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The Second Advent

WHEN THE World Council of Churches took as its theme "Christ, the Hope of the World", the delegates at the Evanston general assembly of 1954 were forced for the first time to consider at an ecumenical conference the vexing question of the Parousia. Never before had the churches tackled a problem at this level which so seriously divided Christians from one another. Most observers anticipated a clash between the Continental apocalypticists and the Anglo-Saxon social activists. Would the ecclesiastics decide that only an eschatological interpretation of the human predicament was truly Christian or would they endorse a gradual evolution of the kingdom?

A very impressive committee of theologians and churchmen was assigned to prepare a report on the main theme. Among the drafters of the advisory document released in 1953 were Karl Barth and Emil Brunner, the Scottish theologian John Baillie and Indian Bishop Leslie Newbegin, the Biblical scholar C.H. Dodd and the poet T.S. Eliot, the Lebanese philosopher-statesman Charles Malik and the Czech theologian Josef L. Hromadka, Professors

George Florovsky and H.S. Alivisatos representing Eastern Orthodoxy, President Henry P. Van Dusen of Union Theological Seminary and the Dutch scholar Hendrik Kraemer. Seldom before in the Christian world had such an array of talent been commissioned for a single task. Yet the result was a disheartening and uninspiring compromise. At best, all the Evanston Advisory Commission could come up with was "the guarantee of God's promise that in His good time His victory will be manifest to all, His kingdom come in glory, and He Himself be known everywhere as King." On this basis, the eminent ecumenical theologians could somehow speak of "a living hope, an ardent longing for that glorious consummation, and an eager expectation of its coming."¹

The timid theological consensus handed out to the World Council delegates at Evanston forcibly illustrates the quandary in which the churches have found themselves for many centuries. Although an apocalyptic understanding of human destiny has repeatedly surfaced during the long history of Christianity, its exponents have always found themselves in the position of a minority scorned and persecuted by the religious establishment. From the time of Origen of Alexandria and Bishop Augustine of Hippo, the Church as a whole has preferred a mystical union of the believer with God or an ecclesiastical identification of the kingdom with the gradual success of the existing institutional Church.

NON-APOCALYPTIC VIEWS OF THE COMING CHRIST

Since the writing of the New Testament at least, and probably even before, the Christian community has been sharply divided over the way Christ is expected to come. According to a common interpretation of scriptural scholars, Paul himself did not hold the same views on this subject throughout his life as a missionary. In his Thessalonian correspondence he clearly believes in the impending return of Christ. But in his later epistles this apocalyptic note becomes somewhat muted. That is, he moved from apocalyp-

¹ *The Christian Hope and the Task of the Church*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1954, pt. VII, p. 1.

ticism to Christ-mysticism. The expected Christ was largely replaced by the indwelling Christ.

What Paul initiated, John extended, and was later carried to its logical conclusion. Since the Parousia was delayed it was natural enough to stress the abiding presence of Christ in the soul of the believer or in the worshipping congregation. If some New Testament scholars are right, the Gospels which emphasize the life and teachings of Jesus resulted from the loss of hope in his imminent return; Luke, for example, is commonly spoken of as a record of the switch from apocalyptic expectancy to what has been called early Catholicism; and the Fourth Gospel is evidence for the further waning of eschatological expectation, according to the scriptural experts.

Roman Catholicism and Eastern Orthodoxy represent the institutionalization, sacramentalization and ritualization of the original eschatological fellowship of Jesus' followers. Rather scornfully, the Catholic Modernist Alfred Loisy noted that Jesus promised us the kingdom but what we got was the Church.² In any case, by the end of the second century, most Christians centered their lives on the sacrament of holy communion. Overt expectation of the returning Christ subsided because Christ was already present in the Church and available in the Eucharist. Professor Karl Adam of Tübingen describes this event:

The faithful Catholic does not merely hope that Jesus will come to him. He knows that He does. He knows that Jesus is there as really and truly as He was once present in the Upper Room or by the Sea of Galilee. . . . Holy Communion is a living intercourse with Jesus truly present, and is therefore a perennial spring of devotion to Jesus.³

² Quoted in Rosemary Reuther, *The Church Against Itself*, Herder & Herder, N.Y., 1967, p. 51.

³ Karl Adam, *The Spirit of Catholicism*, Image Book, N.Y., 1954, p. 198.

And for the Russian Orthodox churchman, the experience is no different:

...the Eucharist is the meeting place between Jesus Christ and the believer, personal, intimate, unique. It makes the Christian a new creature by elevating him into the Divine Presence, and in that transcendental unity His individuality is eternally affirmed and reconciled with the infinite variety of the whole creation. In the Eucharist Christians possess the power that can secure their victory over all the temptations of the intellect and of the flesh; they are restored by it to unity and concord in the fullness of communion with the Holy and lifegiving Trinity.⁴

Furthermore, the revolutionary social implications of the apocalyptic message were detrimental to efforts on the part of churchmen who longed for peace with the Roman Empire. Why raise a fuss over the kingdom to come when one could easily adjust peacefully to the existing social order? For non-theological reasons as well as theological, the Church played down the New Testament hope, reinterpreted it or consigned its fulfillment to some far-distant future.

Yet now, the future has arrived.

