

“*Ἀπαρτι*:<sup>1</sup> The Basis for a Non-Parousia Reading of Matthew 26:64?”  
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In the Gospel of Matthew there are eleven verses that speak of or imply a *future* “coming” of “the Son of Man.”<sup>2</sup> Since the rise of the historical-critical method of interpretation, scholars have divided themselves into two major camps: those who maintain that *all* of these Matthean texts refer to the Second Advent<sup>3</sup> and those who affirm that the Second Advent was envisioned in some *but not all* of these texts.<sup>4</sup>

Scholars of the second camp generally agree that the explicit or implied future “coming of the Son of Man” in 13:40-43, 19:28 and 24:37, 39, 44, 31 speaks of the Second Advent. However, these interpreters normally exempt 10:23, 16:27-28, 24:27, 30, and sometimes 26:64 from this meaning.

One can easily see why conservative Christian exegetes would resist a Second Advent interpretation for 10:23; 16:27-28, and 24:27, 30. These verses apparently delimit the “coming” of the “Son of Man” to sometime within the

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<sup>1</sup> I use *Ἀπαρτι* because in the early manuscripts the letters would have appeared so, leaving open the question of whether the Matthean evangelist intended *ἀπ’ ἄρτι* or *ἀπαρτί*.

<sup>2</sup> 10:23; 13:40-43; 16:27-28; 19:28; 24:27, 30, 37, 39, 44; 25:31; 26:64. Note that six of these verses appear in the eschatological discourse of chapters 24-25.

<sup>3</sup> Notables that belong to the first camp include W. C. Allen, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1912<sup>3</sup>); Alfred Plummer, *An Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Elliot Stock, 1909); Alan Hugh M’Neile, *The Gospel According to St. Matthew* (London: Macmillan, 1928); Adolf Schlatter, *Der Evangelist Matthäus* (Stuttgart: Calwer Verlag, 1963<sup>6</sup>); David Hill, *Gospel of Matthew* (NCB; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972); Joachim Gnilka, *Das Matthäusevangelium* (2 vols.; HTKNT; Freiburg: Herder, 1986, 1988); Robert Gundry, *Matthew: A Commentary on His Handbook for a Mixed Church under Persecution* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994<sup>2</sup>); W. D. Davies and Dale Allison, Jr., *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (ICC; 3 vols.; London: Bloomsbury, 1988-97); Ulrich Luz, *Matthew* (Hermeneia; trans. James Crouch; ed. Helmut Koester; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2001, 2005); John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NIGTC; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005).

I use “Second Advent” rather than *Parousia*, since some scholars (e.g., N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* [vol. 2 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God*; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996], 341-43) argue that the word *parousia* in Matt. 24 refers to a time other than the Second Advent, namely, the Roman destruction of Jerusalem and its temple.

<sup>4</sup> Leon Morris, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992); Craig L. Blomberg, *Matthew* (NAC, 22; Nashville: Broadman, 1992); Donald A. Hagner, *Matthew* (WBC, 33; 2 vols.; Dallas: Word Books, 1993, 1995); Craig Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); Ben Witherington, III, *Matthew* (SHBC; Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2006); R. T. France, *The Gospel of Matthew* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007). An obvious exception to this division into two camps is N. T. Wright, who argues that *none* of these eleven Matthean verses speak of the Last Advent (see the relevant discussions in his *Jesus and the Victory of God*).

generation contemporaneous with Jesus. Therefore, if the Gospel of Matthew is not in error, another meaning must be discovered.

More recently, R. T. France has advanced what might be called a “non-apologetic” argument that one of Matthew’s future coming of the Son of Man texts cannot refer to the Second Advent.<sup>5</sup> His case is based on the Greek phrase that prefaces Jesus’ prediction in 26:46: ἀπ’ ἄρτι = “from now on.” “From now on you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds of heaven.”<sup>6</sup> France then uses this observation to leverage his argument that the future “coming of the Son of Man” elsewhere in Matthew, in particular 10:23, 16:27-28, and 24:27, 30, need not refer to the Second Advent.

