e. prepare for the coming of the KG by defeating the forces of evil] by the Spirit / finger of God [rather than by Beelzebul, as you claim], then the KG is about to break in upon you [and overtake you in your obstinate, unrepentant state]”.²² This statement of Jesus implies an advance on his earlier statements on the KG which used the verb ἤγγικεν, but it does not imply the actual presence of the KG, as has often been concluded; it only underscores the element of imminence. It is, furthermore, important to note that this statement is not merely informative on whether the KG has or has not come; its function is one of warning, almost a threat (this is the force of the expression ἐφ' ὑμᾶς). The objective is to persuade his hearers to repent by confronting them with the consequences of unbelief. This, too, shows that the KG has not yet come on them,

¹⁹ Caragounis, “Kingdom of God, Son of Man, and Jesus' Self-Understanding”, *TynB* 40 (1989), 3-23 and 40.B (1989), 223-38.

²⁰ Caragounis, “Does the Aorist Indicative Support Realized Eschatology?” in *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, pp. 261-78.

²¹ For more detailed discussions, see Caragounis, *TynB*, 40 (1989), 12-32 and *The Development of Greek and the New Testament*, 264-78.

²² Quoted from Caragounis, “Kingdom of God / Kingdom of Heaven”, *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*, ed. J.B. Green, S. McKnight, I.H. Marshall, Downers Grove, Il., Leicester 1992, 423.

but that there is still time for repentance. This exegesis finds corroboration in the next section which climaxes in Jesus' warning of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

The urgency and imminence of the KG that the Synoptics expressed through the 'idiomatic' aorist ἔφθασεν, is analogously expressed in the Fourth Gospel by the aorist of various verbs. This specific viewpoint, which has been adopted in the gospels, has disappeared in Albert Schweitzer's "Konsekvente Eschatologie",²³ which became the standard position in German theology, as well as in C.H. Dodd's "Realized Eschatology", which became the most influential viewpoint in Anglo-Saxon theology. Both of these standpoints have failed to understand the dynamic of the Gospel expression. The former position is too flat, while the latter position is too simplistic.

The abundance of "middle-of-the-line" positions which the above interpretations have produced should be interpreted as a damaging criticism of the two standpoints. At the same time, it should be underlined that the current plethora of positions has led to a more subtle differentiation and a relatively more precise understanding of what the gospel sayings entail. Consequently, Kümmel's mediating standpoint,²⁴ Jeremias' awkward phrase "sich realisierende Eschatologie",²⁵ Florovsky²⁶ and Hunter's "Inaugurated Eschatology",²⁷ Fuller's "Proleptic Eschatology",²⁸ and finally G.E. Ladd's nebulous description as "Eschatology of Biblical Realism"²⁹ in so far as they have put an end to polarization, are welcome correctives; but in so far as they are still caught up by the maelstrom of *konsekvente* and realized eschatology, attempting to hold together in tension the present with the future, in spite of their attractiveness to the modern mind, must be considered failures. This implies that these interpretations, too, have failed to grasp the central element in the KG, which had eluded the extreme positions. That element is none other than that in the work and teaching of Jesus the KG is only potentially present. Thus, if we are to express it in terms of eschatology, we should rather speak of a "potentially present eschatology". This understanding of the nature of the KG is qualitatively quite different from the positions enumerated above, including Fuller's "proleptic eschatology". Common to the above positions is the idea that the KG is in some way already now present in the teaching and works of Jesus, though its consummation or full manifestation is still future.

The position(s) of partial presence encounters its first obstacle already at the level of definition. It is noteworthy and at the same time symptomatic of both *konsekvente Eschatologie* and "Realized eschatology" that they have shied away from the problem of definition. Is the KG nothing more than simply Jesus' powerful deeds, as Dodd seems to imply? And is the KG a place that can be entered into already while Jesus pursues his earthly ministry, as the defenders of the various mediating positions suppose? And, further, what is meant by the believer living in this world and at the same time being in the KG?