For evangelistic Protestants, one interpretation of Christ's coming is when he comes into the heart in the experience of conversion—often as a result of attending very emotional revivalistic meetings. For many believers, it has been an enthralling occasion; William James documents the experience of one man:

And then, with a breaking heart, I said, 'Dear Jesus, can you help me?' Never with mortal tongue can I describe that moment. Although up to that moment my soul had been filled with indescribable gloom, I felt the

⁴ N. Zernov, *Orthodox Encounter*, James Clarke & Co., London, 1961, p. 74.

glorious brightness of the noonday sun shine into my heart. I felt I was a free man. Oh, the precious feeling of safety, of freedom, of resting on Jesus! I felt that Christ with all his brightness and power had come into my life.⁵

Although belief in the second coming of Jesus is considered one of the key doctrines of fundamentalism, much emphasis is placed upon the need for individual rebirth, a conversion experience which cleanses a man of sin and makes him a temple of Christ. Also, until very recently, the Evangelical wing of Protestantism has shied away from the social application of the Christian Gospel and stressed the salvation of the individual soul.

Then there are Christians who identify the coming kingdom of God with the present reality and future triumph of the Church. Catholic thought considers the Church the actual Body of Christ or an extension of the Incarnation. At Pentecost Christ returned to dwell in His Church forever. Augustine's theology of history can be read in this fashion. Against the apocalypticists and chiliasts Augustine denies that there would be a thousand year reign of Christ at the end of history. As Paul Tillich reminds us, for Augustine the Christ rules in this present time; there is no stage of history beyond or other than the one in which we are living. We need not look beyond the present period—the kingdom of God is already manifest in the work and witness of the Church.⁶

Some liberal Protestants relegate the concept of the second advent to the first-century apocalyptic scheme later discredited by the Church; and they feel such a concept is irrelevant for the twentieth century Christian. Professor Paul Minear, then at Andover Newton Theological School, reported that Christian modernists disassociate themselves from any trace of millennialism. They openly repudiate the verbal inspiration and literal infallibility of the scriptures so are in no way bound to accept apocalyptic texts

⁵ W. James, *Varieties of Religious Experience*, Collier Book, N.Y., 1961, p. 170.

⁶ P. Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, Simon & Schuster, N.Y., 1972, p. 121.

in the New Testament. Often they reject references to the return of Christ as relics of an archaic cosmology which cannot be harmonized with modern thought. They argue that believers in the coming judgment have fallen prey to moral quietism, historical pessimism, and cultural obscurantism.

Minear challenges them. He denies that the New Testament hope for the speedy return of Christ is as archaic as modernists suppose. He disagrees with the judgment that apocalypticism represents an attempt to escape from a history gladly resigned to the control of Satan. He asks, must not a Christian trust that Christ will truly redeem the whole world and vindicate God in the temporal order? In contrast to the Biblical version of Christian hope, modernists seem to hold a multiplicity of secular hopes which shift with each new change in the social scene.⁷

Many Christians believe that the Kingdom of God is gradually being built on this earth as the ever-present spirit of Christ inspires us to initiate significant social reforms. Professor Kenneth Scott Latourette of Yale was one such man. He wrote that the Christian faith offers the world hope of a gradual triumph in actual human history of the values embodied in Christ. For proof the church historian mentioned the valuable work of the League of Nations, the Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the YMCA, organizations not directly related to the Church but growing out of lives made radiant through Christ. In 1954 Latourette claimed that Christ and his Church have never been more potent than in our time.

His optimism, however, did not go unchallenged. Reinhold Niebuhr replied that such a naive faith in the gradual progress of mankind under Christ's inspiration was rather fanciful in an age of atomic warfare and global conflict. According to Niebuhr, it was becoming more fantastic to believe in the modern substitute for New Testament eschatology than to expect the Parousia of Christ. The New York theologian observed that "the New Testament eschatology is at once too naive for a sophisticated world and too

⁷ P. Minear, *Christian Hope and the Second Coming*, Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1954, pp. 86-91.

sophisticated for the simple-minded modern man, who has become so accustomed to try to make sense out of life by measuring history in terms of some scheme of rational intelligibility."⁸

In our comments on the varied non-eschatological interpretations of the coming of Christ we do not mean that the idea of the second advent has disappeared from Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox or Evangelical theologies but only that in most cases it is not an issue of paramount importance. In the Palestinian community it was the central affirmation around which all else revolved. In the later Church by and large its realization was consigned to a date unknown to even the Son of God. Yet the second advent was in no sense abandoned.

In their *Handbook of the Catholic Faith* designed to instruct potential Protestant converts, the Dutch priests Van Doornik, Jelsma and Van de Lisdonk state:

The Gospels are absolutely steeped in the thought of the final coming of Christ. . . . This second coming is to be the revelation of the goodness and justice of God; the completion of Christ's work.⁹

CONTEMPORARY APOCALYPTICISM

Early in Christian history Montanus tried to recover the eschatological enthusiasm which characterized New Testament faith. Although he was able to win many to his cause, including the Church Father Tertullian, he was rejected by the ecclesiastical leaders of his time and his movement gradually disappeared. Montanus felt that the hope of an earthly millenium was an indispensable part of authentic Christianity. To this belief unfortunately, he attached other views which were questionable in their validity. The Church as a whole looked askance at this theology and nearly all we know of Montanus comes from his enemies who

⁸ R. Niebuhr, *Essays in Applied Christianity*, Meridian Book, N.Y., 1959, p. 329.