Ἀπ’ ἄρτι has long been noticed by scholars, but insofar as it is understood as a reference to a reality that begins with Jesus’ crucifixion or resurrection, it is usually connected *only* to “seeing” Jesus’ position at the right hand of God, *not* to his coming on the clouds.<sup>7</sup> The latter would occur at the Second Advent.

But according to France, in Matthew 26:64 Jesus’ sitting on the right hand of God and his coming on the clouds of heaven both refer the same reality—the sovereign position of the risen Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

France, along with a few others,<sup>9</sup> have sought to use the context of Dan. 7:13-14, the intertext for Jesus’ predictions about the future “coming of the Son of Man, as evidence that for Jesus and/or the synoptic evangelists “the coming” was not one from heaven to earth (as in the Second Advent) but a coming up to God, resulting in the enthronement and sovereignty of the Son of Man.

In the words of France,

“The coming of the Son of Man” is . . . not a description of a particular

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<sup>5</sup> France, *Matthew*, 1026-28.

<sup>6</sup> All quotations of the Bible come from the NRSV unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>7</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 545; Nolland, *Matthew*, 1131-32; Keener, *Matthew*, 650; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 531 (a possibility).

<sup>8</sup> France, *Matthew*, 396-98.

<sup>9</sup> E.g., T. F. Glasson, *The Second Advent: The Origin of the New Testament Doctrine* (London: Epworth Press, 1947<sup>2</sup>), 63-68; John A. T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming* (New York: Abingdon, 1957), 44-45; N. T. Wright, *Jesus*, 360-63; Thomas Hatina, “The Focus of Mark 13:24-27: The Parousia, or the Destruction of the Temple?” *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 6 (1996): 60-61.

historical event but evocative language to depict his eventual vindication and sovereign authority. As such it can be applied to different stages in the outworking of Jesus' mission. In 28:18 the echo of Dan 7:14 indicates that already immediately after his resurrection the Son of Man has received his kingly authority. In several passages the fulfillment of Daniel's vision is linked to a specific time-frame within the living generation: "some standing here will not taste death until they see . . ." (16:28); "this generation will not pass until . . ." (24:34); "from now on you will see . . ." (26:64). The fulfillment is apparently linked with the vindication and enthronement of Jesus after his resurrection; it is, to use Luke's terminology, ascension language. In 24:30, however, even though the time scale is limited to the living generation (v. 34), the context links the coming of the Son of Man to the latter part of that period, when the temple will be destroyed. But, on the other hand, the same Danielic imagery is applied in 19:28 to what appears to be a more ultimate situation, "the regeneration," when the Twelve will join Jesus in exercising authority over Israel, while in 25:31 it introduces what is generally taken to be a vision of the final judgment. It seems, then that the sovereign authority envisaged in Dan 7:13-14, first inaugurated when Jesus has risen from the dead, works itself out in successive phases throughout history until it finds its ultimate fulfillment in the last judgment.<sup>10</sup>

In this paper I do not propose to challenge France's thesis in its entirety, but to question his use of 26:64 to prove that in Matthew's eyes "the coming of the Son of Man" was fulfilled from the moment of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. I will argue, however, that there are other plausible interpretations of 26:64 that allow for "the coming of the Son of Man" in this verse to refer to the Second Advent.

For France's argument to hold at least two things must be true: 1) **απαρτι** must govern *both* participial phrases that modify τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου (καθήμενον ἐκ δεξιῶν τῆς δυνάμεως and ἐρχόμενον ἐπὶ τῶν νεφελῶν τοῦ οὐρανοῦ), and 2) **απαρτι** must mean "from this point in time forward." However, both of these positions are contestable.

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<sup>10</sup> France, *Matthew*, 396-97.

