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## THE PAROUSIA AS REVEALED IN THE GOSPELS

### I

“ I believe in one God, the Father Almighty. . . . And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God. . . . And He shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: Whose kingdom shall have no end. . . . And I look for the Resurrection of the dead, And the life of the world to come.”  
Amen.

*The Nicene Creed.*

THE historic Creeds of the Church bear witness to the universal belief of the Christian community in a future Parousia or Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. This belief is an integral part of the Christian faith. It is based on the testimony of Scripture itself. Before dealing with the teaching of the Gospels on the subject of the Parousia, it is proposed to give the main expressions used in the New Testament to describe this event.

The most common term is Parousia (*παρουσία*), which is translated in both the Authorised Version and the Revised Version as “ coming ”. The marginal reading in the Revised Version gives the literal meaning “ presence ”. The term invariably describes the arrival of some important individual in person. It refers to the actual presence of a person as opposed to his absence. St. Paul comments on the joy and consolation he experienced at the arrival of Titus.

“ Nevertheless he that comforteth the lowly, even God, comforted us by the *coming* (R.V.m. “ presence ”) of Titus; and not by his *coming* only, but also by the comfort wherewith he was comforted in you . . . ” (2 Cor. vii. 6-7).

When dealing with matters of eschatology, the Biblical writers use the term “ parousia ” to denote the coming of Christ in glory at the end of the age. It is applied technically to His Advent with power. St. Paul, praying for his converts, wrote:

“ May your spirit and soul and body be preserved entire, without blame, at the *coming* (parousia) of our Lord Jesus Christ ” (1 Thess. v. 23).

Similarly St. John refers to the “ parousia ” as an incentive to holy living, and writing to his spiritual children he says:

“And now, my little children, abide in Him; that, if He shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before Him at His *coming* (parousia)” (1 John ii. 28).<sup>1</sup>

In contemporary writings the word is used in reference to the arrival of royal people with stately pomp. Dr. G. A. Deissmann gives us a wealth of information about its contemporary use. He says:

“From the Ptolemaic period down to the second century A.D., we are able to trace the word in the East as a technical expression for the arrival of the visit of the King or Emperor. . . . The parousia of the sovereign must have been something well-known even to the people, as is shown by the fact that special payments in kind and taxes to defray the cost of the parousia were enacted. . . .

“The subject of the parousia dues and taxes in Egypt has been treated in detail by Wilcken. The oldest passage he mentions is in the Flinders Petri Papyrus II, 39e, of the third century B.C.; where, according to his ingenious interpretation, contributions are noted for a crown of gold to be presented to the King at his parousia: ‘For another crown on the occasion of the parousia, 12 artabae.’ This papyrus supplies an exceptionally fine background of contrast to the figurative language of St. Paul, in which ‘parousia,’ and ‘crown’ occur in collocation. While the sovereigns of this world expect at their parousia a costly crown for themselves, ‘at the parousia of our Lord Jesus,’ the Apostle will wear a crown—‘the crown of glory’ (1 Thess. ii. 19), won by his work among the Churches, or ‘the crown of righteousness’ which the Lord will give to him and to all them that have loved His appearing (2 Tim. iv. 8).”<sup>2</sup>

Another term, which is synonymous, is “apokalupsis” (ἀποκάλυψις)—“manifestation”. But the expression “apokalupsis” emphasizes more strongly the divine significance of the Coming. It always implies a supernatural disclosure, whether inward or outward.<sup>3</sup> It is a striking fact that St. Paul uses the term “apokalupsis” to describe the extraordinary manifestation of Jesus Christ to himself at his conversion.

“For neither did I receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came to me through revelation (δι’ ἀποκαλύψεως) of Jesus Christ” (Gal. i. 12).

When used with specific reference to the future manifestation, it denotes the revelation of Jesus Christ Himself in His majesty as Judge and Rewarder.<sup>4</sup> Our Lord used it in a judicial sense when He spoke of the day when the Son of Man would be revealed.

“In the day that Lot went out from Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all: after the same manner shall it be in the day that the Son of Man is revealed (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἀποκαλύπτεται)” (Luke xvii. 29-30).<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> cf. 1 Cor. xv. 23; 1 Thess. ii. 19, iii. 13, iv. 15, v. 2; 2 Thess. i. 7, ii. 1, ii. 8; Matt. xxiv. 3; 2 Pet. i. 16; Jas. v. v. 7; 1 John ii. 28.

<sup>2</sup> Deissmann, G. A., *Light From the Ancient East*.

