

Last Days or Last Daze?

A Catholic Guide to the End of the Age

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I. A Question Wrongly Asked

“Are we living in the last days?” It is one of the most persistent questions in popular religion, and one of the most reliably profitable. In every generation there have been preachers ready to read the morning’s headlines—wars, earthquakes, new technologies, political upheavals—as the unmistakable signs that the end has at last arrived, and ready, often enough, to sell the books and broadcasts that decode them. The dates come and go. The world does not end. The charts are quietly revised, and the question is asked again.

The most systematic modern example is the movement that grew into the Jehovah’s Witnesses, which has taught with great confidence that the “last days” began at a precise calendar moment—1914—after earlier having fixed that beginning at 1799 and the invisible “return” of Christ at 1874. But the impulse is far older and far wider than any one group. It is the conviction that the “last days” name a datable countdown, a final segment of history whose onset can be detected and whose end can be, if not predicted exactly, at least sensed as imminent from the signs of the times.

This essay argues that the question, as usually posed, rests on a misunderstanding—and that the misunderstanding can be cleared up by attending carefully to how Scripture itself, read within the Catholic tradition, actually uses the language of the “last days.” The aim here is positive: to set out what the Church believes about the end, and about the sense in which Christians have been living in the “last days” for two thousand years already. The title’s pun is therefore in earnest. The difference between the “last days” and a “last daze” is the difference between a hope that steadies the Christian life and a speculation that unsettles it.

II. What Eschatology Means

The “last days” are a subtopic of a larger field of theology called *eschatology*—from the Greek *eschatos*, “last.” The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it as the branch of theology “concerned with the four last things: death, judgment, heaven, and hell,” to which the tradition usually adds the resurrection of the body and the renewal of all creation. Eschatology, in other words, is the study of the *end*—both the end as termination and, more deeply, the end as goal: that toward which God is drawing his creation.¹

That second sense matters, because much confusion about the “last days” comes from hearing only the first. If “the end” means merely the moment the clock stops, then the natural question is *when*—and the natural temptation is to start calculating. But if “the end” means the purpose toward which everything moves, then the decisive question is not *when* but *who* and *what*—who brings about the end, and what it consists of. The Christian

answer to both is the same: Jesus Christ, in whom the end has already begun. To see why, we have to begin not with a calendar but with the kingdom of God.

III. The Kingdom of God: The Key to the Last Days

A person's understanding of the "last days" is governed, almost entirely, by his understanding of the kingdom of God—so much so that the two questions cannot be separated. And the kingdom is the great theme of Jesus' preaching. He opens his ministry with it: "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel" (Mark 1:15; cf. Matt. 4:17).

Notice the word translated "repent." The Greek is *metanoia*—not mere regret for wrongdoing but a complete turning of the mind, a transformation of one's whole way of seeing. Jesus is telling his hearers to change the way they think, and he gives a reason: the kingdom is "at hand." But near in what sense? Three further sayings show what he meant.²

First, when the Pharisees ask *when* the kingdom will come, Jesus refuses the premise of the question: "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you" (Luke 17:20–21). The kingdom is not the kind of thing you detect by external portents or locate on a map or a calendar. It is already present among them—in the person standing before them.³

Second, to a scribe who answers wisely Jesus says, "You are not far from the kingdom of God" (Mark 12:34). The kingdom is as near as a change of heart. And third, in the Sermon on the Mount, he teaches his disciples to pray "Thy kingdom come" (Matt. 6:10)—so the kingdom is also something still awaited, something prayed for. Near, present, and yet to come: the apparent tension is the whole point.