⁹ N.G.M. Van Doornik, et al, *A Handbook of the Catholic Faith*, Image Book, Garden City, N.Y., 1956, p. 467.

distorted his opinions. In any case, from his time on anyone who tried to revive the eschatological hope was dismissed as a Montanist heretic and schismatic.¹⁰

Today, however, the field is more open. Lively eschatological views abound. Dr. John Wesley White, chancellor of Richmond College in Toronto, prepared a series of sermons on the second coming which were published in 1971 and widely distributed among fundamentalists.¹¹ While he warns his hearers about overzealous soothsayers who deliberately disobey Jesus Christ by predicting dates for the second advent, he amasses a great pile of evidence which seems to suggest the last days are at hand. He draws countless parallels between Biblical signs of Christ's return and current events, as if to impress Christians with the probability of an approaching second coming. Such a technique shrewdly combines caution and enthusiasm. Christians can look forward to the end but not too much. This way, they will not become disillusioned if the eschatological hope fails to materialize.

White repeatedly finds modern explanations for ancient prophecies from the Old and New Testaments. On the basis of a laboratory experiment in ultrasonic sound, he explains how believers at the final rapture will respond to the trumpet call without the faithless realizing what is going on. He compares astronauts out space walking to the prophecy that Christians will be caught up in the air to meet Jesus. Similarly he suggests that the prediction of the moon turning red as blood might refer to the Russians spraying the moon with red dust or that earthlings might war for possession of the moon turning it into a bloody battlefield. The melting of the elements prophesied in II Peter reminds him of thermonuclear warfare and the destruction of the universe with a great noise may be related to Fred Hoyle's hypothesis that the universe came into existence with a big bang.

Much of White's book is devoted to the woeful state of the world today which he believes provides clear signs of the catastrophe to come. Drugs and divorces, famine and pestilence,

¹⁰ Hans Leitzmann, *A History of the Early Church*, Meridian Book, Cleveland, 1961, vol. II, pp. 193-203.

¹¹ J. W. White, *Re-entry*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, 1971.

juvenile delinquency and violence, Chinese Communism and sex books become evidence for him to prove the Day of the Lord is at hand. He adds to these secular maladies spelling cosmic doom the equally certain sign that the fundamentalist version of Protestantism is losing its grip on the churches.

And finally on the political level Dr. White sees contemporary events authenticating ancient prophecies. He credits Ezekiel with a prophecy that during the last days Russia and China will invade Israel; this will be marked as the prophet predicts with an air-lift of Russian soldiers into that country. The antichrist will consist of a bloc of ten nations now making up the European Common Market. An earthquake splitting the Mount of Olives will signal the final battle between Christ and his foes which will occur literally at Megiddo. The founding of Israel itself, he says, is a confirmation of prophecy, as well as the Six Day War.

We have quoted White's vision at length because these ideas typify the fundamentalist camp in modern Christianity. Not only is apocalypticism real to them, but also literal. With careful selection (and some would say careful omissions) the blueprint of God's ultimate extravaganza is pieced together for all to have a chance to see, and to choose.

If fundamentalists dwell on the rapture of the Church prior to the advent, their distant cousins, the Jehovah's Witnesses, concentrate on warning prospective converts of the terrible battle of Armageddon soon to be fought between the armies of God and Satan. Pastor Charles Taze Russell, who founded the Watchtower Society in 1870, was converted to the Adventist cause as a young man. Whereas the Millerites expected the physical return of Jesus in the year 1873-4, Russell preached that the appearance of Christ would be an invisible one. According to his calculations the return of Jesus would inaugurate a forty year harvest of souls which would be completed in 1914. At that time, the end of the world would come. In a book dated 1908 he asserted that some time before the end of 1914 the last member of the divinely recognized Church will be glorified with Christ. Jehovah would begin His reign on earth. Russell argued that the Great Pyramid of Egypt as

well as the Bible confirmed his predictions.

Judge J.E. Rutherford, Pastor Russell's successor, dropped the Great Pyramid theory and revised the apocalyptic time schedule. According to his theology, in 1914 Satan and Jesus waged war in heaven for 1,260 days. Defeated by Christ, Satan was cast out of heaven to the vicinity of our planet. This explains World War I and other calamities experienced by mankind in that period. Rutherford also asserted that before the generation of 1914 passed away, Christ would reappear on the earth to fight the battle of Armageddon mentioned in the book of Revelation. As one of Rutherford's most popular slogans put it, "Millions now living will never die."

Armageddon will commence with a series of natural disasters: earthquakes, plagues, floods and a rain of fires. The earth will become littered with millions of corpses. In fact, it will take seven months for the survivors to bury the dead and seven years for the world to be restored to its original state as the kingdom of God on earth. At Armageddon the forces of righteousness will be led by Jehovah as supreme commander and Jesus as his field marshal. Satan and his allies will suffer a crushing defeat and be completely routed. But Jehovah's Witnesses will not have to participate in this gigantic battle. They can watch what takes place from a safe distance.