But these are not the only difficulties. How can we explain Jesus' latter public ministry up to the cross, if the KG had already arrived when Jesus inaugurated his public ministry through his preaching, teaching and mighty works? Moreover, the

²³ A. Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*, (ET of *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*) London: A. & C. Black, 1910

²⁴ W.G. Kümmel, *Promise and Fulfilment*, (ET of *Verheissung und Erfüllung*) (SBT 23), 2nd ed., Naperville: Allenson, 1961², *passim*.

²⁵ J. Jeremias, *Die Gleichnisse Jesu*, Zürich: Zwingli, 1947, ⁵1960 (ET: *The Parables of Jesus*, New York: Charles Scribner's, 1963).

²⁶ See C.H. Dodd, *The Interpretation of the Fourth Gospel*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Paperback ed. 1968, rp. 1980, p. 447, n.1.

²⁷ See A.M. Hunter, *The Work and Words of Jesus*, rev. ed. London: SCM 1950, 1973², rp. 1974, p. 94.

²⁸ See R.H. Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement of Jesus* (SBT 12), Naperville, IL: Allenson, 1954, pp. 20-34.

²⁹ For his definition of it, see G.E. Ladd, *Jesus and the Kingdom*, Preface xiii [= 1974]).

Gospels make it obvious that the KG is closely connected with the destiny of the SM.³⁰ Now if we were to suppose that the KG had already arrived during Jesus' ministry, what relation does it bear to Jesus' death? And how could the KG have arrived already in his ministry, when during the Last Supper it is described as something that will come in the future? (Lk 22:16-18).³¹ To explain this by positing a present partial fulfillment to be followed by a full consummation at the Eschaton, as Ladd does, is unsatisfactory.

The difficulties raised here are so serious that no interpretation of the KG as wholly future or wholly present or as partially present from Jesus' point of view commends itself as a viable solution.

5. *A Potentially Present Eschatology*

Over against the Thoroughgoing or *Futuristische Eschatologie* and the "Realized Eschatology" views as well as their intermediate ramifications, I shall now set forth the case for a *Potential Eschatology* or, more correctly, a *Potentially Present Eschatology*. The term *potential(ly)* is liable to be misunderstood. Since the word, properly speaking, denotes "something that exists in a state of potency or possibility for changing or developing into a state of actuality",³² the reader may suppose that the objective existence of the KG is hereby denied or questioned. Such a supposition would be mistaken and unwarranted. The term *potential(ly)*, as used here, does not qualify the term KG, but the term "present". Accordingly, what is potential is not the KG or its coming, but its presence in Jesus during the time of his activity on earth. In the same way, the briefer and neater term *Potential Eschatology* does not cast any doubts on the *Eschaton* as such, but is an abbreviation for a *potentially present eschatology*.

That the KG is only potentially present in Jesus during his earthly ministry according to John's Gospel, may be demonstrated by means of the "eternal life" logia, the references to Jesus' "hour", and the Johannine understanding of the *Eschaton* and of faith.

a. *The αἰώνιος ζωή sayings*

The Gospel of John contains four sayings that use the phrase "has eternal life": 3:36: "He who believes in the Son has eternal life"; 5:24: "He who hears my word and believes in him who sent me, has eternal life"; and 6:47: "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life". The present form of the verb "to have" with αἰώνιος ζωή as its object has led some scholars³³ to conclude that here we have to do with realized eschatology. This is taken to imply that the believer on earth has already accessed the sphere of eternal life, or commences his eternal life at the moment of faith. However, a more careful scrutiny of the relevant passages makes it sufficiently clear that the wording does not really emphasize the present "has" but the fact that faith is *the condition* for eternal life. Not one of these passages actually supports the idea of realized eschatology. Rather, they emphasize the means by which eternal life is obtained. Thus, eternal life is still future from the standpoint of these logia.³⁴

³⁰ See e.g. C.C. Caragounis, *The Son of Man. Vision and Interpretation* (WUNT 38), Tübingen: Mohr, 1986, pp. 145-243.

