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The Necessity for the Parousia

BY THE REV. FREDERICK A. M. SPENCER, M.A., D.D.

WE may confirm our hope for a manifestation of Jesus Christ on the earth in visible glory in a not very distant future, to some extent independently of the predictions attributed to Him in the Gospel records. Let us begin by considering the reason for His visible appearance in His intervention in human affairs from which the Christian religion originated. Why was it necessary for Him to enter the world as an infant, to grow up through childhood into maturity, and then as an adult man to proclaim the advent of the Kingdom of God and the offer of eternal life, together with the conditions for entering into and receiving the same, and afterwards to undergo the sacrifice whereby He has enabled men to fulfil these conditions? Would it have been equally effective if He had done all this while remaining in Heaven, veiled from human sight, announcing the Gospel through the mouths of prophets, at the same time commending and certifying it by such supernatural works of mercy—healing the sick and infirm and feeding the hungry and delivering from sin—as He wrought in visible presence, and then to have undergone the Passion and achieved the Resurrection in some supra-mundane order, causing these also to be made known verbally through inspired agents? Very obviously such would not have excited and gripped and impressed people as did His speaking and doing and undergoing and accomplishing all this in their sight and hearing, and even touch, as when He embraced little children and laid His hand on those whom He healed—a real live, embodied, human personality, moving about among the folk of His country and period, conversing with them, showing His feelings by the expression of His face and the tone of His voice, His gestures and movements—a familiar and even homely figure. Certainly it was to a comparatively few of the world's inhabitants that He was thus physically apparent, and for but a brief portion of His incarnate lifetime, in His claim to speak and act for God, and, we may gather, only to disciples or, to a very select company of would-be disciples, as the Risen Son of God. (St. Paul mentions an appearance “to above five hundred brethren at once”.) But the substance of what He said and did, and how He was received and treated both well and ill, and His brief manifestation as Victor over death, was written down in clear and forcible and appealing language, so as to constitute the authoritative record whereby His representatives on earth, after His departure, have been able to win, in generation after generation, great multitudes to belief in and adoration of Him, and obedience and devotion to Him ever since. Will not, then, another manifest appearance of the world's Redeemer and Lord—a manifestation openly in the sight of all the people on earth, and moreover in heavenly power and glory—be needed for the fulfilment of His mission of drawing all men to Himself for their salvation and perfecting as His brethren and the children of their all-loving Creator and Father?

Yet before this there has had to be an interval in which He has not been visible to people on earth—except for a few very brief appearances to saints and certain privileged individuals called to be saints—to permit of the due conditions of humanity as a whole to receive Him to the best advantage. First, His intimate disciples and their successors had to be made capable of preparing the bulk of mankind for His future infinitely greater manifestation, and thereafter of assisting Him in governing and winning them to acceptance of Him. As He is reported to have said, “It is expedient for you that I go away; for if I go not away, the Comforter (Helper) will not come unto you. But if I depart, I will send Him unto you.” We may interpret this to mean that the continuance of His visible presence among them would have retarded rather than forwarded their spiritual development. For if they had had Him always at hand to consult in perplexities, to direct and to warn and to encourage, they would have been less impelled to seek strength and guidance through spiritual communion with Him and the Father, Who, as He said, “shall give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him”. (A very imperfect analogy would be that of children not gaining the full benefit of what their parents have taught them and the love they have shown them, until they are out in the world.) But besides this, we may reverently suppose that the Son of God had in mind that He Himself would, in His resumed heavenly status, have power to bestow the Spirit in greater measure, agreeably to what St. Peter declared at Pentecost: “Being therefore by the right hand of God exalted, He hath poured forth this which ye see and hear”. And all this applies to the protagonists of the Kingdom of God on earth in the centuries that have followed, and indeed to the Church as a whole, the growing company of those who have believed unto salvation; for, as He said, “Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed”.