<sup>3</sup> Findlay, G. G., *The Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to the Thessalonians*. (Cam. Univ. Press), p. 146.

<sup>4</sup> Bigg, C., *The Epistles of St. Peter and St. Jude* (I.C.C.), p. 100f.

<sup>5</sup> cf. 1 Cor. i. 7; 2 Thess. i. 7; 1 Pet. i. 7, iv. 13.

Thus the "apokalupsis" is a transcendent, supernatural, and divine event, which will take place when Christ appears in His power and glory.

In the Pastoral Epistles and in the Second Epistle to the Thessalonians, St. Paul uses another term—"epiphania" (ἐπιφάνεια)—"appearing". This term denotes a signal, often a sudden appearance, the coming into sight of that which was previously hidden.<sup>1</sup> This word is used in conjunction with the word "Parousia".

"And then shall be revealed the lawless one, whom the Lord Jesus shall slay with the breath of His mouth, and bring to nought by the manifestation of His coming (τῆ ἐπιφάνειᾳ τῆς παρουσίας αὐτοῦ)" (2 Thess. ii. 8).

The Early Fathers and Latin translators felt that the brightness of the coming was implied by the use of the word "epiphania". Thus St. Augustine wrote "illuminatione praesentiae suae".<sup>2</sup> This interpretation is in keeping with the use of the word in the LXX, where in the second book of the Maccabees it refers to manifestations of the divine glory.<sup>3</sup>

The early Church thought of the Day of Judgment as a day when that which is now hidden would be revealed. Thus the term "the Day" was used in contradistinction to the night; for "the Day" would bring to light things which are now hidden and unknown. The expression is frequently used in this sense in Scripture. There is "the day of the Lord", "the day of Christ", and "the day of judgment".<sup>4</sup> The conception of "the Day" so dominated the thoughts of the early believers that it was sufficient to refer to the Coming by that name alone. The Day of the Lord, when Christ shall be all in all, is regarded as the finale towards which all history moves. Dr. Findlay has expressed this point rather finely:

<sup>1</sup> Findlay, G. G., op. cit., p. 180. cf. 1 Tim. vi. 14; Titus ii. 13; 2 Tim. iv. 1, 8.

<sup>2</sup> cf. the Vulgate: "illustratione adventus sui", and also the following by Erasmus. "ut accipias claritate Christi advenientis obscuratum iri Antichristum." Quoted Findlay:

<sup>3</sup> Bernard, J. H., *The Pastoral Epistles*, p. 100.

<sup>4</sup> Acts ii. 20; Phil. ii. 16; 1 John iv. 17. The various phrases incorporating the word "day" in this sense are found in: Matt. vii. 22; John vi. 40, 44, 54, xi. 24; 1 Cor. v. 5; Phil. i. 10; 1 Thess. v. 2; Heb. x. 25; 2 Pet. iii. 12, 18; 1 John iv. 17; Rev. vi. 17.

The day of the Lord, of God, of Christ, of the Son of Man, are not differentiated or distinguished from each other. "The day of the Lord" as a time of blessing and judgment, is carried over from the prophetic teaching on the Day of Yahweh, הַיּוֹם הַהוּא, יוֹם.

This aspect is adopted in the New Testament, mutatis mutandis. The Judgment, however, is more spiritual and supernatural in character, and Jesus Himself is disclosed as the Judge.

See Plummer, A., *The Gospel According to St. John* (Cam. Greek Testament), p. 140 Bigg, C., op. cit., p. 250f. Findlay, G. G., op. cit., p. 108.

“Now the world has its day; ‘this is your hour,’ said Jesus to the Jewish officers, ‘and the power of darkness’ (Luke xxii. 53); then comes the Lord’s Day, when He will be vindicated both in salvation and in judgment. At a later date the weekly date of Christ’s Resurrection received this name (Rev. i. 10): this also is a day of divine vindication, and thus a pledge and anticipation of the great Day.”<sup>1</sup>

In the ecclesiastical writings of the Greek and Latin fathers, the expression “second coming” was used in contrast to the first Coming. Justin Martyr refers to the two Advents in his First Apology:

“For the prophets have proclaimed two advents of His: the one, that which is already past, when He came as a dishonoured and suffering man; but the second, when, according to prophecy, He shall come from heaven with glory, accompanied by His angelic host, when also He shall raise the bodies of all men who have lived, and shall clothe those of the worthy with immortality, and shall send those of the wicked, endued with eternal sensibility, into everlasting fire with the wicked devils.”<sup>2</sup>

The frequent recurrence of these various terms for the parousia is striking and impressive. Their cumulative significance cannot be ignored. The New Testament writers obviously had a very real and fervent belief in the reality of the second Advent. It will be profitable to see to what extent this subject is contained in the Gospels themselves.