³¹ See also the parallel texts in Mk 14:25 // Mt 26:29.

³² *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, Springfield, MASS: Kōnemann, 1986, *sub voc.*

³³ E.g. de Jonge, "The Radical Eschatology of the Fourth Gospel and the Eschatology of the Synoptics" in *John and the Synoptic*, 481-87, pp. 482 ff. J. Frey, *Die Johanneische Eschatologie*, Vols. 1-2 *passim*.

³⁴ See my comments in Caragounis, "The Kingdom of God in John and the Synoptics: Realized or Potential Eschatology?" pp. 477-78.

As shown above, future action is expressed more vividly by those passages that employ the aorist or the perfect indicative: 12:23: “the hour has come (ἐλήλυθεν) for the SM to be glorified”; 13:31: “Now is the SM glorified (ἐδοξάσθη)”; 17:4: “I have glorified (ἐδόξασα) you on earth”. All these are cases of the well-attested but little-known special use of the aorist (and perfect), which transfers an action from the future—to which it strictly belongs—to the present, in order to emphasize its reality and force by highlighting the certainty and imminence of its occurrence.³⁵

b. Jesus’ Hour

About twelve texts speak in various ways of the hour (ἡ ὥρα) of Jesus: simply (12:27 (2 x)); as coming (4:21, 23; 5:25, 28; 16:32); as having come (12:23; 17:2); or as not having come yet (2:4; 7:30; 8:20); while 13:1 employs the aorist indicative ἦλθεν. Two of the above passages have the present ἔρχεται ὥρα and ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν (4:21; 5:25).

At 2:4 Jesus puts his mother in place by telling her “my time has not yet come” (ἤκει). This is a veiled reference to the revelation of his identity. At 7:30 we are told that in spite of their desire to arrest Jesus, the Jewish leaders did not lay their hands on him, because the time of his death had not yet arrived (οὐπω ἐληλύθει ἡ ὥρα αὐτοῦ). This thought occurs again at 8:20, while somewhat differently the hour at 12:27 (twice) makes reference to his coming death. From the speaker’s perspective, in all these texts the hour of Jesus is future.

There are four more texts that speak of a future time when God will be worshipped in new manner (4:21, 23) and Jesus’ resurrection will bring the dead back to life (5:25, 28). One of them—5:25: ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν—has been taken by Frey, as the key to John’s realized eschatology. He lays great emphasis on the present ἔρχεται, which he thinks is further strengthened by ἐστὶν as well as by the temporal adverb νῦν: “the time is coming and is now [here] when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear it will live”.³⁶

In Greek, several verbs such as ὑπάγω and ἔρχομαι, which necessarily express imperfective or ongoing (progressive) action, are particularly usable in denoting futurity or the future completion of an action. That present ἔρχεται in 4:21 refers to the future, becomes obvious from προσκυνήσετε (future indicative). In 5:25, which emphasizes the imminence of the hour, the thought expressed indefinitely as a future action by means of ἔρχεται, is made more definite by καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν. However, this definiteness does not imply realization.³⁷ The νῦν ἐστὶν only serves to emphasize the imminence inherent in ἔρχεται. That the thought is future becomes clear not least from the fact that the saying refers to a time following Jesus’ death—NB! “when the dead *will* hear (ἀκούσουσιν) the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear it *will* live (ζήσουσιν)”. It is obvious that these events have not yet transpired. We see, therefore, that, from the speaker’s standpoint, these actions are future. The futurity of the events described here is further confirmed by 4:23, which in identical fashion, speaks of a future time when men “*will* worship (προσκυνήσουσιν) the Father in Spirit and in truth”.³⁸

Lastly, the aorist ἦλθεν (13:1) and the perfect ἐλήλυθεν (12:23 and 17:1) exemplify the idiomatic use of these tenses to portray a future event in a vivid way as though it were already accomplished.

³⁵ See Caragounis, “The Kingdom of God in John and the Synoptics”, 1992, 478-79.

