

*THE RELATION OF PENTECOST TO THE FIRST  
COMING OF CHRIST.*

I HAVE often felt that one of the most widespread and disastrous errors in Theology is due to the confusion of thought which surrounds the subject of the Advents of Christ, and the relation between what is called His First with His Second Coming.

It is not so much argued as taken for granted, that while He was exercising His ministry in Palestine, His First Advent was already an event of the past, and that His frequent allusions to a future coming must necessarily refer to a Second Advent, which, in this year of grace 1924, is in the future still.

Yet it is, I think, demonstrable beyond all question that when the disciples asked, "What shall be the Sign of Thy coming?" they regarded His First Coming as still to take place. "Art thou he that cometh?" asked St. John the Baptist. The idea that He had already "come," that He was about to disappear and would then come again a second time, never crossed the minds of His followers. It was with a feeling of dismay that they learned that His coming would be a manifestation to them, and not to the world generally. "Lord, what is come to pass that thou wilt manifest thyself to us and not to the world?"

It has been widely assumed that they considered that their Master had come already, that they understood that He was shortly to be separated from them, and that they asked when they might expect Him again after the time of separation was past. It is quite clear that, in the light of what followed, people have read into their words a meaning which simply could not have been theirs.

What they did expect was that, without leaving them,

He would, in some signal manner, manifest Himself in all His power in the eyes of the Hebrew people, and that, convincing them of the truth of His Messianic claims, He would ascend the throne of His father David, and restore again the Kingdom to Israel. "When," they asked in effect, "will thy mission reach its climax, when all will see and believe?"

What has not been sufficiently recognised is that, before Jesus Christ could come to the world as Son of Man, He had to come to the Jews as their Messiah. The larger Mission lay hidden in the narrower one, as the flower lies latent in the yet unburied seed. It was "to all the people," i.e. to Israel, that the herald angel brought the glad tidings at Bethlehem. He was born "under the Law," and the vast, infinite love of the eternal Son of God was cabined, cribbed, confined in its application and expression by the Law's separating restrictions. His mission in the flesh was strictly limited. He was "not sent save to the lost sheep of the House of Israel." Nor would He, during His earthly ministry, allow those limitations to be overpassed by His disciples. "Go not," He said, "in the way of the Gentiles and into any village of the Samaritans enter ye not, but go rather to the lost sheep of the House of Israel."

That Jesus Himself felt acutely the necessary restrictions of His Commission on the active going forth of a love that embraced all mankind is very strikingly shown by the words He spoke when certain Greeks came to Philip at the feast saying, "Sir, we would see Jesus." Their request brought on Him prematurely the pangs of the Crucifixion. In that hour He realised that only by His death as a Jew could He free Himself from the hampering restrictions of the Jewish Law. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a grain of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone,

but if it die, it beareth much fruit" . . . "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? But for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name. . . . And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." The same thought underlies His words towards the close of His ministry. "I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished."

Nothing but His death as a Jew would break down the separating barriers of the Law and rend the veil, and bring Him into saving contact with all. So by His Crucifixion He blotted out the restricting bond written in ordinances that was against the Gentiles and, to use the magnificent rhetoric of St. Paul, He took it out of the way "nailing it to His Cross."

On Palm Sunday, in the fulfilment of prophecy, He entered Jerusalem as King. He was crowned and enthroned a few days later and the great words written over Him "*This is Jesus, the King of the Jews.*"

Till He had died as a Jew, His coming to the whole world as Son of Man could not take place; therefore, while He frequently calls Himself "Son of Man," He invariably speaks of His "coming" in that capacity as an event of the future. In the Body which He took of the Virgin Mary, "made under the Law," it was impossible.

But "the Law hath dominion over a man only while he liveth." By dying Jesus Christ became free from the Law and broke down what St. Paul calls "the middle wall of partition." The Messianic mission was one of the things completed by the great cry from the Cross.

For His wider mission to the whole world as Son of Man, He needed a Body which could be diffused throughout the world, a Body in which He could be active in a thousand places at once and which could live from age to age.

It was in His mystical Body and on the Day of Pentecost that His First coming as Son of Man to the whole world took place. As He became incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and took from her the Body in which He discharged His earthly ministry, so on Pentecost He became incarnate by the Holy Ghost in His Body the Church.

It is altogether a mistake—though a very common one—to speak or think of the Holy Ghost as the substitute for an absent Christ. He is, on the contrary, the living Medium by whom Christ, according to His promise, came.

“I go away and I come to you” (R.V.). I go beyond the reach of the bodily senses that I may come to you by the pathway of the Holy Spirit. The close and essential connexion between the Ascension and the coming of the Holy Ghost is as remarkable as the close and interchangeable connexion between the coming of the Holy Ghost and the coming of the Christ to the whole world as Son of Man.

“If I go not away, the Holy Ghost will not come unto you . . .”

“A little while and ye behold me no more, and again a little while and ye shall see me.”

Before the Holy Ghost could be given Jesus had to be “glorified.”

“The Holy Ghost,” says St. John, “was not yet given because Jesus was not yet glorified.”

“He shall glorify him *in himself* and shall straightway glorify him.”

“And now, O Father,” He prayed, “glorify thou me with the glory that I had with thee before the world was.”

Let us ask then, what did that glorification mean?

Surely it could mean nothing less than this. Receive My human spirit into full and complete union with God

the Holy Ghost, that in His coming I may come, and in His abiding I may abide.<sup>1</sup>

So, if we ask, what happened at the Ascension, we should say that with their bodily eyes the Apostles saw Him raise His hands to bless them, that while He blessed them a mist or cloud gathered round Him, and then—like a cloud of steam on a dry day—it passed, and from the sense-world He was gone.