Let's begin with the second proposition, i.e., that **απαρτι** means "from this point in time forward." It is possible that **ἀπ' ἄρτι** is a later misunderstanding of the single word **ἀπαρτί**, glossed as "*completely . . . exactly, just*" by *LSJ*, but also as "certainly" by Bauer and by *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek*.<sup>11</sup> Albert Debrunner made a good case that the author of the Book of Revelation intended **ἀπαρτί** in 14:13 on the reasonable assumption that the common reading of P<sup>47</sup> and Sinaiticus is original: μακάριοι οἱ νεκροὶ οἱ ἐν κυρίῳ ἀποθνήσκοντες **απαρτι** [my emphasis] λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα ἵνα ἀναπαύσονται ἐκ τῶν κόπων αὐτῶν . . . .<sup>12</sup> If, however, **ἀπ' ἄρτι** is the correct construal, it must be attached to the participle ἀποθνήσκοντες. But if so, why is the blessing reserved for those who die "from this time forward"? On the other hand, **ἀπαρτί** as "certainly, assuredly" easily modifies the following λέγει τὸ πνεῦμα. In this case **ἀπαρτί** would be very similar to ἀμήν as used in Jesus' ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν. Does this, perhaps, help to account for the variant reading **απαρτι** λέγω ὑμῖν, attested by a bevy of witnesses, which introduces Jesus' prophecy to Nathanael in John 1:51?

Moreover, Albert Debrunner reasonably suggested that in John 13:19 an **ἀπαρτί** as "certainly" prior to λέγω ὑμῖν would parallel the ἀμήν ἀμην λέγω ὑμῖν of the following verse and would make better sense in the verse than **ἀπ' ἄρτι**.<sup>13</sup> Why would the Johannine Jesus say, only on the penultimate day of his earthly life, that *from that point on* he would tell the disciples what the future would bring so that they would believe in him when they saw the fulfillment?<sup>14</sup>

**Απαρτι** occurs three times in Matthew's Gospel with each occurrence peculiar to this Gospel. In the first two occurrences, 23:39 and 26:29, the context,

<sup>11</sup> H. G. Liddell and Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996<sup>9</sup>), 180; Walter Bauer et al., *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2000<sup>3</sup>), 97; Franco Montanari et al., *The Brill Dictionary of Ancient Greek* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), XXX.

<sup>12</sup> Albert Debrunner, "Über einige Lesarten der Chester Beatty Papyri des Neuen Testaments," *Coniectanea Neotestamentica* 11 (1947): 45-49.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 47-48.

<sup>14</sup> Prophecies of Jesus' glorification (death and resurrection) appear in 1:51; 2:19-22; 3:14-15; 8:28; 10:11-18; 11:50-51; 12:23-33; the coming of the Holy Spirit in 3:5-8, 34; 4:10-15; 7:37-39, Jesus' role in judgment and the resurrection of the dead in 5:19-29; 6:40, 44, 54, the ascension of Jesus to heaven in 6:62; prophecy of the betrayal of Jesus by a disciple in 6:70; 13:10-11, and Jesus' return to the Father in 7:33; 8:21. The NRSV attempts to evade the difficulty posed by **ἀπ' ἄρτι** by simply translating it as "now," in contrast the future fulfillment of prophecies.

where **απαρτι** is followed by ἕως, demands that we read ἀπ' ἄρτι as two words. It is naturally tempting to read 26:64 in the same way. It should, however, be noted that there are two differences between the first two Matthean occurrences and the third. In the third reference, 26:64, **απαρτι** is not followed by ἕως, and the word in question precedes the verb rather than follows it. Thus, it is conceivable that Matthew 26:64 joins Revelation 14:13 and John 13:19 as instances where the authors intended ἀπαρτί with the meaning “certainly, assuredly, truly.”<sup>15</sup>