³⁶ See v. Hartingsveldt’s comments on this text against Bultmann, in van L. Hartingsveldt, *Die Eschatologie des Johannesevangeliums. Eine Auseinandersetzung mit R. Bultmann*, Assen: Van Gorcum, 1962, p. 210.

³⁷ Frey, *Johannine Eschatology*, II, 2 ff.

³⁸ Cf. also 7:39: οὐπω γὰρ ἦν πνεῦμα, ὅτι Ἰησοῦς οὐδέπω ἐδοξάσθη, which clearly refers to the future.

c. Faith and the Eschaton

The term *eschatos* occurs six times in the Fourth Gospel referring to the last day (ἐσχάτη ἡμέρα). In five instances (6:39, 40, 44, 54; 11:24) Jesus is presented as promising to raise up those who believe in him. The sixth instance (12:48) concerns the last day judgment. In this expression Bultmann³⁹ and his followers⁴⁰ imagined that a redactor tried to harmonize the eschatology of John with the futuristic eschatology in vogue in his day. However, both Barrett⁴¹ and Beasley-Murray⁴² have pointed out that the unity of the passage cannot be called in question. On the other hand, Barrett's remark that "it seems that it was John's intention to retain just enough futuristic eschatology..." and Beasley-Murray's remark that "The duality of present and future participation in the kingdom of God is fundamental to the proclamation of Jesus in all four Gospels..." are only symptomatic and indicate the mistaken emphasis on the present element in the KG that still bedevils New Testament scholarship.⁴³

Here we should note that "the last day" is not concerned with a particular day at the end of time, but with the new age that will be ushered in, the new αἰών, the *ha'olam haba'*,⁴⁴ when the KG, i.e. God's rule in a dynamic way, will be revealed. This puts the KG at the *Eschaton* by showing its other-worldly nature.

It is, indeed, true, that in the ministry of Jesus the *Eschaton* is brought in contact with the present. This is so, because the *Eschaton* and the KG are inextricably connected with Jesus' person. In his person, public ministry and death on the cross Jesus gathers all the strands that proceed from God: his eternal counsel, salvation, eternal life, dynamic rule over all creation—all these things find in Jesus the key to their fulfillment. Everything is contingent on the posture that is assumed towards him. *It is this nexus between present faith—the decisive factor for one's eschatological destiny—and the future character of the Eschaton, that brings future and present together in Jesus. This does not mean that the Eschaton has ceased to be future, but that the decisive act on the believer's part, the act that will determine his place at the Eschaton, takes place already in the present. Thus, although the KG is a wholly eschatological concept, entrance into it or exclusion from it is determined already now by the act of faith or unbelief directed to Jesus as the Christ.* As Moloney has expressed it: "Jesus makes God known, and the judgment flows from an acceptance or refusal of that revelation".⁴⁵

6. Conclusions

The above discussion hopefully has shown that John and the Synoptics share several strands about the KG. Although these points show the limited scope in John's diversity, they offer a sufficient ground for speaking of common traditions between them. However, in John the believer's eschatological existence is not portrayed primarily in terms of the KG idea but by his more characteristic —though by no means peculiar to him—ideology of everlasting life. Non the less, whether we speak of the KG or of eternal life, John's eschatology has been interpreted as emphatically realized. The

³⁹ R. Bultmann, *Das Evangelium des Johannes* (KEKNT), Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1941, p. 194.

⁴⁰ E. Haenchen, *Das Johannesevangelium. Ein Kommentar*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1980, *ad loc.* and J. Becker, *Das Evangelium des Johannes I-II* (ÖTKNT), Gütersloh: Mohn, 1979-1981, *ad loc.*

⁴¹ C.K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St John. An Introduction With Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text*, Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978², p. 283, 294.

⁴² G.R. Beasley-Murray, *John* (WBC 36), Waco, TX: Word Books, 1987, 92.

⁴³ Cf. also Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Future*, London: Macmillan, 1954

⁴⁴ See esp. G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902, p. 152.