## II

### THE PAROUSIA IN THE SYNOPTICS

In the Synoptics the teaching of Christ centres around the conception of the Kingdom of God. The term “Kingdom of God” did not originate with Christ, for it had previously been used in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> But Christ radically deepened and transformed the popular conception as held by his contemporaries.

The Kingdom, as revealed by Christ, was not a materialistic and earthly Kingdom, but a spiritual, invisible, supra-mundane Kingdom. This Kingdom has two aspects. It is, on the one hand, a thing of gradual, unobtrusive growth; on the other, a thing established by a final, great, conclusive event. In its former form, the Kingdom has a present being here on earth; in its latter form, the Kingdom will have a perfect glorified form in eternity.<sup>4</sup> Dr. S. D. F. Salmond has shown the interrelation and connexion between these two conceptions:

<sup>1</sup> Ibid. Findlay, G. G., op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Justin Martyr, *The First Apology*, ch. LII.

<sup>3</sup> cf. Ps. ciii. 19; Dan. ii. 44, iv. 3, 17.

<sup>4</sup> Orr, J., *The Kingdom of God*, H.D.B., Vol. II, p. 854.

“There are two ideas—one representing the Kingdom as a gradual growth, the other as established by a great catastrophe. These two ideas are consistent: continuous inner development, and a sudden outward event at the end.”<sup>1</sup>

By His first advent Christ instituted the Kingdom; by His second advent He will consummate the Kingdom. The Kingdom, therefore, is both present and future.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus taught that He was the founder of the Kingdom, and His presence among humanity meant that the Kingdom of Heaven was inaugurated. As He gathered a band of disciples to Himself, so the Kingdom grew.

“And being asked by the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God cometh, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: neither shall they say, Lo, here! or, there! for lo, the kingdom of God is within you” (R.V.m. “in the midst of you”) (Luke xvii. 20-1).

Again Christ said,

“If I by the Spirit of God cast out devils, then is the Kingdom of God come upon you” (Matt. xiii. 28).

This inward and spiritual Kingdom grew by individuals receiving Him into their hearts by faith. By faith men and women became members of the Kingdom.

“Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man would come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me. For whosoever would save his life shall lose it: and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it” (Matt. xvi. 24-5).

But this is only the earthly aspect of the Kingdom. While the Kingdom of God is subjectively realized in individual hearts now, there will be an objective manifestation of the Kingdom at the Judgment in the future.

This earthly phase of the Kingdom will be succeeded by the heavenly. This higher and eternal state is described as the “regeneration” (*παλιγγενεσία*) or the resurrection. The judgment then takes place which tests the reality of the profession of the members of the Kingdom.

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many

<sup>1</sup> Salmond, S. D. F., *The Christian Doctrine of Immortality*, pp. 297-8.

<sup>2</sup> Jesus speaks of the Kingdom as future in Mark ix. 1, xiv. 25; Matt. vii. 21; and as present in Matt. xii. 28, xiii. 24. “The two conceptions of the Kingdom as future and present,” says Dr. H. R. Mackintosh, “are equally and ineradicably combined in the mind of Jesus”—*Immortality and the Future: the Christian Doctrine of Eternal Life*.

will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy by thy name, and by thy name cast out devils, and by thy name do many mighty works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity" (Matt. vii. 21-3).

The Kingdom is thus finally consummated in the future life, when the good and bad are entirely separated.

The teaching of the parables of the Kingdom is relevant to this discussion. The method of teaching by parables was adopted by our Lord at a crisis in His ministry. There was the increasing animosity of His opponents, and the decreasing enthusiasm among many of His followers.<sup>1</sup> Parables would have the double property of revealing and concealing: they would instruct the disciples whose minds were still in line with Christ's, and yet they would give little opening to His enemies. This was but a fulfilment of Christ's own words, when He declared, to

"whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath" (Matt. xiii. 12).

Thus the understanding of the parables is determined by previous acceptance or rejection of the Truth. They are to each according to his standpoint. They are incomprehensible to a man unless he stands in a right relationship to the Kingdom of God. As St. Paul so truly says:

"The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him; and he cannot know them, because they are spiritually judged" (1 Cor. ii. 14).