Put the three together and a picture emerges. When Jesus announced that the kingdom was "at hand," he meant that, *except for their lack of repentance*, the kingdom was already there. It was as close to them as the decision to let God reign in their hearts and to love their neighbors with God's own love. The philosopher Dallas Willard put it memorably: the kingdom of God is "the range of God's effective will"—wherever what God wants done is done. We enter it, benefit from it, and extend it whenever we live in that obedient love; and we look forward in hope to its full extension over a redeemed world at the end.⁴

This is why Jesus told so many parables that begin, "The kingdom of God is like ...": a seed sown in various soils (Matt. 13:1–23), a seed that grows secretly while the farmer sleeps (Mark 4:26–29), a tiny mustard seed that becomes a great shrub (Mark 4:30–32), wheat growing among weeds until the harvest (Matt. 13:24–30), leaven working unseen through

the dough (Matt. 13:33). Every one of them describes something *already begun* but *not yet complete*—hidden, gradual, contested, and certain of its outcome. The kingdom is not a government inaugurated on a future date. It is a dynamic reality that began with Jesus and unfolds through history toward its consummation.⁵

And it is why the risen Christ can say, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me” (Matt. 28:18). This is worth dwelling on. The authority is given to him at the resurrection, as an accomplished fact—*there is no further authority he could receive*. He cannot become more of a king at some later date than he already is in the great commission. Paul says the same of what this meant for the first Christians: God “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son” (Col. 1:13)—past tense, already done. The reign of Christ is not pending. It is exercised now, over history, until “he has put all his enemies under his feet,” the last of which is death (1 Cor. 15:25–26).⁶

IV. What Israel Awaited: The Two Ages

To understand the “last days,” we have to hear the phrase as Jesus’ first hearers heard it—and they were not Enlightenment moderns expecting a datable countdown. They were Jews formed by the Hebrew Scriptures, whose language about the future was comfortable with a kind of fruitful ambiguity our own scientific culture finds difficult.

The very phrase “the last days” comes from that world. The Hebrew *be’aharit hayyamim*—“in the latter days,” “in the days to come”—first appears when the dying Jacob gathers his sons to tell them “what shall befall you in days to come” (Gen. 49:1), and recurs throughout the prophets: Isaiah, Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel. The expression carries a deliberate double sense. It can mean simply “in time to come,” and it can also point to the *climax* of an age. It became so settled a code for that climax that at Pentecost Peter could take Joel’s plain “afterward” and render it “in the last days” without distorting the prophet’s meaning (Acts 2:17; cf. Joel 2:28).⁷

The crucial point is this: neither the ancient Hebrews nor the first Christians used “last days” the way modern date-setters do. They did not have in mind a delimited stretch of time beginning and ending with particular events. They used the phrase to mean *the time when God’s foretold purposes and promises would at last be fulfilled*. Whoever was alive when that happened would be living in the “last days.”

Behind this lay a settled framework. Jewish thought divided history broadly into two: *this age* (the present order, the age of waiting) and *the age to come* (the messianic age, when God would set everything right). Jesus himself uses exactly this language—“this age” and “the age to come” (Matt. 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30). The present world would be

brought to an end, and the world to come introduced, by the coming of the Messiah and the Last Judgment.⁸

Why did Israel expect this so confidently? Because of the covenants. The Mosaic (Deuteronomic) covenant was conditional: it carried explicit sanctions, and foretold exile as the consequence of disobedience—a prophecy fulfilled when Assyria carried off the Northern Kingdom and Babylon the Southern. But the covenants with Abraham and David were *unconditional*—promises with no “disobedience clause” attached. Israel’s subjection to foreign powers, then, could not be God’s last word. The Jews who returned from Babylon and shaped the Judaism of Jesus’ day expected that the promised restoration was *still to come*, to be accomplished by a coming royal deliverer—the Messiah—who would inaugurate the age in which the Abrahamic and Davidic promises would finally be realized. The table below sketches that expectation.⁹

The “Last Days” from a Jewish (Pre-Christian) Perspective

“This Age” (the present order)	be’aharit hayyamim — “the last days”	“The Age to Come” (the Messianic Age)
The age of waiting, under the covenants: • Abrahamic — unconditional • Davidic — unconditional • Mosaic / Deuteronomic — conditional	The prophets foretell the “Day of the LORD”: judgment and redemption. <i>Isa. 2:2; Mic. 4:1; Jer. 23:20; Ezek. 38:16; Dan. 12:9–10</i> Mal. 4:5–6: Elijah to come first	When the promises are fulfilled: • Judgment of the nations • Salvation of God’s people • Regathering of the exiles; a remnant restored • Gentiles added to Israel • Outpouring of the Spirit (Joel 2:28) • Coming of the Messiah and Suffering Servant • A new covenant (Jer. 31:31)

V. “In These Last Days”: The Christian Transformation

The first Christians did not invent the expression “last days.” They inherited it, and then announced something startling: the long-awaited *age to come* had already dawned. The decisive events had happened—in Jesus. The Messiah had come; the Spirit had been poured out; the new covenant had been cut in his blood. The “last days” were therefore not in the future. They had *begun*.

