

The Personal Return of Christ (commonly called "The Second Coming")

General Comments (Shepherd)

- 1] what the expression doesn't mean: that JC is now absent but will return (shortly).
- 2] "second coming" is used nowhere in S.; but what it refers to is spoken of in S.
- 3] many other expressions are used in S.: e.g., "the Day of the Lord", "his coming", etc.
- 4] the *parousia* is one of four major building blocks in the NT.

To understand the significance of the *parousia* we must understand the significance of our Lord's earthly ministry.

Why did he come? Most succinctly 1 John 3:8: "...to destroy the works of the devil."

Consider his mighty deeds. Ultimately in him a new *creation* has appeared. However, it is possible to deny all this. Still, Xns insist that in his resurrection the kingdom has come and the Messianic age has dawned. Then the king and his kingdom must be made manifest unambiguously. Everyone will then have to acknowledge (not necessarily love and adore) him. His final, full manifestation will be incontrovertible and therefore indisputable.

During his earthly ministry JC was present as the sole representative of a new humanity, a renewed human race. Following his R'n he was present among his disciples in his Spirit. Here he called us to himself so that we might share in his new being and become agents of its spread. On "the Day" he will stand forth as the centre of a human community to which all his people belong. This community, the "demonstration project" that he launched in Palestine, will crown the new creation.

What do Christians do in the meantime? Never sleeping, we must "wait" (without waiting around, loitering) and we must "watch". As watchers

- 1] we are free to spend ourselves for others, since we don't have to preserve ourselves.
- 2] we uphold righteousness even though the world laughs at us who discipleship before "getting ahead."
- 3] we find our daily obedience to JC and his way confirmed as all other pseudopaths end in swamp or desert.
- 4] we wait to see the self-sacrificed One vindicated, knowing that *our* sacrifices he will render fruitful.
- 5] we uphold the church's proclamation patiently, trustingly, joyfully.
- 6] we encourage fellow-watchers and warn of the dangers of sleep-walking.

Then why the delay? To give people opportunity to repent!

Early-day Xns were (i) aware that JC is always in their midst and has never left them
(ii) continued to cry, "Come, Lord Jesus."

(CURRENT ISSUES IN ESCHATOLOGY)

- 1] Albert Schweitzer (p174): Jesus was an apocalyptic figure, albeit mistaken. In the wake of the kingdom's delay Xns exercise an "interim ethic." (Where do you think Schweitzer was wrong and where right?)
- 2] C.H. Dodd: "realized eschatology".
- 3] Ernst Kaesemann: the early church was apocalyptically oriented.
- 4] George Eldon Ladd (p176): eschatology is more than "realized": there remains a strong, *characteristic*, future orientation. The kingdom, fulfilled in history, must be consummated at the end of history.

Note: do not confuse eschatology with futurology.

(THE SECOND ADVENT) (p180)

D-Day: the decisive break-through occurred, even as fighting continues.

V-Day: the war is over.

p181. Note that both the righteous and the unrighteous face judgement: for the former, acquittal has already been pronounced.

(THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD)

Resurrection is not the same as resuscitation.

What is meant by "resurrection of the body"?

What is the form of Christ's risen body?

Remember: there is no inherent "immortality of the soul": in S. death means annihilation.

(THE MILLENNIUM)

Note (Shepherd) [1] Revelation is the only NT book to speak of the "thousand years", and it appears to do nothing with it.

[2] The reference means at least that the powers of evil are resilient.

[3] Augustine and others in the western church: the "thousand years" are all the years of the Christian era (from incarnation to parousia.)

Pre-millennialism: the appearance of Christ inaugurates the 1000-year reign.

Pre-M stresses the imminence of the second coming, and the undisputed reign of Christ *within* history. I.e., the kingdom of God is yet to come. This view has frequently been linked with dispensationalism.

A-millennialism: Satan has already been defeated and needs only to be destroyed. The kingdom of God *has* come. The appearance of Christ renders the "1000 years" a symbol of the new heaven and new earth, transfigured.

Post-Millennialism: there will be a golden age for the church and for preaching to all the nations prior to the end. Christ's promises will be fulfilled in history. (Pre-Ms and A-Ms maintain that these promises will be fulfilled "in" history *as history gives way to that fulfillment that lifts history to a new plane.*) Post-Mn flourished in the 17th and 18th centuries in Pietism and Puritanism. It supported huge developments in evangelism and world mission.

Characteristic Strengths and Weaknesses:

1] Pre-M Strengths

- : some of God's promises at least will be fulfilled on earth within history.
- : Israel will be vindicated.
- : it keeps vivid the daily anticipation of the Day.

Pre-M Weaknesses

- : the kingdom of God is an intensified form of earthly kingdoms. (e.g., USA)
- : it has fostered anti-intellectualism and "quick fix" holiness.
- : it separates Christ's appearing from the last judgement.
- : it places the glorification of the church before the appearing of Christ.
- : its dispensationalism elevates Israel as a political entity.

2] Post-M Strengths

- : it highlights Christ's victory over Satan, therein fostering mission.
- : it emphasizes the perdurability of the church.
- : it emphasizes the people of God as a vast throng from every tribe and tongue (the ultimate reversal of Babel.)
- : it insists the world belongs to Christ and therefore should be claimed for Christ.

Post-M Weaknesses

- : is it naïve concerning the virulence of the evil that remains?
- : does it view the spread of the kingdom organically?
- : does it undervalue the apocalyptic dimension of the eschatological?
- : does it overlook the NT insistence that *all* Xns are kings, priest and martyrs *simultaneously*?

3] A-M Strengths

- : it sees the *parousia* in its multi-dimensionality as one event.
- : it stresses the reality of Christ's victory *now* (at least in principle) or what's the point of his r'n.

A-M Weaknesses

- : it tends to identify the reign of Christ with the church (forgetting that the church is sin-riddled and compromised by evil. Recall Augustine, where the church is the kingdom of God.)

- Xns : it undervalues the triumph of JC in *this* world (often in practice), thereby paralyzing for this world.
- : it tends to conflate "1st" and "2nd" comings of Christ, thereby claiming for his R'n what can properly be claimed only for the *parousia*.
- (Shepherd notes: [1] the Corinthian church made just this mistake
[2] there is an exceedingly fine balance between acknowledging Christ's victory in his R'n and recognizing that the final manifestation of that victory awaits us.

p197. Bl. rightly points out that the churches of the Reformation have never recovered the eschatological consciousness of the NT church. [The non-mainline churches, even the sects, are then left attempting to restore the deficit.]

What Are We To Make of All This? (Shepherd)

- 1] Bl. is surely correct: "wherever the gospel is proclaimed the utter defeat of Satan is further revealed and confirmed." Therefore we must *always* proclaim and *embody* the gospel. (Embodying it is more difficult -- because more costly -- than proclaiming it.)
- 2] Wherever the kingdom becomes more manifest we can expect intensified opposition.
- 3] We must never view our work in Christ's name as hopeless (a temptation since our work can't render the world the kingdom of God) and we must never view our work as superfluous (since the world is destined to become the "kingdom of our God and of his Christ."
- 4] Christ's people, whether few or many (God isn't an arithmetician) will be vindicated.
- 5] the visible church will remain a *corpus mixtum* until the End.
- 6] until the End we must never abandon the world.

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