Dr. Edersheim sums up the position:

"The ground of the different effect of the Parables on the unbelieving multitude and on the believing disciples was not objective (caused by the substance or form of these Parables), but subjective (caused by the different standpoint of the two classes of hearers towards the Kingdom of God). . . . The cause of the hardening lay, not in the parabolic method of teaching, but in the state of spiritual insensibility at which, by their own guilt, they had previously arrived."<sup>2</sup>

For the Christian the parables are a rich heritage, revealing the mystery of the Kingdom of God. Their preciousness is only revealed to the initiated. To the initiated Christ reveals that the Kingdom will be long in developing.

<sup>1</sup> Plummer, A., *The Gospel According to St. Matthew*, p. 187.

<sup>2</sup> Edersheim, A., *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, Vol. I, pp. 583-5.

“He added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they supposed that the kingdom of God was immediately to appear . . .” (Luke xix. 11).

Again, He reveals that the Kingdom is a present, developing reality.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field: which indeed is less than all seeds; but when it is grown, it is greater than the herbs, and becometh a tree . . .” (Matt. xiii. 31-2).

Furthermore, the Kingdom, in its earthly manifestation, will always have a mixture of good and bad. The final separation can only be achieved at the Judgment.

“The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: which, when it was filled, they drew up on the beach; and they sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but the bad they cast away. So shall it be in the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the righteous, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt. xiii. 47-50).

Dr. Brunner has summed up the meaning of the Kingdom of God in his brilliant epigrammatic language.

“The Kingdom of God in its eschatological, transcendent, anti-evolutionary sense is present in Jesus Christ, and therefore it is present in the Christian community or Church through faith in Christ. . . . One can truly share it, but only in a paradoxical way—through faith, not through sight. Such is also the character of the Kingdom of God in the community of saints, the Church. In what does it consist? In the share the believers have in the heavenly inheritance; so that they, who still belong to the world of sin and death, belong by faith, though not visibly, to the other world, the world to come. They have the Spirit, that is, they are sealed for the coming Kingdom. . . . They have, they are, they live in, the Kingdom. But they live in it through faith, indirectly not directly, invisibly not visibly, paradoxically not empirically. For empirically they are still under the sway of sin and death because they are still in the flesh. To be in the flesh means to belong empirically to the world of sin and death. To believe means to partake in the victory which Christ has won over sin and death.”<sup>1</sup>

But apart from His specific teaching on the Kingdom of God, Christ made numerous allusions to His future return in glory. The first announcement was made at the crisis of Caesarea Philippi (Mark viii. 38; Matt. xvi. 27; Luke ix. 26). St. Peter had declared emphatically his belief in the Messiahship of Christ:

“Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. xvi. 16).

<sup>1</sup> Brunner, H. E., *The Theology of Crisis*, pp. 108-9.



Immediately after this public confession, Jesus revealed to His disciples His approaching death by violence. But He also pointed beyond that event to the future Judgment:

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds” (Matt. xvi. 27).<sup>1</sup>

From the time of the crisis of Caesarea Philippi, the image of the Second Coming appears more and more in detail.<sup>2</sup> Christ’s teaching on this culminates in the discourse on the destruction of Jerusalem. St. Matthew records that as Jesus

“sat on the mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming (τῆς σῆς παρουσίας) and of the end of the world? (συντελείας τοῦ αἰῶνος)” (Matt. xxiv. 3f).

Some scholars feel that these passages refer only to the destruction of Jerusalem.<sup>3</sup> But such an interpretation seems to be difficult to substantiate. In view of the technical meaning of the word *παρουσία*, its use in the phrase τῆς σῆς παρουσίας militates against any purely local interpretation of the passage. Since in the eschatological sense the expression is used in the New Testament for the return of Christ in glory, the destruction of Jerusalem cannot be interpreted as the fulfilment of this.

Part of the discourse does clearly deal with the destruction of Jerusalem by the armies of Titus in A.D. 68–70. Christ foretells the signs that will prelude that fateful struggle. From the description of the local crisis He proceeds immediately to a description of the consummation of the age.

<sup>1</sup> The actual significance of the term “Son of Man” has been much disputed. The phrase itself (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) occurs in all four Gospels, and is only used by Christ Himself. The Evangelists never use it of Him, and no one ever addresses Him by it.

The phrase occurs in the Old Testament, which the LXX renders υἱὸς ἀνθρώπου never ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου. (a) In the Psalms the phrase אֱדָוָה־בְּנִי signifies the Ideal Man,

e.g. Ps. viii. 4, lxxx. 17, cxliv. 3, cxlvi. 3. (b) In Ezekiel the phrase אֱדָוָה־בְּנִי is the title by which the prophet is addressed, e.g. Ezek. ii. 1, 3, 6, 8. (c) In the night visions of Daniel the phrase refers to the Ancient of Days, אֱלֹהֵי כְבוֹד־וְדָוָה vii. 13–14.