This is stated plainly and repeatedly across the New Testament. The Letter to the Hebrews opens: “In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but *in these last days* he has spoken to us by a Son” (Heb. 1:1–2). Peter writes that Christ “was made manifest *in the last times* for your sake” (1 Pet. 1:20). John tells his readers, “it is *the last hour*” (1 John 2:18). Paul says of his own generation that the end of the ages *has*

come upon them: “these things ... were written down for our instruction, *upon whom the end of the ages has come*” (1 Cor. 10:11)—where the Greek verb is perfect tense, denoting a completed arrival, not a future prospect.¹⁰

The clearest single declaration comes at Pentecost. When the Spirit falls and the crowd is bewildered, Peter stands and explains: “*This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel*: “And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh” (Acts 2:16–17). *This is that*. Peter tells the assembled multitude, in effect, that they are standing in the “last days” the prophets foretold—not centuries away, but now, in the outpouring they are witnessing. The gift of the Spirit is itself the proof that the final age has begun.¹¹

Two texts the Watchtower itself leans on say the same. Paul’s description of “the last days,” with its lovers of self and money and pleasure (2 Tim. 3:1–5), ends with the instruction “Avoid such people”—counsel that is useless unless such people stood in Timothy’s own congregation. And Jesus told His hearers that some standing before Him would not taste death before they saw the kingdom of God come with power (Mark 9:1)—which fits a kingdom inaugurated in their generation, in the Resurrection, Pentecost and the gospel’s spread, and does not fit one established in 1914, long after every one of them had died.

The composite “sign” fares no better, and Christ Himself is the one who blunted it. Wars and rumors of wars, He said, must come, “but the end is not yet”; famines and earthquakes are “but the beginning of the birth-pangs” (Matt. 24:6–8). He offered these not as a calendar but as a caution against being misled by them—they are what every generation sees, which is why every generation since has found them abundantly. A sign present in all ages marks out none. And the presence it is said to signal invisibly is, in the same discourse, as unmistakable as lightning shining from east to west (Matt. 24:27).

The table below sets the Christian transformation of the schema beside the Jewish expectation. The same two-age structure remains, but the decisive turn has already happened in Christ, and the believer now lives in the overlap—the inaugurated “age to come,” awaiting its completion.

The “Last Days” from a Christian Perspective

“The Last Days” of the Jewish Age	“This Age” (the New Covenant age, inaugurated by Jesus)	“The Age to Come” (all promises fulfilled)
John the Baptist comes as the promised “Elijah” (Mal. 4:5–6). Jesus is baptized and preaches that the kingdom of God is near.	The risen Christ receives “all authority” (Matt. 28:18; cf. Dan. 7:14).	Christ reigns over history until every enemy, including death, is subdued.

“The Last Days” of the Jewish Age	“This Age” (the New Covenant age, inaugurated by Jesus)	“The Age to Come” (all promises fulfilled)
He institutes the new covenant (Jer. 31:31), is crucified, and is vindicated by the Resurrection.	Pentecost fulfills Joel 2:28 — confirming these are the “last days” (Acts 2:16–21). Hebrews 1:1–2: “in these last days” God has spoken by his Son. A.D. 70: Jerusalem and the Temple are destroyed, ending the Jewish age.	Then he hands the kingdom to the Father (1 Cor. 15:24–28). Remaining: the parousia, the resurrection of the body, the Last Judgment, and the renewal of creation.

VI. Already and Not Yet

If the “last days” began two thousand years ago, does that mean nothing remains? By no means. The Catholic understanding holds two truths together, and the whole shape of Christian hope depends on keeping them together. The kingdom is *already* here and *not yet* consummated. The decisive battle has been won; the final victory is not yet displayed.