Witnesses believe that only 144,000 will get to heaven. The rest of the faithful will survive the holocaust at Armageddon to be rewarded with everlasting life on a purified and perfected earth. Our world will become again the Garden of Eden. In Jehovah's theocracy on earth there will be no police, no soldiers, no bad weather, no wild animals, no sickness and no crime. No one will want for material comfort and all will experience the simple joys of an earthly Paradise forever. As for the special remnant in heaven, they will assist Jesus in governing the whole creation.

The theology of the Jehovah's Witnesses revives many of the basic ideas common to apocalyptic Judaism and chiliastic Christianity—with notable additions, of course. For them, the last days

are drawing nigh. Armageddon might begin next week or even tomorrow.¹²

ORTHODOX DOUBTS AND LIBERAL DENIALS

As one might expect, there has been a reaction in Christian circles to bold pronouncements of fundamentalists and Jehovah's Witnesses. When Dr. L. Berkhof, president emeritus of Calvin Theological Seminary and a longtime spokesman for the Christian Reformed Church in America, published in 1953 a brief treatise on the second coming he took pains to dampen enthusiasm among conservative Protestants in regard to any immediate return of Jesus. Besides refuting Modernists who no longer believe in a literal second advent and correcting dispensationalists for what he considered to be an un-scriptural interpretation, he warned that a premature expectation was to be carefully avoided.

The Calvinist theologian cautioned that contemplation of the future coming of Christ often has given birth to speculative, unwarranted theories and noted that the Bible leaves many of our questions unanswered. He specifically contradicts the fundamentalist claim that a proper interpretation of scripture will provide the Christian with a detailed blueprint of God's future intentions. According to Berkhof, the second coming is to a great extent a mystery about which the Bible itself gives no complete explanation.

He also reminded churchmen that serious times have often provoked considerable enthusiasm for the return of Christ. He specifically mentioned the millennial hopes of the early Church, the fanatical sects which appeared during the Reformation, and the excitement of Christians during the worst days of the French Revolution. As examples of mistaken calculations made by apocalyptic speculators Berkhof cited the hope that Christ would come back in 1000 A.D. as was thought in the Dark Ages, at 1260

¹² For further information on the Jehovah's Witnesses see William J. Whalen, *Armageddon Around the Corner*, John Day Co., N.Y., 1962 and Charles S. Braden, *These Also Believe*, Macmillan, N.Y., 1949, Chap. X.

A.D. as predicted by disciples of Joachim of Fiore, during the Reformation as preached by the Anabaptists of Munster in Germany, in 1843 as the Adventist Miller prophesied, or in 1914, the crucial year emphasized by Pastor Russell. Since such predictions were not fulfilled, Berkhof claims that they prove the utter folly of prying into the secrets of God.¹³

Professor Clarence B. Bass of Bethel Theological Seminary has published an informative, though critical study of the dispensationalism ordinarily taught by the fundamentalist. Like Berkhof, he objects to this approach on scriptural grounds. He is particularly opposed to the idea of the fulfillment of every detail of early prophetic statements concerning the old Israel. Until the nineteenth century, he contends, Israel as a separate entity was believed to have no place in the millenium to come. Thus dispensationalists, while claiming to be "the true Christians" and followers of "old-time religion" are in reality putting their own innovations into scripture.

According to dispensationalist doctrine, at his second coming Christ will again offer an earthly kingdom to Israel. This time it will be accepted. This distinctly Jewish state will reestablish the throne of David, restore the Temple and reinstitute the Mosaic sacrificial system. Christ will have a physical throne from which to rule the nations. King David will return to serve as his regent. The seat of world government will be at Jerusalem and all the different nations of the earth will be subservient to Israel throughout the millenium. All the Old Testament promises and prophecies will thus be fulfilled.

Bass, himself a fundamentalist, makes a clear distinction between the nation of Israel and the New Israel, which is the Church.¹⁴ There is no basis whatsoever in the New Testament that

¹³ L. Berkhof, *The Second Coming of Christ*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1953, pp. 9-28.

¹⁴ C.B. Bass, *Backgrounds to Dispensationalism*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1960. The author traces these novel views back to Reverend J.N. Darby, an Anglican priest who later founded the Plymouth Brethren sect. C.J. Scofield adopted them from A.C. Gaebelien who admits his great indebtedness to Darby.

will support the idea of an earthly kingdom going to Israel, a view which is held by Scofield Bible Christians, dispensationalists, and in part by Dr. Wesley White.