Secondly, mankind in general had to be schooled for readiness for the appearance to and among them of their Saviour and King, as is to be inferred from His own definite statement: “This Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the inhabited earth for a testimony to all the nations; and then shall the end come”. We may venture to imagine how He would have been received if He had gone about among the neighbouring peoples proclaiming the Kingdom of God and healing the sick and infirm, as He had in Israel previously. Might He not have been welcomed like as were Barnabas and Paul by the simple-minded folk of Lystra after their cure of the man crippled from birth, proclaiming them Zeus and Hermes (the head of the Hellenic pantheon and his chief messenger) and hastening to array them with garlands of flowers and to sacrifice oxen in their honour? Or supposing that He had made a world-wide manifestation in supernatural radiance, how terror-struck would have been the even more superstitious multitudes of primitive barbarism, and with what fantastic and even horrible rites might they have attempted to propitiate Him! The little nation of Israel had to undergo a long-drawn-out education, by means of a succession of prophets and harrowing experiences, ingraining a strictly monotheistic world-view with corresponding forms of worship and moral code, so as to be fit for the sojourn under human limitations of

the Redeemer of the world in its midst. And, even so, the immediate result was to Him bitterly disappointing, as He showed when He exclaimed, "Alas for thee, Chorazin! Alas for thee, Bethsaida!"—and "Thou, Capernaum, shalt thou be exalted unto Heaven? Thou shalt be thrust down into Hades." Nevertheless this preparation was sufficient to enable Him to gather a select company—the "called-out", against which "the gates of Hades will not prevail"—to be commissioned with the tremendous responsibility of conditioning the whole of mankind, with its manifold racial and national components, for His no less human but far more patently Divine presence, still the Son of Man but more manifestly Son of God. As the Hebrew scriptures served for preparing the nation of Israel for His coming under earthly limitations, so the Christian scriptures, especially the record of what He then said and did and underwent and accomplished, have been ordained and are being used by the Church which He established for preparing the whole human race for His approaching heavenly coming, so that He may fulfil the mission appointed Him, the universal salvation and perfecting of the mortal children of men to be the immortal children of His Father. This greater preparation for the second and greater manifestation has already exceeded the former in temporal duration, as indeed might have been expected. But are there not even now signs that it is nearing its completion?

We come back to the question, "What constitutes the necessity for the return of Jesus Christ to be present again on the earth, but universally visible and more manifestly of Heaven?" For why should not the authentic record of His previous coming and sojourn in the world of men, whereby through the agency of His appointed emissaries and the operation of the Holy Spirit, many millions have already been won to faith in Him and consequent salvation and rebirth for eternal life, suffice in due course for the regeneration of the totality of the human race? Granted that we should expect the Christ to manifest Himself when this has been completed, in order to transfer humanity to some super-earthly state and region in Heaven, why should He have to appear beforehand?

The answer to this may be presented under several headings. First, the record of His career on earth, vivid and stirring though it be, and repeatedly told and expounded by enthusiastic evangelists and pastors, has so far been inadequate to effect in the majority of mankind their conversion and acceptance of the proffered deliverance and blessed life, and there appears little prospect of its so doing in any foreseeable future. For along with the more competent presentation of the Christian message by scholars and theologians and the ardent appeals of preachers, there have arisen exponents of a materialistic and crudely humanistic world-view, attempting to discredit the Gospel narrative and its religious significance and bearing on life generally; and the worldly and carnally-minded, alarmed at the challenge of the Christian faith to their manner of living, are apt to seize on the excuse offered on alleged scientific and rational grounds for disregarding religion in general and Christianity in particular as discredited and obsolete superstition. And though not only morally reformed lives, but also marvellous cures of otherwise intractable ailments and infirmities,