The Catechism states it exactly: “Since the Ascension God’s plan has entered into its fulfillment. We are already at ‘the last hour.’ ‘Already the final age of the world is with us, and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way.’” And yet, in the next breath, it insists that the kingdom, “already present” in the Church, “will be perfected” only at the end, when Christ returns. We live in the overlap of the ages: the new has truly broken in, the old has not yet wholly passed away.¹²

This is why the New Testament can speak of the end as both behind us and ahead of us without contradiction. The most important eschatological events have *already happened*—in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, and the sending of the Spirit. But genuinely future events remain, and the New Testament names them with three Greek words for Christ’s coming, all pointing forward: his *parousia* (arrival or presence), his *apokalypsis* (unveiling), and his *epiphaneia* (appearing). Still to come are the resurrection of the body, the Last Judgment, and the renewal of all creation, when Christ “delivers the kingdom to God the Father” and God becomes “all in all” (1 Cor. 15:24, 28).¹³

The error to avoid runs in both directions. To deny that the kingdom has come—to push it wholly into the future, as a government to be set up on some calculated date—is to miss what Christ accomplished and what Pentecost inaugurated. But to claim that the kingdom has *already* come in its fullness—that there is nothing left to await—is to deny the

resurrection of the body and the judgment still ahead. Catholic eschatology refuses both collapses. It keeps the tension that the gospel itself sustains.

VII. Augustine, the Millennium, and the Catholic Tradition

How does this bear on the most disputed text in all of eschatology—the thousand-year reign, the “millennium,” of Revelation 20? Here the Catholic tradition took a definite shape, largely through Augustine, and it is worth knowing.

Broadly, there have been three ways of reading the millennium. *Premillennialism* holds that Christ will return *before* a literal earthly thousand-year reign, which his return inaugurates. *Postmillennialism* holds that Christ returns *after* a golden age brought about within history. *Amillennialism* holds that the “thousand years” is not a future literal period at all, but a symbolic figure for the present age of the Church—the whole stretch between Christ’s first and second comings, during which the saints already reign with him.

It was Augustine, in *The City of God*, who gave the amillennial reading its classic form. He had once expected a literal earthly reign, but came to see that the “first resurrection” of Revelation 20 is the soul’s rising from sin to grace in baptism, and the “thousand years” the era of the Church militant. On this reading the millennium is *now*—we are in it. This became, and has remained, the mainstream Catholic position. It coheres exactly with the “already and not yet” already described: Christ reigns now, his saints reign with him now, and his visible return lies still ahead.¹⁴

The Church has gone further and explicitly *rejected* the expectation of an earthly messianic kingdom set up within history before the end. The Catechism is blunt: the Church “has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism,” and warns that the deception of Antichrist “already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history.” This is precisely the error of every movement that promises a datable, this-worldly kingdom—whether a thousand-year reign after an imminent battle, or a heavenly government installed in a particular calendar year. The Church names that hope a counterfeit of the true kingdom, which God alone will bring *beyond* history, by his own act, at a time he has not disclosed.¹⁵

VIII. What the Church Does and Does Not Require

It is important to be clear about the limits of what has just been said. The Church requires belief in the *substance* of Christian hope—Christ will come again in glory, the dead will rise, all will be judged, and creation will be made new. These are confessed in the Creed

and are not negotiable. What the Church does *not* require is adherence to any particular system for timing or diagramming the end.

This restraint is ancient. Consider Justin Martyr, writing about A.D. 160. He himself believed in a future earthly reign of Christ in a restored Jerusalem—and yet, when pressed, he freely acknowledged that “many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise.” A second-century Father could hold a strong eschatological opinion and, in the same breath, recognize that faithful Christians disagreed with him about it, without anyone’s orthodoxy being in question.¹⁶

The reason lies in how the early Church distinguished the essential from the optional. Vincent of Lérins, around A.D. 434, gave the classic test of authentic apostolic faith: *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*—“that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all.” The core of the faith—summarized in the “rule of faith” handed down from the apostles and crystallized in the creeds—met that test of universality, antiquity, and consent. A detailed eschatological calendar never did. No creed, formal or informal, ever required a particular scheme of the end times. We therefore cannot make any such system a measure of Christian faith, because the Church herself never did.¹⁷

Scripture itself counsels this humility. Paul, who had seen the risen Christ, still wrote that “we know in part”; that “now we see in a mirror dimly,” and only at the end “face to face” (1 Cor. 13:9, 12). John wrote, “it does not yet appear what we shall be” (1 John 3:2). If the apostles disclaimed exhaustive knowledge of the end, the confident date-setter claims more than they did.

