



# DOING GOD'S STORY IN WORSHIP: ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF CHRISTIAN NATIONALISM ON THE CHURCH'S SANCTUARY

Session 1a: Theological Touchstones for Worship:  
Worship Does the Story of God, including the  
End

# ESCHATOLOGICAL

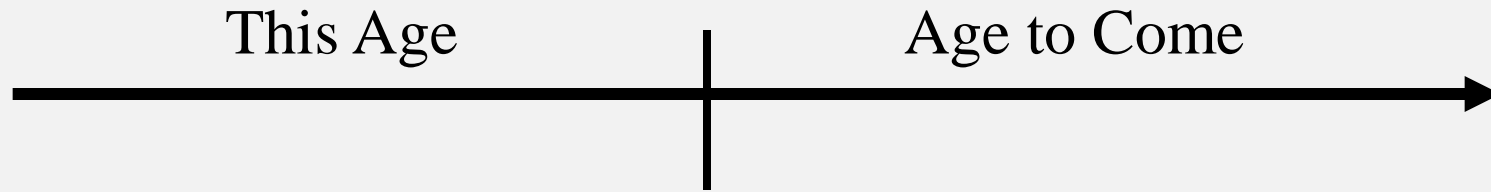
With a nod toward Jean-Jacques von Allmen et al.

## POINT 1: (ESCHATOLOGICAL) TIME IS IMPORTANT IN THE GOSPEL

- We usually do not stress time as a part of how we understand the Gospel.
- But it was for Jesus. Consider Mark 1:14-15. “Time” is literally the first thing Jesus names as he begins his public ministry: “Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.’”
- Luke? The first word of the first public sermon of Jesus (Luke 4:21) is a time word: today
- Matthew? The last word from the mouth of Jesus is a time expression (Matthew 28:20): the completion of the age.

POINT 2: UNDERSTANDING THE TIME  
NOW: WHAT TIME IS IT?

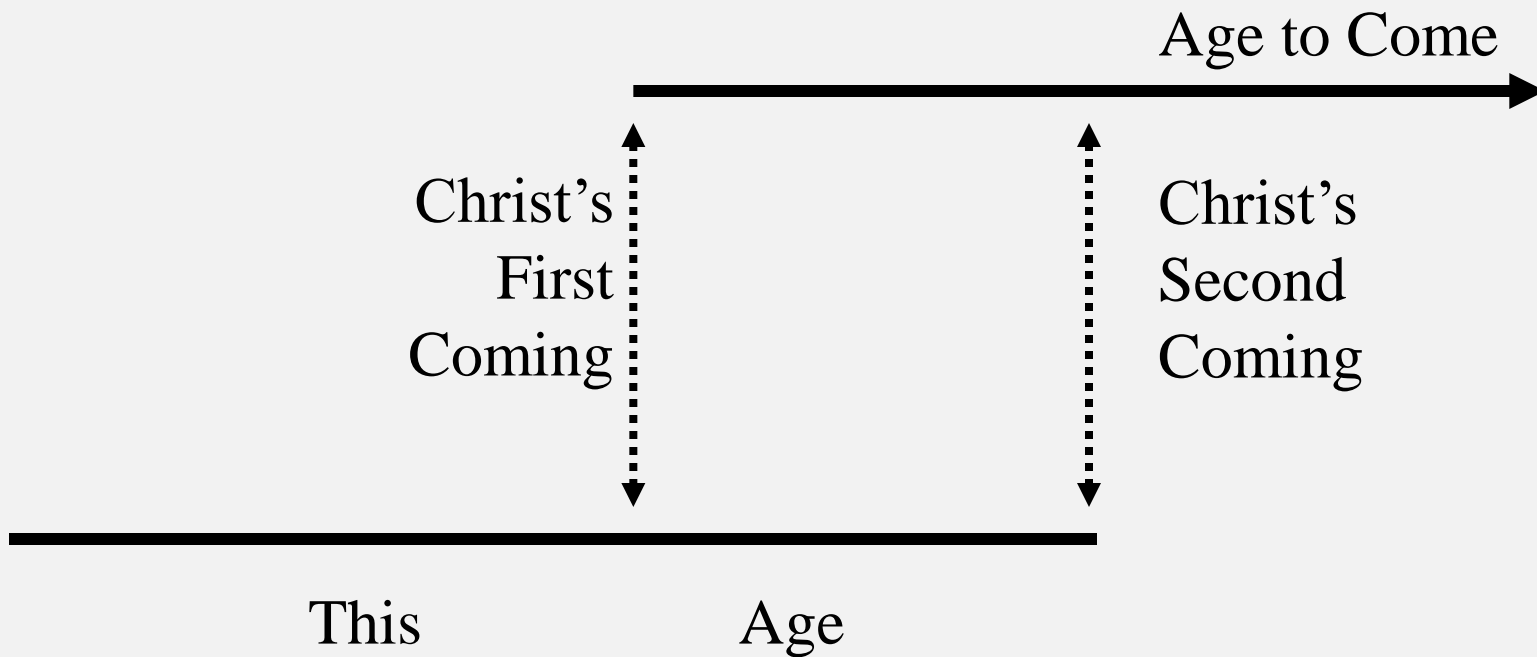
## A COMMON JEWISH SENSE OF TIME IN THE 1<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY



An example of the use of these categories:

Ephesians 1:20-21: God put this power to work in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and above every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the age to come.