The term “Son of Man”, as used in the Gospels, was probably not a recognized title for the Messiah. It always appears to have been enigmatic to those who heard it applied by Jesus to Himself. The title was unpopular to the Jews, because it emphasized human weakness. But the very reason which induced them to avoid the expression, induced our Lord to take it. The generic significance of the term “man” enabled Christ to identify Himself with the whole of humanity.

For detailed discussions see Dalman, *Words of Jesus*, pp. 234–67; Dewick, *Primitive Christian Eschatology*, p. 153f.; Dorner, *The Person of Christ*, Eng. trans., li., p. 54.

<sup>2</sup> Swete, H. B., *The Gospel According to St. Mark*, p. 185.

<sup>3</sup> e.g. Gould, E. P., *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (I.C.C.), p. 241.

“ But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun shall be darkened . . . and then shall they see the Son of man coming in clouds with great glory ” (Mark xiii. 24-6).

St. Matthew’s account appears to make the two events almost contemporaneous.

“ But immediately (εὐθὺς) after the tribulation of those days . . . ” (Matt. xxiv. 29).

This accords with the nature of Biblical prophecy in the Old Testament, where this construction is known as the prophetic perspective or timeless sequence.<sup>1</sup> Events which are widely separated in actual occurrence are brought together in prophetic perspective.<sup>2</sup> There are, however, numerous references in the Discourse which show that a considerable interval is to separate each event. Christ says:

“ And the gospel must first be preached unto all the nations ” (Mark xiii. 10).

This points to a lengthy lapse of time before the ultimate *παρουσία*. St. Luke’s account also conveys the impression that a period of time must first elapse:

“ And Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the times of the Gentiles be fulfilled ” (Luke xxi. 24).

These statements prevent the prophecy being placed in the lifetime of one generation, and point to the elapse of a considerable interval before the final conclusion of the world order with the return of the Son of Man.<sup>3</sup>

Several critics hold that portions of the Discourse belong to a Jewish-Christian Apocalypse, whose disjecta membra were incorporated by the Synoptics.<sup>4</sup> This theory is entirely hypothetical, and has no documentary basis whatsoever.

In this connexion it is necessary to notice the so-called eschatological school, represented by Albert Schweitzer and Johannes Weiss. This school maintains that the mind of Christ was dominated by the apocalyptic eschatology of His contemporaries. Schweitzer dismisses any other interpretation:

<sup>1</sup> Salmond, S. D. F., *op. cit.*, p. 303. Edersheim, A., *op. cit.*, Vol II, ch. vi, p. 450.

<sup>2</sup> The Greek word *εὐθὺς* thus corresponds to the Hebrew word קָרָב.

<sup>3</sup> H.D.B., Vol. III, p. 676. Creed, J. M., *The Gospel According to St. Luke*, p. lxxii.

<sup>4</sup> Charles, H., *Eschatology*, p. 325f. Moffatt, J., *The Historical New Testament*, p. 637f.

“Men feared that to admit the claims of eschatology would abolish the significance of His words for our time; and hence there was a feverish eagerness to discover in them any elements that might be considered not eschatologically conditioned. . . . But in reality that which is eternal in the words of Jesus is due to the very fact that they are based on an eschatological world-view, and contain the expression of a mind for which the contemporary world with its historical and social circumstances no longer had any existence.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus the advocates of this interpretation argue that Jesus taught that in the immediate future a transcendental Kingdom would be inaugurated by divine intervention. But it is precarious to argue from the current Jewish eschatological hopes. Dr. Edersheim, the brilliant Rabbinical scholar, points out that there is an infinite distance between the teaching of Christ and the theology of the Synagogue.

“In the pseudepigraphic writings, which expressed the apocalyptic expectations of the Jews before the time of Christ, there is a marked difference from the New Testament.”<sup>2</sup>

Christ certainly announces the great objective nature of His return under the analogy of the Old Testament descriptions of the Day of the Lord (Joel i. 15; Mic. iv. 1). But these are very different from the grotesque descriptions of the Jewish Apocalypses.<sup>3</sup> The eschatological school lay considerable emphasis upon one verse in St. Luke's Gospel.

“Verily I say unto you, This generation (*γενεά*) shall not pass away until all things be accomplished” (xxi. 32).

The interpretation of this verse is admittedly difficult. But it is worth noticing in passing that a scholar of the calibre of Dorner explains *γενεά* as meaning an indefinite period of time. In any consideration of Christ's eschatology, it is necessary to consider His teaching on the kindred subject of the Kingdom of God. Many of the Galilean parables are connected with this subject. His teaching was regarded as mysterious and unique.