IX. Vigilance, Not Calculation

What, then, of the second coming itself? Here the Church simply repeats what Jesus said—and what he said is remarkably clear: do not try to calculate it. “Of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father” (Mark 13:32). If the angels do not know it, and if the incarnate Son in his human knowing does not disclose it, then the enterprise of pinning it to a date is not merely difficult but presumptuous.¹⁸

And this is not a frustrating gap in our knowledge; it is the very thing that shapes the Christian posture toward the end. Precisely *because* the return is certain but its timing is hidden, the believer is called to constant readiness. The parables of the end are not puzzles to be decoded but summonses to be awake: the householder who does not know when the thief will come, the servants who must be found at their work, the bridesmaids who must keep oil in their lamps (Matt. 24:36–25:13). “Watch,” Jesus says—not “calculate.” The

Catechism captures the balance: Christ's coming "could be accomplished at any moment," and so the Church lives in vigilant hope, neither dating the end nor forgetting it.

Many of the earliest Christians evidently expected Christ to return within their own lifetimes; the New Testament preserves their sense of imminence, and also their growing recognition that the timing was not theirs to know (cf. John 21:21–23; 2 Thess. 2:1–3). That combination—certainty of the event, indeterminacy of the hour—is exactly what the Lord intended. It is what keeps Christian hope from curdling either into complacency or into feverish speculation.

X. Conclusion

There is a clear consensus among the New Testament writers that the beginning of the Christian era marked the beginning of the last days. The apostles would have found it strange to be asked, "Are we near the end?" For them the last days had already begun—with Jesus the Messiah: his life, death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father's right hand, and the sending of the Spirit at Pentecost. The most important eschatological events lie nearly two thousand years in the past. This does not trivialize what remains—the resurrection of the body, the judgment, the renewal of creation are real and still to come—but it relocates the center of gravity. We are not waiting for the last days to begin. We are living in them, and have been all along.¹⁰

That is why no scheme of eschatology should be allowed to stand at the center of Christian faith. There is a center—but it is the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ, not a speculative calendar of what remains to be fulfilled. The Watchtower and every other date-setting movement makes the same fundamental mistake: it treats the "last days" as a countdown to be measured and a kingdom to be installed on a calculated date, and so must endlessly revise its predictions as they fail. The Catholic answer is not a better calculation. It is a different and older understanding altogether: the kingdom came in Christ, comes now in his Church and in every heart that receives him, and will come in glory when he returns at an hour no one knows.¹⁹

So are we living in the "last days"? Yes—and so was every Christian generation before us, since the Spirit was first poured out. The proper response to that fact is not to scan the headlines for the date of the end, but to live, today, as people in whom the end has already begun: turning the mind to God in *metanoia*, letting his reign take hold in our hearts, extending his effective will in the world around us, and waiting in vigilant hope for the day—certain in its coming, hidden in its hour—when the kingdom that is already among us will be revealed in its fullness. That is the difference between the last days and a last daze: not a calendar, but a life lived toward the One who is himself the End.