The division in the fundamentalist camp is even more acute when it comes to the idea of the "rapture". Briefly, this is the assertion supported by I Thessalonians 4:16-17 that the true Church will be removed from the earth ahead of time and will meet Christ in the air. Dr. G. Campbell Morgan, the popular British Evangelical, was once asked if he believed there was scriptural support for this. He replied that he had once held this view, but had given it up as a result of further study, claiming that it was a misreading of the Thessalonian text and thus a modern invention, without any Biblical basis whatsoever.¹⁵

Within the fundamentalist camp itself there is considerable criticism of the "new" style of fundamentalism typified by Dr. White and the dispensationalists. It is easily understandable that there is a widespread and unequivocal dismissal of fundamentalist tenets by Christian scholars in the mainline churches. In his book *Eternal Hope*, Emil Brunner minces no words in his utter repudiation of the notion of stars falling from heaven and Christians being raised to meet the Lord in the clouds on his return. The Zurich theologian maintains that Christian theology is wrong to suppose it can ignore the change from the archaic Judaic image of the universe to the Copernican world view of today. As such, fundamentalism leads to a ridiculous and intellectually unsound position.¹⁶

The thoughts of Edward John Carnell of Fuller Theological Seminary are typical of scholarly opinion:

Unlike the Continental Reformers and the English dissenters, the fundamentalists failed to develop an affirmative world view. They made no effort to connect their convictions with the wider problems of the general culture. . . . This is why fundamentalism is now a reli-

¹⁵ *Ibid*, footnote, p. 17.

¹⁶ E. Brunner, *Eternal Hope*, Westminster, Philadelphia, 1954.

gious attitude rather than a religious movement. It is a highly ideological attitude. It is intransigent and inflexible; it expects conformity; it fears academic liberty. It makes no allowance for the inconsistent, and thus partially valid, elements in other positions. . . .

Fundamentalism is a lonely position. It has cut itself off from the general stream of culture, philosophy and ecclesiastical tradition. This accounts, in part, for its robust pride. Since it is no longer in union with the wisdom of the ages, it has no standard by which to judge its own religious pretense. It dismisses non-fundamentalistic efforts as empty, futile or apostate. Its tests for Christian fellowship become so severe that divisions in the Church become a sign of virtue. And when there are no modernists from which to withdraw, fundamentalists compensate by withdrawing from one another.¹⁷

While orthodox Protestant scholars are uniformly critical of fundamentalism's faulty grasp of shades of meaning in the Gospel, they are likewise uniformly cautious in their own positions concerning the second advent. After all, the tale of unfulfilled eschatological hope goes from the apostles themselves all the way to the very top leaders of the Reformation. Luther, for example, clearly believed he was living in the last days. He found confirmation for this outlook in such diverse things as the Roman papacy, the Turkish armies threatening the city of Vienna, and the solar eclipses of 1514, 1518, 1531. But the Lord did not show up.

Professor G.C. Berkouwer of Amsterdam urges caution in evaluating apocalyptic "signs of the times". He asks if some of the catastrophes said to indicate the approaching last days happen again and again in completely different areas, then how are we to evaluate their eschatological significance? A Calvinist theologian, he asserts that calculations about the apocalyptic time-table are not

¹⁷ Edward John Carnell, "Fundamentalism", *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, Meridian Book, N.Y., 1972 ed., pp. 142-143.

necessary, desirable or even possible. This is true because the eschatological message is always of *present* significance. It never loses its contemporaneity. For the Gospel of Luke, armies surrounding Jerusalem were a sign on the horizon of the lives of the apostles, not an end time far in the future. An eschatological light penetrates through all times and is able to attract the attention of people in every era. Therefore he maintains that the catastrophic signs have received far too much consideration: wars and famines are not the important signals. The primary concern, he feels, should be the preaching of the gospel throughout the whole world.¹⁸

Though Berkouwer never substantially denies the teaching of the second coming in the New Testament, another tradition stemming from the birth of Biblical criticism not only makes the date of the advent ambiguous but altogether throws it out. John Robinson and L. Harold DeWolf take this position.

Robinson, a respected Cambridge scholar and bishop of the Church of England, comes to the conclusion that Jesus himself did not teach his disciples anything about his return. That is, from his study of the Parousia texts, he feels that there is no firm foundation in the authentic words of Jesus that Christians should await the return of God's Son from heaven. All of the parables were not intended to refer to a future situation but to the present overwhelming crisis facing the nation; hence Jesus' plea was a warning for the signs of the times then before it was too late. He was trying to arouse a deluded people and their blind religious leaders to a realization of the awful gravity of that unique moment of visitation, which if not recognized would be a disastrous time of dispossession and rejection.

However, after Jesus was executed, the Evangelists applied the parables quite naturally to their own period and interpreted them in terms of the awaited Parousia. Thus, Parousia parables were originally crisis parables. Jesus' warning to his contemporaries became some sort of future judgment.¹⁹

VIII. ¹⁸ G.C. Berkouwer, *The Return of Christ*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, 1972, chap.

¹⁹ J.A.T. Robinson, *Jesus and His Coming*, Abingdon, N.Y., 1957.

L. Harold DeWolf, a Methodist scholar and author of *Theology of the Living Church*, admits that he has gradually changed from an increasingly evangelical liberal to a liberal evangelical. But he still has strong reservations about the eschatological enthusiasm of many modern Protestant theologians. He sides with those New Testament critics who find it difficult to decide exactly what Jesus himself thought about the coming of the kingdom.

He maintains that the Gospels upon which we are forced to rely for evidence give two conflicting interpretations. On one hand, the reign of God is to be inaugurated by a cataclysmic intervention in human affairs made by Christ who returns in a burst of overwhelming power. On the other hand, the kingdom is said to be already present and will spread gradually as the influence of the ever-abiding Christ expands. According to DeWolf (among others) no textual ground exists for dismissing either conception as a late addition.