“Unto you is given the mystery (*τὸ μυστήριον*) of the kingdom of God . . .” (Mark iv. 11).

A mystery in the New Testament, like the Greek mysteries, is something hidden—revealed only to the initiated. To the

<sup>1</sup> *Quest of the Historical Jesus*, p. 400.

<sup>2</sup> Edersheim, A., *op. cit.*, Vol. II, ch. vi, p. 432.

<sup>3</sup> Salmond, S. D. F., *op. cit.*, p. 306.

initiated Jesus explains that the Kingdom will not be a spectacular manifestation, but the preaching of the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> Under the image of the Sower, Christ describes the preaching of "the word of the kingdom" (Matt. xiii. 19). This word of the Kingdom is to one

"a saviour from death unto death; to the other a saviour of life unto life" (2 Cor. i. 16).

The Kingdom will grow unobtrusively, the wheat and the tares together, through many generations, until the time of the harvest. The teaching of the parables of the Kingdom (Matt. xiii) is thus in striking contrast to that of the contemporaries of Jesus. This is a fact of paramount importance in any discussion of the contemporary eschatological conceptions.

Apart from these controversial issues there is ample evidence in other parts of the Synoptics that our Lord taught explicitly a future return of an objective character. He refers to His advent in glory:

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then shall he render unto every man according to his deeds" (Matt. xvi. 27).

In the judgment scene before the High Priest, Jesus testified:

"Henceforth ye shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matt. xxvi. 64).

The Synoptics teach that the coming will result in the final Judgment. This will be universal in scope, with Christ Himself as Judge.

"The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be the weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. xiii. 41-2).

But the Judgment will be discriminatory: not only will there be a final penalty for the evil, there will also be a final reward for the good.

"Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father" (Matt. xiii. 43).

<sup>1</sup> Gould, E. P., op. cit., p. 74.

## III

## THE TEACHING OF ST. JOHN

The Johannine teaching on eschatology presents a striking contrast to that contained in the Synoptists. But this difference is in keeping with the general structure and design of St. John's Gospel as a whole. It is at once apparent that the author is writing from a different point of view. Clement of Alexandria, who wrote about A.D. 200, stated that

"John, perceiving that the bodily or external facts had been set forth in the (other) Gospels, at the instance of his disciples, and with the inspiration of the Spirit, composed a spiritual Gospel."<sup>1</sup>

The adjective "spiritual" aptly describes St. John's Gospel. It abounds in mystical discourses rather than parables. It portrays Christ as the eternal and divine Son, rather than as the humble carpenter of Nazareth.

St. John has carefully chosen his facts, so that his narrative tends to supplement the account given in the other Gospels. A knowledge of the main characters and incidents is presupposed. John the Baptist is mentioned in the first chapter without any preliminary introduction. Again, the institution of the Lord's Supper is not recorded. The apocalyptic discourses are also omitted. Some scholars, however, have been misled by these omissions. They feel that the omission of the long eschatological passages which are given in the Synoptics is a proof that St. John has endeavoured to transmute the current eschatological hopes of the early Christians. This point of view has been expounded by Dr. Wade:

"The expectation of their Lord's speedy return in visible form was for the early Christian community the chief incentive of their missionary efforts, and the main source of their fortitude under persecution. But as time passed, and the long delay began to elicit the mockery of unbelievers, a growing depression among the faithful was inevitable; and to counteract such the Fourth Evangelist transformed current eschatological conceptions altogether. . . . He endeavoured to habituate the mind of the Church to the thought that Christ's Second Coming had already taken place, through the bestowal of the Holy Spirit upon believers."<sup>2</sup>

But a closer study of the Johannine text yields several important facts which militate against such an interpretation.

<sup>1</sup> Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History*, VI, 14.

<sup>2</sup> Wade, G. W., *New Testament History*, p. 672.

The Gospel itself refers explicitly to a future Coming. Jesus comforts His disciples by saying:

“ Let not your heart be troubled . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I come again (πάλιν ἔρχομαι) and will receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also ” (John xiv. 1-3).

The comment of Archbishop J. H. Bernard on this verse is unambiguous:

“ The present tense of *πάλιν ἔρχομαι* expresses the certainty of the future return, ‘ I am coming back.’ This is an explicit announcement of the Parousia, or Second Advent. Not as much is said about this in St. John as in the Synoptics; but it is nevertheless an integral element in Johannine doctrine.”<sup>1</sup>

Again, when Jesus exhorts His disciples to patient service, He refers to that Return which is the hope of all their labours. “ If I will that he tarry till I come (ἕως ἔρχομαι), what is that to thee? ” (John xxi. 22). The teaching in the Johannine Epistles is similar.