occasionally follow on Christian belief and prayer, resort may be had to psychological explanations, and even to "psychical" or "occult" conjectures among those inclined that way. And secondly, with the passage of centuries and the impending elaboration of scientifically implemented civilization, would not the Gospel story, as it recedes into an ever remoter primitive past, come to seem more and more irrelevant to the prevailing secular concerns and plans for further progress? And thirdly, there appears a fair prospect that before many more decades have elapsed the Gospel will indeed have been preached to all the nations of the earth, and if "the end", comprising the return of the Son of Man in glory, has not then come, as He predicted that it would, this would be taken as a conclusive argument that Christ was mistaken, and even that the Christian Gospel as a whole is a delusion. And fourthly, we have no justification for ignoring what Jesus taught about the evil growths of satanic origin intermixed with the good growths implanted by Himself, the tares among the wheat, or His sundry warnings against the supreme Devil and his demonic assistants—in the Apostle's phrase, "the spiritual agencies of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. vi. 12)—which will not be eradicated or overpowered until He shall intervene mightily to save life on the earth from wholesale destruction. And lastly, it is surely inconceivable that the Saviour would defer His manifest return to the bewildered and tormented human race until, after many more centuries of agonizing trials and vicissitudes, including not only the brief final "great tribulation" that He foretold, it should have attained to the peace and fraternity and the knowledge of God to which it is destined. How could the all-loving and all-powerful Creator permit such a needless protraction of the travail of His offspring? Rather will He send His Son to take charge of the world in visible presence so soon as ever the conditions permit of this decisive intervention. And these conditions are, in the main, as we have seen, twofold: first, that all the nations of the world shall have had the Gospel of the Kingdom of God clearly and forcibly presented to them, together with what the Son of God offers and also requires for their participation therein; secondly, that there will be a sufficiency of His disciples, trained through communion with Him and service under Him, so as to be capable of assisting Him with the government of the world and the eventual drawing of all men to Him for the salvation which opens the way to eternal life. Then "He that cometh shall come, and will not tarry" (Heb. x. 37).

All this points us to the assured hope of beholding Jesus coming upon the earth while mankind is still in a distressed and far from redeemed condition—indeed at a juncture when evil shall have become most powerful and menacing—first in order to deliver and then to lead on to the destined perfection. Consequently, as He repeatedly declared, He will judge, accepting some for more or less close association with Him, and rejecting and bidding others to depart for further probation. And both those accepted and those rejected will, it is evident from the record of His words, see Him and even hear Him. And again, more widely, "Then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of Heaven with great power and glory". And, more precisely, as an early disciple

wrote, " We shall see Him even as He is " (1 John iii. 2)—both human and of the Godhead. And as (probably) another was inspired to declare, yet more emphatically of His universal manifestation, " Every eye shall see Him, even they who pierced Him ; and all the tribes of the earth shall mourn because of Him. Even so, truly ! " (Rev. i. 7). Surely this means a beholding with the eyes of the flesh, since the majority of mankind will still be too carnally bemused for spiritual vision, not to mention those who participated in His crucifixion. A few will, we may conjecture, be privileged actually to feel Him, as when He aforetime laid hands on the ailing for their healing, or touched His three most intimate followers after His first—very fleeting—revelation in heavenly radiance, to rouse and assure (Matt. xvii. 7).

A great crisis in the world appears to be developing, about to involve the whole human race, with vast potencies for ill and also for good, for death and also for greater life. Have we then very long to wait before we really see Him Who alone has authority to determine the issue of this crisis for the supreme good which the Creator and Father, of His all-embracing love, has ordained and will accomplish? For, as His Son has assured us, " With God all things are possible ".

The Baptismal Relevance of Mark x. 13ff

BY THE REV. J. A. MOTYER, M.A., B.D.

IN *Baptism in the New Testament* (p. 28) Oscar Cullman quotes the following words of Leenhardt : " It is customary to cite, as Biblical foundation for Infant Baptism, New Testament texts which do not speak of Baptism at all, while the New Testament texts which do speak of Baptism do not apply to Infant Baptism ". This charge, if proved, is, of course, extremely serious. At any rate, it is a peculiarly appropriate introduction to a study of Mark x. 13ff., which Leenhardt may have had in mind, for it is a passage which, though not mentioning Baptism, is yet widely used in Baptismal connections. Thus, for example, Article 27 of the Thirty-nine Articles of the Church of England declares that " the baptism of young children is in any wise to be retained in the Church, as most agreeable with the Institution of Christ ", and, as if in support of this claim, Mark x. 13ff. is the set Scripture for the service of " The Public Baptism of Infants ", wherein it is followed by an exposition relating it directly to the occasion.

How far can Mark x. 13ff. bear a weight of Baptismal Theology ?

A SURVEY OF THE PASSAGE

St. Mark tells us that the candidates for blessing were *παιδια* ; and in the parallel passage, Luke xviii. 15, the word *βρεφη* is used. The usage of these words is given by Grimm Thayer as follows : *παιδιον* is used of an infant just born (John xvi. 21) ; also of a child recently born (Matt. ii. 8 ; Luke i. 59, etc.) ; and also of a mature child (Mark ix. 24)—this last being its most extensive category. *βρεφος* is more