

“COME, LORD JESUS!” THE ESCHATOLOGICAL CHARACTER OF THE EARLY CHRISTIAN COMMUNITIES

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Abstract. The earliest Christians lived in expectation of the *parousia* and this influenced the character of their communal gatherings. This eschatological character of their gatherings was expressed in the intense expectation of the *eschaton* and an orientation toward the future rather than the past and present. The eschatology of the earliest Christians was expounded in various activities that took place during the early Christian gatherings. The eucharistic and other types of communal prayers that were pronounced during and after the communal meal were filled with words that expressed future coming of Jesus Christ and establishment of God’s Kingdom. Early Christians also read texts which looked toward the Second Coming of Jesus Christ, the resurrection, and the final fate of all people. Extant texts of early Christian sermons also contained eschatological appeals. As for early Christian singing, the texts of songs do not contain clear eschatological material; however some of them have eschatological motifs. During their assemblies, early Christians also expressed eschatologically-oriented liturgical exclamations. Thus, on the basis of the extant early Christian texts that were heard in their gatherings and described their content, one can conclude that those gatherings clearly had an eschatological character in the first and second centuries.

Keywords: eschatological character, *parousia*, *eschaton*, Christian community, eucharistic meal

Introduction

Jesus’ teaching and preaching about the Kingdom of God was eschatological in nature.¹ According to the Gospel writers, after Jesus’ death and resurrection, the first believers in Christ-Messiah expected his return and the climax of the present age. Jesus was expected to come as Judge and Saviour in order to save the faithful and judge the wicked.² Numerous parables and sayings of Jesus in the Gospels testify to those expectations.³ In the Book of Acts, the author expresses the

¹ Mk 1:15.

² 1 Thess 1:10; Phil 3:20; 1 Cor 4:5; 2 Cor 5:10.

³ Mk 13:26-27; Matt 13:36-43; 24:3-51; Lk 12:40.