“ And now, my little children, abide in him; that, if he shall be manifested, we may have boldness, and not be ashamed before him at his coming (παρουσία) ” (1 John ii. 28).

This evidence is of paramount importance. Scholars fairly unanimously agree that the Epistles are later in date than the Gospel,<sup>2</sup> and yet far from the doctrine of the Coming being transmuted or modified, it is asserted with equal, if not greater, explicitness.

The Coming, as in the Synoptics, is associated with the Judgment. There is the announcement of a great Assize at the last Day, when all men shall be judged by the Son of Man.

“ For neither doth the Father judge any man, but he hath given all judgment unto the Son . . . ” (John v. 22).

Christ Himself claims to be the Judge. This idea of the Messiah as Judge was not found in the Old Testament.<sup>3</sup> The Judgment is also associated with the Resurrection.

“ Marvel not at this: for the hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgment ” (ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως) (John v. 28-9).

<sup>1</sup> Bernard, J. H., *The Gospel According to St. John* (I.C.C.) Vol. II, p. 535.

<sup>2</sup> Westcott, B. F., *The Gospel of St. John*, p. lxxxviii. Hunter, C. F., *The New Testament: Its Writers and Their Messages*, p. 237.

<sup>3</sup> Salmond, S. D. F., *op. cit.* pp. 316-7. This truth is also enunciated elsewhere in the New Testament, e.g. Acts x. 42, xvii. 30-31; Rom. ii. 16; 2 Cor. v. 10, etc.

The Evangelist declares that the works of healing of the Son are indeed marvellous, but the greater marvel is what will happen at the last Day, when the dead shall be quickened by the Son, and final judgment shall be pronounced by Him on good and evil. All must rise, both the believers and the unbelievers, at the Resurrection. This prevents the passage being interpreted in any purely spiritual sense. Our Lord says that the wicked shall come forth unto the "resurrection of judgment",<sup>1</sup> and this cannot mean a spiritual resurrection. Spiritual resurrection must always be a resurrection of life, a passing from spiritual death to spiritual life. But a passing from spiritual death to *judgment* is not spiritual resurrection. This passage and St. Paul's declaration in Acts xxiv. 15<sup>2</sup> are the only direct assertions in the New Testament of a resurrection of the wicked.<sup>3</sup> St. John refers to the resurrection again in his Epistle.

"Herein is love made perfect with us, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment . . ." (1 John iv. 17).

The Epistle tends to lay more stress on the judgment of the future than the Gospel.

Sufficient evidence has been given to show that St. John, together with the Synoptics, teaches explicitly a future Coming of an objective character, in which Christ will be the Judge of the living and of the dead. There will be a final consummation, a great Assize. But St. John supplements this teaching on the final judgment by speaking of the judgment as being also a present process. St. John writes:

"He that believeth on him is not judged: he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God" (John iii. 18).

Clearly St. John teaches that the deciding factor for salvation is whether a person believes in Christ or does not believe. One exegete has written:

<sup>1</sup> "εἰς ἀνάστασιν κρίσεως." The word *κρίσεως* combines the notion of "separation" and "judgment", and from the context often acquires the further notion of "condemnation."

Plummer, A., *The Gospel According to St. John* (Cambridge Greek Testament), p. 140. The word *ἀνάστασις* is used by Aeschylus (Eum. 648) of "rising up" from the grave, that is, of "resurrection". In the LXX it is infrequent, and occurs with this meaning only in 2 Macc. vii. 14, xii. 43.

Bernard, J. H., *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> ". . . having hope towards God, which these also themselves look for, that there shall be a resurrection both of the just and unjust."

<sup>3</sup> This is also implied in Matt. x. 28, Rev. xx. 12-13.