# THE APOSTOLIC SENSE OF TIME (A MODIFIED SENSE)



A modified sense developed in light of what actually  
Happened in the life, death, Resurrection,  
and Ascension of Jesus Christ

## ONE FOOT IN EACH AGE: AN INHERENT, CRITICAL TENSION

- The Church is an in-between people.
- We are in “this present age” but not of it.
- We belong more ultimately to the age to come/Kingdom of God/Reign of God, which, although inaugurated, is not here in all of its fullness.

## COMMON NT WAYS OF EXPRESSING TENSION

- Crucified/raised
  - In/of the world
  - Current age/age to come
  - City here/city to come
  - The Kingdom is/The Kingdom isn't
- 
- There are cosmic, not just personal (or national) categories.
  - They are intended to be revelatory: the other world should be able to be seen somehow in the church. (But with tempered expectations.)



## POINT 3: OUR WORSHIP TODAY OCCURS IN THE SAME TENSION

- Worship is an in-between activity.
- Worship is in “this present age” but not of it.
- Worship belongs more ultimately to the age to come/Kingdom of God/Reign of God.
- Worship is an important time for revealing the Age to Come.

## WORSHIP AS REVELATION

- Our worship today should anticipate and reveal the future.
- Our worship today should reveal dimensions of the age to come.

## AN EXPLANATION OF THIS GOAL

*Colossians 3:12-17: “As God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in the one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”*

## THE REVELATORY QUALITY OF LOVE IN WORSHIP

- 1 Corinthians 13:1-3, 8-13: *“If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing...Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when the complete comes, the partial will come to an end. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became an adult, I put an end to childish ways. For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part; then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known. And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.”*

## AN EXAMPLE OF WORSHIP STILL OPERATING UNDER THE PERSPECTIVE OF “THIS AGE”

*James 2:1-5: “My brothers and sisters, do you with your acts of favoritism really believe in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ? For if a person with gold rings and in fine clothes comes into your assembly, and if a poor person in dirty clothes also comes in, and if you take notice of the one wearing the fine clothes and say, ‘Have a seat here, please,’ while to the one who is poor you say, ‘Stand there,’ or, ‘Sit at my feet,’ have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? Listen, my beloved brothers and sisters, has not God chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom that he has promised to those who love him?”*

## POINT 4: WORSHIP AS REVELATION AS SEEN IN (THE BOOK OF) REVELATION

- All people will worship something or somebody. It is a matter of whether it is the God revealed in Jesus Christ or not.
- Worship is a matter about ultimate, eternal, and critical allegiance.
- Worship is the central activity of heaven.
- Worship is centered in praise and honoring God.
- The worship of heaven is sung.

## POINT 4: WORSHIP AS REVELATION AS SEEN IN (THE BOOK OF) REVELATION

- Worship is a response to God's character and activity as seen and accomplished through Jesus Christ
- Worship is a holistic response involving an individual's whole person, including postures to honor and recognize the One worshiped.
- Worship is a hopeful, joyous response to God's victory over evil. The victory having already begun, we anticipate the completion of this victory in God's good time.
- It is inclusive, "a great multitude from every nation, tribe, people and language."

## POINT 4: WORSHIP AS REVELATION AS SEEN IN (THE BOOK OF) REVELATION

- Worship content needs to include remembering the future, especially the return of Jesus Christ and the coming resurrection.
- Sunday has an importance as a symbol of the future.
- Baptism and the Lord's Supper are connected to the future, not just the past; they are connected with dimensions of God's work which are cosmic, not just individual and personal. They are key eschatological symbols.
- When in doubt, be filled with the Holy Spirit and love.



## ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES

*“It is the whole vision of an Eschaton (the end of the story) that is now missing outside the church. The assembly of believers must therefore itself be the event in which we may behold what is to come...[if] a congregation or whatever wants to be ‘relevant,’ its assemblies must be unabashedly events of shared apocalyptic vision. ‘Going to church’ must be a journey to the place where we will behold our destiny, where we will see what is to come of us.”*

Robert Jenson, “How the World Lost Its Story,” *First Things* (Oct. 93): 24.  
(Lutheran)

## ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES

*“...the paschal character of baptism—the connection between baptism and Pascha—remains the key not only to baptism but to the totality of the Christian faith itself...(a robust, participatory celebration of baptism by the Church is) an event in which the whole Church acknowledges herself as passage—Pascha—from ‘this world’ into the Kingdom of God, as participation in the decisive events of Christ’s Death and Resurrection...It is here that the Church reveals her own nature to herself, constantly renews herself as a community of the baptized.”*

Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit* (1974), 37-8.  
(Russian Orthodox)