Admitting that there are arguments for emphasizing the apocalyptic teachings, the Methodist still prefers to make the immanent conception normative. He cites five reasons. First, an apocalyptic bias on the part of Jesus' hearers must be expected and accounted for. Secondly, men are apt to remember the spectacular side of a teaching and in the process of retelling are inclined to elaborate upon it. Thirdly, Jesus' predictions of a national disaster to befall his people could easily be misunderstood and reinterpreted as prophecies of the final judgment. Fourthly, other teachings of Jesus about a blessed life after death or warnings of judgment could be distorted into apocalyptic claims. But most important, since apocalyptic hopes were not fulfilled as the early Church expected, do we really want to suggest that Jesus was mistaken about the very thing which was at the center of his thought? If the consistent eschatologists are correct, this raises serious and far-reaching questions about the authority of Jesus. An ordinary apocalyptic prophet could not release the creative power which the early Church and later Christianity clearly possess. For these reasons, DeWolf concludes that Jesus believed in a reign of God in our hearts and lives, now partial and fragmentary, but

destined to grow to fulfillment.²⁰

Clearly a survey of contemporary Christian thought on such an important doctrine as the second advent shows no general consensus of opinion among churchmen. Christians equally dedicated and of equal repute in the Church do not see eye to eye on this basic matter. Spokesmen for the mainline denominations almost to a man affirm that the second advent will take place in the probably distant and certainly unknown future. Or they claim that a return of Jesus is not to be expected because his spirit is always with us. Fundamentalists and some very popular sectarian movements stress that the kingdom is drawing nigh. Perhaps a reinterpretation of the nature of the second advent, like that proposed by Unification theology, will bring divergent Christians together.

RESURRECTION

Literally, of course, resurrection means to rise from the dead; Pharisaic Judaism interpreted this prosaically as the resuscitation of every corpse at the time of the final judgment; some Christians have interpreted the term in a similar fashion, and the Apostles' Creed embodies a belief in the resurrection of the flesh. Modern scholars, somewhat embarrassed by such a materialistic interpretation of eternal life, either substitute for it the Greek view of the immortality of the soul or explain that the doctrine of the bodily resurrection is a symbolic way of insisting that God cares for the total human personality. The Sadducees of Jesus' day denied the resurrection of the body, because it represents an idea borrowed from the Zoroastrians and is not found in the Torah.

Divine Principle uses the Garden of Eden account to suggest a different meaning for the concept of resurrection. According to the Yahwist narrative, the Lord warned Adam and Eve that the day they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would die. Obviously they did not. What, then, was meant by death in this connection? Did it refer to the fact that man's physical body becomes old, dies, and turns to dust? *Divine Principle* would say no. Death of that sort is the natural fate of physical existence in

²⁰ H.L. DeWolf, *A Theology of the Living Church*, Harper & Row, N.Y., 1968, pp. 306-317.

accordance with natural law. No physical body is created to last forever.²¹

All of the great world religions teach that man will have a life after death, but in modern times secular-minded people cling to this physical existence believing that life ends at the grave. According to *Divine Principle*, the inevitable separation of the spirit from the body is not death in God's sight. Real death comes from the absence of give and take with Him. In this ultimate sense, death originated with man's separation from his Creator. This is a spiritual state in which man no longer has the ability to perceive God's love clearly or to respond to His presence. People born in a fallen condition must advance to the higher stages of growth and perfection. That process is resurrection, the restoration of man's original nature, and its goal is the attainment of perfection.

There is no outward change as one experiences resurrection; yet a vast spiritual transformation occurs which alters the character of one's inner life. New Testament Christianity refers to it as a virtual rebirth. It is in this way that resurrection in the apocalyptic sense should be understood.

Like judgment, resurrection has been going on since the dawn of history; and like revelation, it has a progressive nature. Man's religious ascent is from a primitive superstition and savagery. Students of the history of religion claim that mankind slowly turned from animism to polytheism to henotheism to monotheism. God could shed only as much light as man could understand and employ profitably.

Therefore, resurrection is that process which brought us from the days of Abraham, when people carried around their compact household divinities and animal sacrifices were the means to get right with God, and through the days of Moses, when the Hebrews

²¹ A common Christian interpretation of the Genesis story is that physical death is part of the curse laid upon man because of the Fall. Adam and Eve were created to live forever. By being expelled from the Garden of Eden they forfeited the chance to eat the fruit from the tree of life by which they would become immortal. Without treating the Eden story literally, many theologians nevertheless maintain that physical death is part of the price paid for man's original sin.

were united in devotion to Yahweh by Law, to the days of Jesus when a great many men were liberated to relate to God from an even more mature spiritual standpoint. Resurrection means facing up to God, the gradual abandonment of fear, and the narrowing of the distance between a life of external or internal slavery to a life of true freedom.

After man fell, God immediately started working to raise man to higher and higher levels of spiritual advancement, with the Ten Commandments given to the Jews marking the height of the formation stage. Jesus was to carry this further ideologically and spiritually through the growth stage to perfection. In spite of his premature death, New Testament Christianity provides an opportunity for men to be resurrected to the height of the growth stage. For this reason the newly converted Christian feels a profound change in his inner being. He experiences a resurrecting life force far beyond that common in other religious circles.