But suppose Matthew's **απαρτι** should, after all, be read as ἀπ' ἄρτι.<sup>16</sup> In that case, must ἀπ' ἄρτι govern both of the participial phrases that follow? If this were true, one would have expected the phrases to have appeared in the opposite order. If Jesus' words are closely controlled by Dan. 7:13-14, as France alleges, one must note that in Daniel the Son of Man comes, with the clouds of heaven, up to the Ancient of Days in order to be given kingship. Thus, if France is correct, it would have been much more felicitous for Jesus to have promised that his hearers would henceforth see him, as the Son of Man, coming with the clouds and then sitting enthroned at the right hand of God. France acknowledges the apparent problem of the order of the participles, but dismisses it by claiming that “there is no temporal sequence between the two clauses, but that each describes in different imagery the state of sharing God's authority.” But this objection rings hollow when it is France himself who has insisted on the importance of Dan. 7:13-14 for determining the Gospel usage for “the coming of the Son of Man with the clouds of heaven.” In Dan. the Son of Man ascends to the Ancient of Days, where he is then given kingship. The temporal sequence is clear!

If **απαρτι** in Matthew 26:64 means “from this time forward” it is possible that this phrase applies to the first participial phrase, but not to the second. In this case, Jesus would have been promising that from the resurrection onward those with the eyes to see would *discern* that he was enthroned at the right hand of God (*a la* Psa. 110:1) and that eventually they would *see*, literally, the Son of Man coming to earth with the clouds.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Favored by Maurice Casey, *Son of Man: The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979), 183-84.

<sup>16</sup> According to Luz, *Matthew*, 3:430, n. 39, “Origen *Comm. Ser. Matt.* 111 . . . ; Euthymius Zigabenus, 698, and a large portion of the Greek interpreters relate the “seeing” to the present. They will “see” when the exalted Christ comes to his people as the Logos and leads them to knowledge. In the Western interpretation v. 46b usually is understood as the parousia of Christ the World Judge.”

<sup>17</sup> Gundry, *Matthew*, 545.

However, Wolfgang Trilling has well articulated a different construal of 26:64 with the reading ἄπ' ἄρτι.<sup>18</sup> As observed above, there are two other texts where Matthew uses ἄπ' ἄρτι.<sup>19</sup> In the former, 23:39, Jesus promises the inhabitants of Jerusalem: "You will absolutely not see me again until you say, 'Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.'"<sup>20</sup> In the latter, 26:29, Jesus makes another promise: "I will never again drink of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom" (NRSV). In both cases ἄπ' ἄρτι distinguishes between the past and the near advent of the eschaton.<sup>21</sup> Perhaps 26:64 is to be read along the same lines. As Trilling pointed out, "Die Einleitungsphrase "ich aber sage euch" haben . . . alle drei Stellen gemein. Die beiden Stellen 23,39 und 26, 64 sind ferner verwandt in dem Bezug auf die Gegner und dem Hinweis auf den kommenden Menschensohn."<sup>22</sup> One should also note that in both texts Jesus promises that certain unbelievers will eventually "see" the Son of Man.

Trilling's observations yield an interpretation of 26:64 that goes as follows: presently the Jewish court sees Jesus as a disgraced and condemned messianic pretender. But as such they will see him no longer. From the moment of his trial and death forward, they will see him (only) as the Messiah coming from heaven on his throne-chariot,<sup>23</sup> or at least coming in the glory that would imply his enthroned status.<sup>24</sup> The Second Advent will thus make the

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<sup>18</sup> Wolfgang Trilling, *Das Wahre Israel: Studien zur Theologie des Matthäus-Evangelium* (SANT, 10; Munich: Kösel-Verlag, 1964), 86-87, cited approvingly by G. R. Beasley-Murray, *Jesus and the Coming of the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 302-303.

<sup>19</sup> All three are unique to Matthew.

<sup>20</sup> My translation.