⁴⁵ F.J. Moloney, *The Gospel of John* (SP 4), Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1998, 366.

dividing line that separates present from future—if recognized at all—has shrunk so much that it is practically obliterated.

Careful study of the texts that have been put forth as supporting realized eschatology and a critical scrutiny of the arguments in favor of it, have indicated that realized eschatology is built on a misunderstanding. A fatal error here has been the failure to perceive the ‘idiomatic’ function of the aorist. This has simply been interpreted woodenly in its usual temporal significance, and the nuanced communication has been undetected.

According to my analysis the eschatology of both John and the Synoptics is strictly future. However, the future is decided in the present. This decision is entirely based on the attitude of faith or unbelief to Jesus’ call. John presents the *Eschaton* in a manner that corresponded to the Early Church’s experience of salvation as grounded in faith and decided here and now. We may then say that in John faith is transmuted into eternal life and unbelief is transmuted into judgment. It is this dynamic transmutation that has been misinterpreted as realized eschatology, when in actual fact this transmutation is nothing else than faith transmuted. Now faith would not count as faith if what is believed and hoped for were already present (cf. Rm 8:24: ἐλπίς δὲ βλεπομένη οὐκ ἐστὶν ἐλπίς and Heb 11:1: ἔστιν δὲ πίστις ἐπιζομένων ὑπόστασις).

Περίληψις

Τὸ παρὸν ἄρθρον πραγματεύεται τὸ θέμα τῆς ἀπὸ κοινοῦ παραδόσεως περὶ Βασιλείας τοῦ Θεοῦ (= ΒΘ) εἰς τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην καὶ τὰ συνοπτικὰ εὐαγγέλια. Τὸ θέμα αὐτὸ ἐν γένει ἔχει τύχει μικρᾶς προσοχῆς ἐκ μέρους τῆς διεθνoῦς ἐρεῦνης. Ἡ συχνὴ καὶ πλουσία ἀναφορὰ εἰς τὴν ΒΘ στὰ συνοπτικὰ εὐαγγέλια καὶ ἡ σχεδὸν παντελὴς ἀπουσία τοῦ ὅρου αὐτοῦ στὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην εὐαγγέλιον τίνει νὰ περιθωριοποιήσῃ τὴν ΒΘ εἰς τὸ τέταρτον εὐαγγέλιον, ἂν καὶ τὰ σπουδαῖα χωρία 3:3, 5 τὴν παρουσιάζουν ὡς κάτι ποῦ μπορεῖ νὰ ὀραθῆ καὶ εἰς τὸ ὁποῖον μπορεῖ κανεὶς νὰ εἰσέλθῃ. Ὅμως ἡ εἰδέα περὶ ΒΘ, ὅχι ὁ ὅρος, συνήθως ἀντικαθίσταται διὰ τοῦ ἰωαννεῖου ὅρου «αἰώνιος ζωὴ». Ὅπως στὰ συνοπτικὰ ἔτσι καὶ (ἀκόμη περισσότερον) εἰς τὸ κατὰ Ἰωάννην, ἡ ΒΘ καὶ ἡ αἰώνιος ζωὴ ἔχουν ἐρμηνευθεῖ ὡς ἤδη πραγματοποιηθεῖσαι. Χωρία ὅπως τὸ Μτ 12:28 «ἔφθασεν ἡ ΒΘ» καὶ Ἰωάν 5:25 «ἔρχεται ὥρα καὶ νῦν ἐστὶν»; 12:23 «ἐλήλυθεν ἡ ὥρα» ἔχουν ἐκληφθεῖ ὡς ἀποδείξεις τῆς θεολογικῆς αὐτῆς θέσεως τοῦ C.H. Dodd περὶ πραγματοποιηθείσης ἐσχατολογίας.