Though Christianity has been the vanguard of resurrection, God has worked in all cultures to raise the standard of worship from the primitive and fearful to the understandable and the evident. A short list of examples would include Hinduism in India, Buddhism in the Far East, Islam in the Arab world, the mystical philosophy of the Kabbalah and Hasidism, or the Reform and Reconstruction movements in Judaism. Everywhere today men call for a new faith which will harvest the fruits of all religions. The ultimate catalyst then is the expected Messiah, who comes to lead Christians as well as faithful adherents of other religious traditions to the final stage of resurrection.

Because our times are preparing for the arrival of this messianic age, we witness the appearance of many astounding psychic phenomena. Just as the intense anticipation of the immediate return of Christ produced the experience of Pentecost by the first disciples, so contemporary man's ardent longing for a Messiah has given birth to an astonishing outburst of mystical gifts and visions.

Since World War II, the western world—particularly its youth—has turned to astrology, numerology, yoga, transcendental meditation, witchcraft, satanism, mediums and visionaries. The

growing popularity of the Catholic Pentecostals, over 50,000 in America who have received or seek the gift of speaking in tongues, is another clear sign of something amazing occurring in the soul of modern man. Many say that we are entering a brand new era: the age of Aquarius is about to begin, the age of Pisces (that of the fish which is a symbol of traditional Christianity) is drawing to a close.

In this century, as is recorded in a growing number of books, lectures and life experiences from one end of the world to the other, the channels of communication between the spiritual and the physical are being opened up wider than ever before. For *Divine Principle*, this is a phenomenon linked to the second advent, a new revelation of divine truth and the supreme manifestation of God's power.

New Testament Christians were familiar with the "prophet"; he was that unique person in the early church (referred to in Ephesians, for example) through whom God could speak directly. By means of this basic principle of intuitive guidance, Unification theology suggests a partial explanation for today's unusual psychic phenomena. These days God is virtually pouring His spirit and power upon mankind. Widespread pentecostalist fervor and the development of highly spiritualistic sects in Asia, Europe (especially England) and America owe their inspiration to such activity.

In the meantime, the established Christian churches, in seeking on the one hand to become knit together and on the other to knit the world together, actually reflect a union that is sought for above, in the view of Unification theology. In spite of some defects, the ecumenical movement and the social gospel movement (now called liberation theology) represent positive responses to the clear challenge of God for our day.

With each passing year the crescendo of spiritual activity mounts. For *Divine Principle*, this is like a symphony tuning up before the grand performance. If one now hears only discordant notes and strange noises, the time is not remote when all will realize their roles as parts of a whole in the universal and long-sought final resurrection.

ANTICHRIST

In an age filled with messianic expectancy, the term antichrist may again be heard. Ecclesiastics have always had a certain penchant for vitriolic language and this particular epithet has enjoyed a place of special privilege. In order to use the term correctly a brief historical explanation may be useful.

Probably the oldest usage of the word goes back to a period prior to the writing of the New Testament. It is highly likely that Jesus himself was accused of being the antichrist by the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Essenes. That is, because of his work and the awe in which he was held by his disciples, he could easily be denounced as a pseudo-Messiah, the Hebrew expression for which antichrist is a Greek equivalent. Down through her history Judaism has been cursed with the appearance of charismatic figures, religious or military, who have claimed to be the long-awaited Messiah. Theudas the Galilean (Acts 5:36) is one such messianic pretender, but there were many. In the light of its later usage by Christians, it is important to remember that the abusive term was originally employed against Jesus himself.

Within the New Testament the word seems to have been used in two very different ways, both referring to the ultimate incarnation of evil. In the little apocalypse of Mark (chap. 13), "the abomination of desolation" was connected to a political enemy of God, either someone like the Hellenistic ruler Antiochus Epiphanes who polluted the Holy of Holies in Jerusalem by sacrificing a pig on the high altar, or the insane Roman emperor Caligula who ordered that a statue of himself be placed in the Jewish Temple. In both cases the antichrist was a secular antagonist of God and the true faith. A later New Testament writing, the book of Revelation, likewise identifies an enemy of the Most High as a pseudo-savior like the profligate emperor Nero or the notorious imperial persecutor of Christians, Domitian.

This political explanation of the antichrist has never been completely abandoned. Hitler, for example, was denounced as the antichrist by some Christians inside and outside of Germany. Lenin and Stalin were likewise condemned because of their inhuman

totalitarianism in general and their ruthless persecution of the Russian Orthodox Church in particular. In this sense, the antichrist is a secular ruler who challenges the rightful prerogatives of God.

A second usage is also grounded in the New Testament. In one of the Johannine epistles, the antichrists are those who deny that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh (I Jn. 4:2-3). Quite clearly the objects of the New Testament author's wrath are not Jews who deny that Jesus is the Messiah but Christians who deny that he came in the flesh. As most commentators agree, I John is attacking either the Gnostics who felt that matter is evil and thus Christ's appearance was spiritual or the Docetic Christians who believed that Jesus was completely divine so only looked like a man. In both cases, we find an identification of the antichrist with the heretic; that is, a Christian who holds doctrinal views contrary to the majority in the Church is considered an enemy of the Messiah.²²

Eccelesiastical history is replete with examples of this. It has been used by Eastern Orthodox against Roman Catholics, Roman Catholics against Protestants, Lutherans against Anglicans, Quakers against Congregationalists, New Light Presbyterians against Old Light Presbyterians, etc., ad infinitum. Differences in doctrine, polity or custom have led one group of believers to confront another with a charge of being the antichrist. Not until comparatively recent times have Christians who differ in theology, forms of church government or liturgical practice been able to meet and work together without wild accusations of heresy and schism.