<sup>21</sup> Trilling, *Wahre Israel*, 86-87: "Ἄπ' ἄρτι, das für Matthäus genau so bezeichnend ist wie ἀπὸ τοῦ νῦν für Lukas, dient an der wichtigen Stelle 26, 29 zur Markierung eines Zeitpunktes, der die beiden Situationen von "jetzt" und "einst" trennt. In allem drei Fällen (23,39; 26, 29. 64) bildet ἄρτι eine Scheidewand nach rückwärts. Nach vorwärts kommt nur noch eine "neue," stets die eschatologische Situation in Frage, die in 26, 29 und 26, 64 eindeutig umschreiben ist als das neue Essen vom Weinstock und the Ankunft des Menschensohnes.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>23</sup> On the throne-chariot as a possible way of construing the connection between "sitting" and "coming" see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:530. Luz (*Matthew*, 3:429, n. 3) also thinks this option is possible.

<sup>24</sup> Trilling, *Wahre Israel*, 86-87. A possible alternative meaning of ἄπ' ἄρτι would be "in the future" (cf. "hereafter" in the KV); David M. Hay, *Glory at the Right Hand: Psalm 110 in Early Christianity* [SBLMS, 18; Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973], 68; Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:530). One might point to Matt. 23:39, where Jesus says that Jerusalem will not see him ἄπ' ἄρτι until it greets him as the one coming in the name of the Lord. A more general "in the future" works better here than would "from this point in time forward" since the people of Jerusalem did see Jesus on Maundy Thursday and Good Friday.

enthronement of Jesus visible.<sup>25</sup> This interpretation makes sense of the order of the two participles in 26:64, “sitting,” and “coming.” The first thing that Jesus’ hearers would notice would be his exalted position; his coming would be secondary.

Jesus’ promise that his hearers would *see* the Son of Man may well be rooted in Zechariah’s promise in 12:10 that the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem would *look on* the one they pierced. In fact, John the Divine brings Zech. 12:10 and Dan. 7:13 together in Rev. 1:7: “Look! He is coming with the clouds; every eye will see him, even those who pierced him; and on his account all the tribes of earth will wail.”<sup>26</sup> This expectation that the Second Advent would be visible lends credence to the foregoing interpretation of Matt. 26:64, according to which Jesus expected the members of the Jewish court to see him *visibly* when coming with the clouds. Understood in this manner, 26:64 would be essentially a repetition of the similar promise that Jesus made to recalcitrant Jerusalem in 23:39 as he left the temple: “For I tell you, you will not see me again [ἀπ’ ὄρατι] until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’”<sup>27</sup>

## Conclusion

France’s interpretation of Matt. 26:64 is only one of at least four plausible understandings of this *textus criticus*. Its most obvious shortcoming is its failure to account adequately for the order of the two participial clauses: “sitting” and “coming.” His hypothesis that “coming on the clouds of heaven” is to be closely defined against its Danielic background provides no

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<sup>25</sup>Hay, *Glory*, 66, 68. Commenting of Mark 14:62, Hay says: “14:62 describes not the enthronement of the son of man but the revelation of him as enthroned. The *kathemenon* indicates not the beginning of the SESSION but its continuance. When Jesus comes on the clouds he will the authority and might of the one sitting at God’s right hand. Probably, then, Mark concurred in the general opinion that Jesus sat down beside God with, or directly after, his resurrection. The evangelist’s interest, however, was concentrated on the parousia revelation, when Jesus’ claims will be proven true.” With respect to Matt. 26:64, Hay writes, “Matthew retains the orientation to the parousia despite the introduction of *ap’ arti*. . . . The phrase seems to be inserted to bring out the contrast between Jesus’ abasement and his parousia glory; the former condition is about to end.”

<sup>26</sup> It is striking that in Matt. 24:30, Dan. 7:13 and Zech. 12:10-14 are also linked. This makes it very likely that the ὄψεσθε of Matt. 26:64 derives from Zech. 12:10 according to which disobedient Jerusalem would “look upon” the one they pierced. The noticeable use of ὄραω in Rev. 1:7 and in Matt. 24:30 rather than the ἐπιβλέπω of Zechariah LXX and the other Greek versions can be explained either by the seer’s dependence, directly or indirectly, on Matthew, or both may be dependent on an older Christian exegetical tradition (see Davies and Allison, *Matthew*, 3:360, who opt for the latter).