Endnotes

1. “Eschatology,” *Oxford English Dictionary*. The term derives from the Greek *eschatos* (“last”) and *logos* (“study, account”). On the “four last things”—death, judgment, heaven, and hell—as the traditional content of eschatology, see *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2nd ed. (Vatican City: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1997), §§1020–1060, which treats them under the heading of Christian hope.
2. On *metanoia* as a complete turning of mind and heart rather than mere regret, see *Catechism*, §§1430–1433 (“interior repentance”). The proclamation “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17; cf. Mark 1:15) is treated as the inauguration of Jesus’ public ministry; see *Catechism* §§541–546 on the kingdom’s coming.
3. Luke 17:20–21. The Greek *entos hymōn* can be rendered “within you” or “among you / in your midst”; most modern translations prefer the latter, since Jesus is addressing hostile Pharisees. Either way the point stands: the kingdom is not located by external observation. See *Catechism*, §2816, on the kingdom that “has come in Christ’s death and Resurrection” and “comes” in the Eucharist and the hearts of the faithful.
4. Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy: Rediscovering Our Hidden Life in God* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1998), 21–29, where Willard describes the kingdom of God as “the range of God’s effective will.” Willard was professor of philosophy at the University of Southern California; the formulation is widely quoted, though it expresses an emphasis (the present, dynamic reign of God) congenial to, but not identical with, the fuller Catholic understanding of the kingdom as also the Church and the consummation.
5. On the parables of growth—the sower (Matt. 13:1–23), the seed growing secretly (Mark 4:26–29), the mustard seed (Mark 4:30–32; Luke 13:18–19), the wheat and the weeds (Matt. 13:24–30), and the leaven (Matt. 13:33; Luke 13:20–21)—as expressing the hidden, gradual, and contested growth of the kingdom already inaugurated, see *Catechism*, §§543–546.
6. Matthew 28:18–20. On the universal kingship conferred on the risen Christ, cf. Daniel 7:13–14 (“to him was given dominion and glory and kingdom”) and Philippians 2:9–11. Paul describes the transfer already accomplished for believers at Colossians 1:13: God “has delivered us from the dominion of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son.”
7. The Hebrew *be’aharit hayyamim* (“in the latter days / in the days to come”) first appears at Genesis 49:1, where Jacob tells his sons “what shall befall you in days to come,” and recurs in the prophets: Isaiah 2:2; Micah 4:1; Jeremiah 23:20; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 10:14; cf. Numbers 24:14. The phrase carries a built-in ambiguity—it can mean simply “in

time to come” and can also point to the climax of an age. Translations vary widely: “last days” (KJV, NIV, NASB), “end of days” (JPS), “latter days” (ASV), “days to come” (NRSV), “final part of the days” (NWT).

8. On the rabbinic and intertestamental scheme of *ha’olam hazeh* (“this age”) and *ha’olam haba* (“the age to come”), see George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 67–69; and Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology* (New York: Scribner, 1971), 96–108. Jesus himself speaks of “this age” and “the age to come” at Matthew 12:32; Mark 10:30; Luke 18:30.

9. On the unconditional character of the Abrahamic (Gen. 12:1–3; 15:1–21; 17:1–8) and Davidic (2 Sam. 7:8–16; Ps. 89) covenants, as distinct from the conditional, sanction-bearing Mosaic (Deuteronomic) covenant (Deut. 28–30), see Scott Hahn, *Kinship by Covenant: A Canonical Approach to the Fulfillment of God’s Saving Promises* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), esp. chs. 5–6 and 9. The conviction that the Abrahamic and Davidic promises remained to be fulfilled shaped the messianic expectation of Second Temple Judaism.

10. Hebrews 1:1–2 (“in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son”); 1 Peter 1:20 (Christ “was made manifest in the last times”); 1 John 2:18 (“it is the last hour”); James 5:3; 1 Corinthians 10:11 (“on whom the end of the ages has come”). The New Testament consistently locates the “last days” as already begun in Christ’s first coming, not as a future calendar period. On this point see Brant Pitre, *Jesus, the Tribulation, and the End of the Exile* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005), and more accessibly the treatment of inaugurated eschatology in *Catechism*, §§670–671.

11. Acts 2:14–21. Peter applies Joel 2:28–32 (“in the last days ... I will pour out my Spirit”) to the events of Pentecost with the words “this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel” (Acts 2:16). Joel’s own text reads “afterward”; Peter’s rendering “in the last days” interprets the outpouring of the Spirit as the dawning of the promised end-time. See *Catechism*, §§715–716, 731–732, on Pentecost as the fulfillment of the prophetic promise of the Spirit “in the last days.”

12. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §670: “Since the Ascension God’s plan has entered into its fulfillment. We are already at ‘the last hour.’ ‘Already the final age of the world is with us, and the renewal of the world is irrevocably under way.’” The interior quotation is from the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium* (1964), 48. See further *Catechism*, §671, on the kingdom as “already present” yet “not yet” consummated.