The use of the term antichrist, as well as other epithets, has meant that in the past no figure of ability or position could feel safe from attacks by the mean-spirited. Among the heretics and schismatics of church history were Stephen and Paul, Origen, Pope Honorius I, Patriarchs Nestorius and Cyril Lucar, Erasmus, Luther, George Fox, Theodore Parker, Lyman Beecher and Horace Bushnell. Since 1900 heresy charges have been levelled at Bishop Barnes of Birmingham, Harry Emerson Fosdick, Teilhard de Chardin and Rudolf Bultmann, all of them eminent scholars.

²² Otto Piper, "Antichrist", *A Handbook of Christian Theology*, Meridian Book, N.Y., 1972 edition, pp. 13-17.

Fortunately latitudinarian views have accompanied the birth of the ecumenical movement in almost all branches of the Christian Church and heresy hunting has been increasingly confined to the ignorant, the bigoted and the backward remnant of the clergy. By and large the motto for mainline Christianity has become: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." What else would be appropriate for a religion whose founder was accused of being an antichrist, an immoralist and a blasphemer?

THE SPIRITUAL APOCALYPSE

According to Unification theology, all religions have arisen through the providence of God and each has contributed to the spiritual enlightenment of mankind. Within Christianity too, all denominations in varying degrees are part of one vast flock through which God has encouraged progress and brought abundant benefit to this world. All have helped to lay the foundation for the final dispensation of the second advent. Even some of the so-called heresies in history have been well-intentioned efforts to recover aspects of Christian thought overlooked or disregarded by the established churches.²³ Many of the arguments and opinions put forth heretofore, coming from the classic tradition in Christian thought, in some manner support the view of the second advent of Unification theology, while others are no doubt in opposition.

The argument of Berkouwer that wars and famines are not necessarily the signs of the last days would be in agreement; the notion that an intended earthly fulfillment was not in the plan of God would be in opposition. The idea of the Dutch Catholic scholars that Christ must come to finish his work would find strong sympathy in *Divine Principle*; the theory that some figure will come on a physical cloud with a supersonic voice would not. The conviction of the various New Age groups, assorted mystics and spiritualists, fundamentalists, pentecostals, Jehovah's Witnesses that these are the days of the Messiah's coming find a common

²³ Rufus M. Jones, *The Church's Debt to Heretics*, George H. Doran Co., N.Y., 1924. The title speaks for itself; the Quaker theologian has only one regret; that there are too many heretics for one small book.

base, but the notion that supernatural phenomena will surround it would be in profound disagreement.

Because the new Christ is coming in a way similar to the appearance of Jesus 2000 years ago, there will again be a tremendous dichotomy between the literal apocalyptic expectation and the actuality of his person. Yet, he will come in a way that can reconcile those viewing the kingdom as already having begun and those viewing it as yet to be consummated. In one sense—a very basic one—the emotional expectancy in modern charismatic movements is similar to the attraction of the ancient fishermen to the Messiah. From a different perspective, the scholarly peeling away of non-essential myth prepares us to accept the Messiah when he comes—to respond in a realistic way to a realistic move of God. Thus, though some on emotional levels may have partial revelation of his coming, they but see it in highly exaggerated, fantastic, clouded terms—much as did people 2000 years go. The goal of historical research is to put events in their rightful perspective. Apocalypticism serves its purpose by arousing anticipation and inspiring preparation.

In Jewish messianism, the return of Elijah the prophet to herald the arrival of the Son of Man played an important role. Much of the spiritual phenomena of the past 100 years is itself the Elijah for the messianic age to come, in the view of *Divine Principle*.

If there is such a thing as a spiritual apocalypse which is not supernatural, if there is such a thing as demythologizing without dematerializing, if there is such a thing as a second coming theology without either spiritualizing it out of existence or eschatologizing it into the absurd, then that terminology, that ideology would somewhat apply to Unification theology. If not, then perhaps a new term—qualified eschatology?—may be coined. Every culture has begun with a powerful, inspired religious figure; any hope for world peace and unity depends on the unity of religion: from that point unity of people, and thus the unity—though not uniformity—of culture can be realized. In the four major cultural spheres today, there is an awareness that their religions are not

quite fulfilled and some kind of judgment day or time of fulfillment is expected. If each is realized through a different messenger, then there will still be religious barriers and thus cultural barriers, and world peace and unity will be impossible. If on the other hand, God inspires a man and a people with a truth that can be the fulfillment of historic religions, then through that man and that truth, world harmony will be within grasp, and the prince of peace will have come.

In a striking way, for *Divine Principle*, the stage is set today. The characters and their roles are not all that different from 2000 years ago—yet the script we have and the cast to be included have been expanded. One can hope and believe that we will use the lessons of history today to correct the mistakes of the past.

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