<sup>27</sup>Schlatter, *Matthäus*, 760.

satisfactory explanation as to why “sitting” should precede “coming.” There is also another fact that weakens his argument that in Matthew the “coming on the clouds” of the Son of Man is an ascent to God and therefore shorthand for the sovereignty of the enthroned Messiah. France must admit that even in Matthew, the “coming of the Son of Man” sometimes refers to his coming to earth in the Second Advent, as is the case in 24:37, 39, 44; 25:13, and, of course, 25:31.<sup>28</sup> In these cases the “coming of the Son of Man” cannot be simply a reference to Jesus’ royal sovereignty, but must refer to the event of Jesus’ coming from heaven to earth to judge the world. Finally, France’s view would seem to require that Caiaphas and his fellow judges saw Jesus’ sovereign position from the time of his resurrection forward. Of course, they did not.

Of the remaining options, I would list them in the following order of probability:

1. **Απαρτι** should be read as ἀπ’ ὄρτι, meaning that Jesus’ adversaries would no longer see him as he was before them, but that the next time they would see him, he would be the enthroned Messiah coming to judge them. This view is sensitive to the previous two uses of ἀπ’ ὄρτι in Matthew,<sup>29</sup> explains the order of “sitting” and “coming,” allows the word “see” to have the same meaning when applied to both “sitting” and “coming,” allows “see” to refer to literal sight, which is most likely, and takes into account that Jesus’ words were directed to the High Priest and his cohorts.
2. **Απαρτι** should be read as ἀπ’ ὄρτι, meaning that from the resurrection of Jesus forward Jesus’ hearers would see evidence of Jesus’ glorious enthronement, and that eventually, in the Second Advent, they would literally see him coming to judge the earth. While possible, this view is hampered by having to limit ἀπ’ ὄρτι to the first participle, “sitting,” by requiring that “see” be used with different

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<sup>28</sup> The Second Advent is also described as a “coming” in Matt. 23:39, though France (*Matthew*, 884-85) attempts to argue that Jesus’ words mean that the people of Jerusalem will not see Jesus again *unless* they soon welcome him as the Messiah. But, of course, as France admits, they do see him later; therefore, “see” must mean “see Jesus as the Messiah,” thus making a tautology out of Jesus’ promise.

<sup>29</sup> Particularly 23:39, in which Jesus promises that those who rejected him then, would eventually *see* him *coming* in a manner would reveal the truth about Jesus’ identity.



meanings, and by ignoring the fact that Jesus' audience consisted of the High Priest and the Sanhedrin, who never recognized Jesus' enthronement.

3. **Ἀπαρτι** should be construed as **ἀπαρτί**, thus affirming the certainty of Jesus' promise to be seen "sitting" and "coming." While conceivable, the combination of no unequivocal usages of **ἀπαρτί** in Matthew (or the entire NT for that matter) and two clear Matthean uses of **ἀπ' ἄρτι** in the passion narrative weakens the case for this option.

It is difficult to weigh the probability of France's interpretation against the foregoing alternatives, but for my purposes, it is unnecessary. I want to make a more modest claim, i.e., that France's construction falls short of demonstrating that Matthew 26:64 fails to refer to the Second Advent.

One's judgment regarding the meaning of 26:64 will be heavily conditioned by one's exegesis of all of the other Matthean texts that speak of a future coming of the Son of Man. Those who are inclined to accept France's argument will appeal to other "coming of the Son of Man" texts in Matthew that cannot *seem* to accommodate a reference to the Second Advent. Above all, the texts in question are 10:23, 16:27-28, and 24:27, 30. There are, however, good exegetical reasons to question France's interpretation of these texts, especially the latter two. But such an argument will have to be mounted at a later time.