13. Paul and the New Testament describe the still-future coming of Christ with three principal terms: *parousia* (“arrival, presence”: 1 Cor. 15:23; 1 Thess. 2:19; 3:13; 4:15; 5:23; 2 Thess. 2:1, 8); *apokalypsis* (“unveiling, revelation”: 1 Cor. 1:7; 2 Thess. 1:7; 1 Pet. 1:7, 13); and *epiphaneia* (“appearing, manifestation”: 2 Thess. 2:8; 1 Tim. 6:14; 2 Tim. 4:1, 8;

Titus 2:13). All three look forward, confirming that the New Testament's "already" does not swallow up its "not yet."

14. Augustine, *The City of God (De Civitate Dei)*, Book XX, esp. chs. 7–9, where Augustine interprets the thousand years of Revelation 20 not as a future earthly reign but as the present age of the Church, between Christ's first and second comings, during which the saints reign with Christ. This "amillennial" reading became the mainstream Catholic position. English translation: Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Henry Bettenson (London: Penguin, 2003).

15. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, §676: "The Antichrist's deception already begins to take shape in the world every time the claim is made to realize within history that messianic hope which can only be realized beyond history through the eschatological judgment. The Church has rejected even modified forms of this falsification of the kingdom to come under the name of millenarianism." Cf. §675 on the Church's final trial, and the 1944 decree of the Holy Office rejecting "mitigated millenarianism" as one that "cannot be taught safely."

16. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, ch. 80. Justin affirms his own belief in a future earthly reign of Christ in a rebuilt Jerusalem, but immediately adds that "many who belong to the pure and pious faith, and are true Christians, think otherwise." The passage is the classic early witness that the Church tolerated differing eschatological opinions. English translation in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, vol. 1 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1867; repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953).

17. Vincent of Lérins, *Commonitorium* 2.6 (c. A.D. 434): the catholic faith is *quod ubique, quod semper, quod ab omnibus creditum est*—"that which has been believed everywhere, always, and by all." The maxim names the criterion of universality, antiquity, and consent by which authentic apostolic tradition is recognized, and by which a particular eschatological system is shown *not* to belong to the essential rule of faith.

18. Mark 13:32: "But of that day or that hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." On the indeterminacy of the timing as the ground of constant vigilance rather than calculation, see the parables of watchfulness at Matthew 24:36–25:13 and *Catechism*, §§672–673: "Christ's Ascension ... does not mean ... that we can know when this will be. ... His coming could be accomplished at any moment." The Son's professed not-knowing is understood through the two natures of Christ: he does not know it in his human nature as something to be communicated.

19. On the cross and resurrection—not a speculative calendar—as the center of Christian faith and hope, see 1 Corinthians 15:3–4, 12–28, and *Catechism*, §§638–655 (the Resurrection as the crown of the Paschal mystery) and §1085 (the Paschal mystery as the once-for-all event that remains ever present). Paul's own caution against claiming full

knowledge of the end is explicit: “now we see in a mirror dimly ... now I know in part” (1 Cor. 13:12); cf. 1 John 3:2, “what we will be has not yet appeared.”

For Further Reading

Jesus, Paul and the End of the World, by Ben Witherington III.

New Testament Theology, by G. B. Caird (completed and edited by L. D. Hurst).

The Language and Imagery of the Bible, by G. B. Caird.

The End of the World and the Ends of God, edited by John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker.

The Last Days Are Here Again: A History of the End Times, by Richard Kyle.

3 Crucial Questions about the Last Days, by Daniel J. Lewis.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, (esp. §§668–682, 1020–1060).

* * *

*Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit,
as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.*

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A Note on Authority

This essay represents the author’s articulation of the Catholic understanding of the “last days,” drawing on Scripture, the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, the Church Fathers, and the broader theological tradition. It is offered as a personal presentation, not as an official statement of the Church’s teaching. Where it aligns with the magisterial teaching of the Church, the credit belongs to the tradition that formed it; where it falls short, the responsibility is the author’s alone.