## ILLUSTRATIVE QUOTES

*“That is the truth about the Church and her duty: to hold fast in this tension between what she already has and what she still awaits, between what she already is and what she must become, between the fulfillment and the repetition of her prayer, between the Supper as messianic meal and the Supper as mere ambiguous prefiguration of that meal—without being made proud or idle by what she already has, or grieving or being discouraged as if she had nothing. But her Eucharistic prayer, still calls in the name of the whole world for the coming of God’s Kingdom; in the Eucharistic fulfillment she experiences already, on behalf of the whole world, the truth and reality of that kingdom.”*

Ron Rienstra, *Church at Church: Jean-Jacques von Allmen’s Liturgical Ecclesiology* (2019), 53-4.  
(Reformed)

# *MALOS* MOVEMENT

SPEAKING OF JEAN-JACQUES  
VON ALLMEN

## WAYS TO EXPRESS THE TENSION, EXPANDED

### ALREADY NOTED

- Crucified/raised
- In/of the world
- Current age/age to come
- City here/city to come
- The Kingdom is/The Kingdom isn't

### VON ALLMEN

- Worship as threat and promise
- Both terms apply to what the future age will hold for the present age.

## AS THREAT

*“The worshipping church is to the world both a threat and a promise. It is a threat because it is a challenge to human righteousness, a foretaste of the last judgment, and a protest against worship aimed at anything other than the living God. Whenever the church assembles to worship, it renounces the world and the world’s claim to offering human beings a ‘valid justification for their existence.’ So, for example, the doxological declarations of the church are an anti-pagan polemic with a political overtone; when worshipers sing ‘Praise God from whom all blessings flow,’ when they declare ‘Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory,’ they reject all pretensions to these things that might be implicitly claimed by other forces—such as the seductive cultural narratives of consumerism, or explicitly claimed by the state and its demands of obedience. This rejection is a proleptic judgment that prefigures the ultimate accounting of the church and the world at the ‘eschatological discrimination.’”*

## AS THREAT

*“In this sense, by the mere fact of its celebration, the Christian cult is a basically political action: it reminds the state of the limited and provisional character of its power, and when the state claims for itself an absolute trust and obedience, the Christian cult protests against this pretension to claim a kingdom, a power and a glory which belong of right to God alone. That is why, in gathering together for Christian worship, people compromise themselves politically.”*



## AS PROMISE

*“The worship of the church is not just menace or threat. It is also a promise to the world because of Jesus Christ, the one in whom the world, if it consents to renounce itself...regains its true destiny. By its worship, the church serves in a vicarious and priestly capacity, representing and leading the entire universe in the worship that it was originally intended to offer. God’s intention in creation...was a liturgical one. Hence, at worship, the church shows the world ‘the past it ought never to have lost and the future promised to it’.”*

# ESCHATOLOGICAL

## STRENGTHS

- Balances our tendencies to commemorate the past or focus on the present
- Offers the chance to envision a spiritual liturgical reality beyond the constraints of what we can see here and now, to get beyond ourselves
- Easy to develop as a NT theology of worship since eschatology is so critical in the NT
- Stressing revelation of the future can undercut the hyper-instrumental notions that can dominate some Western thinking

## WEAKNESS

- The imprecision of looking at and contemplating the future
- Requires a humble and wise imagination
- Hubris and presumption can lead to an over-realized eschatology

## QUESTIONS THAT COME TO MIND

- Is the service not cautious enough about focusing on things that are only of this age and will pass away?
- Does the service lean more into recovery of the past over anticipation of the future?
- How critical is the Resurrection (Christ's and ours) and the coming of a "new heavens and a new earth" in how the common good is portrayed as being accomplished? Are these divinely-achieved events a central reason for which God is to be honored?
- How is the tension with the present age portrayed and negotiated? How does the service speak of the harder aspects of being "resident aliens" in this age? Or is there an over-realized eschatology?

## QUESTIONS THAT COME TO MIND

- What of the future is the Spirit expected to bring more fully and completely?
- If love as seen in God (i.e., love that is inherently righteous and just) is the defining quality of future existence, how does worship today exemplify, anticipate, and participate in that existence in a preliminary way? Is something else lifted up as the defining quality of life and existence in God?
- How else might the service expect the future to break out in the present? And is this breaking out within the community of the church or outside of it?
- Is there any humility about the limits of human knowledge about the specifics of the future and God's realm?
- Do the rhythms and structures of time acknowledge a "not-yet-ness"?

THE KEY IDEA/BASIC DEFINITION  
OF EACH THEOLOGY

1. Dynamic worship narrative:  
Worship is the *doing* of God's story.
2. Eschatological: Worship is \_\_\_\_\_.
3. Trinitarian
4. Christological/Incarnational

THE KEY IDEA/BASIC DEFINITION  
OF EACH THEOLOGY

1. Dynamic worship narrative:  
Worship is the *doing* of God's story.
2. Eschatological: Worship is the preliminary in-breaking of the future.
3. Trinitarian
4. Christological/Incarnational