Ἡ παροῦσα μελέτη ἐξετάζει συντόμως τὶς θεωρεῖες τοῦ Dodd καὶ ἄλλων ἐρευνητῶν (παραπέμποντας σὲ προγενέστερες καὶ ἐκτενέστερες μελέτες), καὶ ἀποδεικνύει ὅτι ἡ γλώσσα τῶν τεσσάρων εὐαγγελίων ἔχει παρερμηνευθεῖ, ἐφ’ ὅσον δὲν ἔγινε καταληπτὴ ὑπ’ αὐτῶν ἡ ἰδιαίτουσα χρῆσις τοῦ ἀορίστου (π.χ. ἔφθασεν), ὁ ὁποῖος ἀπὸ τὴν ἐποχὴν τοῦ Ἀριστοφάνους καὶ τοῦ Εὐριπίδου μέχρι τῶν ἡμερῶν μας χρησιμοποιεῖται πολλάκις διὰ νὰ ἐκφράσῃ μίαν μελλοντικὴν πρᾶξιν ἢ κατάστασιν ὡσὰν νὰ εἶχε ἤδη λάβει χώραν, διὰ νὰ τονίσῃ *βεβαιότητα* καὶ *ἀμεσότητα*. Τοῦτον σημαίνει ὅτι τόσον ὁ Ἰωάννης ὅσον καὶ οἱ συνοπτικοὶ διδάσκουν μίαν ὄχι πραγματοποιηθεῖσα, ἀλλὰ *Δυνητικὴ Ἐσχατολογία* ἢ ἀκριβέστερα: *Δυνητικῶς Παροῦσα Ἐσχατολογία* (*Potentially Present Eschatology*). Ἐκεῖνον τὸ ὁποῖον εἶναι *δυνητικόν* (ἢ «δυνάμει») (potential) δὲν εἶναι ἡ ΒΘ οὔτε ἡ ἔλευσις της (οὕτως δὲν ὑπάρχει ἀμφιβολία διὰ τὴν ὑπαρξίν ἢ ἔλευσιν τῆς ΒΘ), ἀλλὰ ἡ παρουσία της στὸν Ἰησοῦν κατὰ τὴν διάρκειαν τῆς ἐπιγείου διακονίας του, ὅπερ σημαίνει ὅτι ἡ ΒΘ ἦτο παροῦσα μόνον δυνάμει στὸ πρόσωπον καὶ ἔργον τοῦ Ἰησοῦ πρὸ τῆς σταυρώσεώς του. Ἐφ’ ὅσον ὁ σταυρικὸς θάνατος τοῦ Ἰησοῦ ἦτο ἡ προϋπόθεσις διὰ τὴν ἔλευσιν καὶ ἐδραίωσιν τῆς ΒΘ, αὐτὴ καθ’ ἑαυτὴν ἡ ΒΘ δὲν ἠδύνατο νὰ ἔλθῃ *πραγματικῶς* πρὸ τῆς σταυρώσεώς του. Ἄρα δὲν μπορεῖ νὰ γίνῃ λόγος περὶ Πραγματοποιηθείσης Ἐσχατολογίας κατὰ τὴν ἐπίγειον διακονίαν τοῦ Ἰησοῦ. Στὸν Ἰωάννην τὸ *Ἐσχατον* ἔχει στενὴν σχέσιν μὲ τὴν πεῖραν σωτηρίας τῆς πρώτης Ἐκκλησίας, ἡ ὁποία ἦτο

δομημένη στην πίστιν «ἐδῶ καὶ τώρα». Θὰ μπορούσε λοιπόν, νὰ λεχθῆ ὅτι ὅταν ὁ Ἰωάννης ὁμιλεῖ περὶ αἰωνίου ζωῆς «μεταλλάσσει» τὴν πίστιν σὲ αἰώνιον ζωὴν (faith is transmuted into eternal life) καὶ τὴν ἀπιστίαν σὲ κρίσιν. Αὐτὴ ἡ δυναμικὴ «μεταλλαγή» ἔχει παρανοηθεῖ ὡς πραγματοποιηθεῖσα ἐσχατολογία, ἐνῶ στὴν πραγματικότητα ἡ μεταλλαγή αὐτὴ δὲν εἶναι παρὰ ἀπλῶς πίστις μεταλλαγηθεῖσα (faith transmuted).