"The believer has eternal life in Christ; he has passed into life. There is no uncertainty as to the final judgment for him. . . . But there is also the man who is not willing to come to Christ that he may have life (verse 40), i.e. is not willing to 'believe' on Him. St. John says of him  $\delta \mu\eta \pi\iota\sigma\tau\epsilon\upsilon\omicron\nu\nu \eta\delta\eta \kappa\acute{\epsilon}\kappa\rho\iota\tau\alpha\iota$ , 'he has been judged already,' by his unbelief. The present judgment is anticipatory of the future. This is indeed the judgment which will declare itself at the last Day (xii. 46)."<sup>1</sup>

Thus a future judgment is not inconsistent with a judgment which has been already determined in the present life by the unbelief and blindness and disobedience of man. Each man is passing a subjective judgment on himself in this present life which does not preclude the future objective judgment.<sup>2</sup>

Jesus insists upon the judgment of the present hour, not pronounced by the fiat of external authority, but determined by a man's own self, and his relation to God in Christ.<sup>3</sup> Eternal life ( $\zeta\omega\eta\nu \alpha\iota\omega\nu\iota\omicron\nu$ ) is a present reality and possibility, and Jesus is the Door through whom man can enter into possession here and now. The Synoptics always apply the all-embracing term "eternal life" to the future consummation (e.g. Mark x. 30), whereas in St. John it is also used to denote the present possession of the life of God by believers (e.g. John v. 24). The Synoptics, however, do recognize in fact the present reception and enjoyment by believers of those blessings of the Kingdom which St. John designates by "eternal life" (e.g. Matt. v. 3ff.).<sup>4</sup> Christ solemnly declared:

"He that believeth on the Son hath eternal life; but he that obeyeth not the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John iii. 36).

Disobedience is a matter of voluntary choice. It implies a mind which is rebellious and lawless, rather than a series of disobedient acts. The wrath of God is the natural complement to the love of God; and if there is love for those who believe, there must be wrath for those who disbelieve.<sup>5</sup> It is significant that Christ states that the wrath "abideth on him",  $\eta \delta\omicron\rho\rho\eta \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon \mu\acute{\epsilon}\nu\epsilon\iota \acute{\epsilon}\pi' \alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\nu$ : it is not merely future, but present also. The unbeliever, like the believer, not only *will* have, but *has*, his portion; and he has to struggle not to avert a sentence, but to be freed from it.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Bernard, J. H., op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 120-1.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, pp. 386-9.

<sup>3</sup> It will be noticed that this is parallel to the teaching of the Synoptics on the present realization of the Kingdom of God in individual hearts.

<sup>4</sup> Orr, J., H.D.B. Article, "The Kingdom of Heaven." Vol. II, p. 850.

<sup>5</sup> This is the only place in the Gospels where the phrase "the wrath of God"  $\eta \delta\omicron\rho\rho\eta \tau\omicron\upsilon \theta\epsilon\omicron\upsilon$  occurs.

<sup>6</sup> Plummer, A., op. cit., p. 112.



St. John is the only Evangelist who uses the term, "the last Day". He uses it in connexion with the doctrine of the final Judgment. Jesus says:

"For this is the will of my Father, that everyone that beholdeth the Son, and believeth on him, should have eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day" (John vi. 40).

Similarly, on another occasion, our Lord said:

"He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him; the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John xii. 48).<sup>1</sup>

Some critics have endeavoured to escape the implications of these verses by the arbitrary expedient of pronouncing them interpolations.<sup>2</sup> But it is quite inadmissible to tear out these verses from St. John, and to retain the rest of the Gospel. As Sanday has beautifully written:

"The Gospel is like that sacred coat 'without seam woven from the top throughout': it is either all real and true, or all fictitious and illusory, and the latter alternative is more difficult to accept than the former."<sup>3</sup>

Thus in St. John's Gospel the judgment which is present and subjective is emphasized, but the judgment which is future and objective also finds an integral place. These two doctrines are neither contradictory nor inconsistent: the latter is only the logical consummation of the former. The future judgment is associated with the resurrection. The possession of eternal life is crowned by the restoration to the believer of a transfigured manhood.<sup>4</sup>

Nevertheless, it is a fact that St. John does not dwell on the Coming and the Judgment to the same extent as the Synoptics. Writing towards the end of the century, he sees that the Kingdom of God may not be immediately established with power. There will, indeed, be the final consummation, but St. John emphasizes in more detail the judgment which is present and subjective. This present judgment fulfils itself in a probation of character and a self-verdict which proceeds now.<sup>5</sup>

*Oak Hill College, London.*

S. BARTON BABBAGE.

<sup>1</sup> The phrase "the last day" (ὁ ἔσχατος ἡμερα) also occurs in John vi. 39, 44, 54.

<sup>2</sup> Charles, H., *A Critical History of the Doctrine of the Future Life in Israel*, pp. 370-1.

<sup>3</sup> Quoted, Plummer, A., *op. cit.*, p. 232.

<sup>4</sup> Westcott, B. F., *op. cit.*, p. 103.

<sup>5</sup> Salmond, S. D. F., *op. cit.*, p. 323.