But if our thoughts—like the Apostles'—gaze steadfastly into Heaven; not "up into Heaven," but "into Heaven" (R.V.), into the place where they saw Him disappear, into the inner world into which He had gone, they may reverently behold how God glorified Him "*in Himself.*"

It was in truth, "the taking of the Manhood into God." It was the Assumption by the Holy Ghost of the human spirit of Jesus, and of all that belonged to that perfected Manhood. Thus it was through the Holy Ghost that the Son of Mary reached the throne of Godhead, through the Holy Ghost that He became incarnate in His Church and through the Holy Ghost that He makes us one with the eternal Father and one with one another.

"I in them and thou in me, that they may be one in us." He comes to His followers now as then, approaching them from within, from the spiritual side of their being, by the way of the Holy Spirit. True, because our eyes are still turned towards the material world, He, by the same Holy Spirit, assumes a sacramental Body, and approaches by the way of the senses; but that sacramental approach—precious as it is—is temporary, "till He come," and after the manner of a reflection as when a friend approaching from behind is seen in a mirror as though approaching from the front. The eyes of the friends really meet, and when

<sup>1</sup> See an interesting article on "The Theology of the Holy Spirit," by the Rev. W. S. Bishop, D.D., in the *Expositor* for April, 1917.

in the mirror the friend appears to arrive He is really there, and we may say, like Browning in his poem about the coming of the unseen friend,

“Hush, I pray you,  
What if this friend happen to be God?”

At Pentecost, then, and in the lifetime of those who heard Him speak, and before His disciples had gone over the cities of Israel in the way of preparation, the great First Coming of the Son of Man took place. But it was indeed a coming “with clouds”—and we may remark in passing that clouds are invariably in Scripture meant to conceal, not—as is generally assumed—to reveal. The world was blind to that Coming. *It* could not receive Him because it saw Him not, but His disciples saw. In the Coming of the Holy Ghost the human spirit of Jesus came, and in the indwelling of the Holy Ghost they found within themselves in all His love and power the Master whom they had followed and loved and worshipped.

Brooding over His Church and dwelling in it, He controlled and directed the actions of His followers.

Cf. “They assayed to go into Bithynia; but the Spirit of Jesus (R.V.) suffered them not.”

He was near them before; now, as Faber so beautifully says, He was not far enough away to be near.

At the cost of some repetition, let me shortly sum up what, so far, I have tried to show.

Jesus Christ came first to the Jews as their promised Messiah—the Son of David. As such He was circumcised and made obedient to the Law, with all its separating restrictions.

Cf. “It is not lawful for a man that is a Jew to come unto one of another nation.”

Accordingly, He recognised that, during the days of His flesh, His mission was limited to His own nation.

Yet He spoke the words of eternal life, and His love embraced all mankind. As Son of Man He longed to break down "the middle wall of partition," and to take out of the way the handwriting of the ordinances that was against the Gentiles.

To accomplish this He recognised that there was only one way. The Law only had dominion over a man while he lived. He must die as a Jew if He would "draw all men unto Him."

His rejection as Messiah and His Crucifixion were in the providence of God the necessary preliminaries to His Coming to the whole world as Son of Man.

Shortly before His death He spoke of this Coming as future and as imminent—as certain to take place in the lifetime of some who heard Him.

This promise was fulfilled, and, as Kingsley says, they are

"Fools, who fancy Christ mistaken."

At the Ascension He departed from the world of sense.

At Pentecost He came to the world by the way of the Spirit—"a new and living way."

But before He could come by the way of the Spirit it was necessary that He should be "glorified."

This involved the Assumption by the Holy Ghost of the human spirit of Jesus—"The taking of the Manhood into God."

So He came to the world as Son of Man in a Body against which the gates of death could not prevail, and in which He could actively carry on His work in a thousand places simultaneously.

Till this Pentecostal Coming, His world-wide Gospel was to be kept back. From the date of that coming His followers were to go out with their message to all the world.

Now let us see how deplorably the failure to realise the

truth of these simple propositions has told on modern theology, and quite needlessly shaken the faith of good men.

In his review of my book *Apocalyptic Problems*, the present Archbishop of Melbourne writes, "Perhaps his most striking argument is his dealing with the 'Coming of the Son of Man.' One of the most confident and orthodox exponents of the Futurist school confessed to the reviewer recently what a staggering problem to his faith was the assertion of Christ in Matthew x. 23: 'Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come.'"<sup>1</sup>

Bishop Gore, in his recent book, *Belief in Christ*, writes: "Recently it has come to be widely and confidently stated and believed that Jesus Christ anticipated and proclaimed His *immediate* Coming as the glorified Christ within the lifetime of His own generation; and was in this (as in some other respects) deluded, or the victim of current ideas which were, in fact, illusion; and there has been a great deal of discussion upon the bearing of these delusions of the mind of Christ upon the Theology of His Person."

Elsewhere, he says: "So wise a man as the late Henry Sidgwick was alienated from the faith and membership of the Christian Church mainly by the conviction that Jesus Christ had certainly proclaimed the immediate coming of the end of the world, and that it had not come as He prophesied. Jesus, he thought, was certainly under a delusion, and could not therefore be what Christendom believed Him to be."

"Did Christ," asks Archbishop Bernard, "expect an immediate Parousia? . . . How are we to deal with such

<sup>1</sup> He asks, What would the gain be of believing that these words refer to the First "Coming," which was still an event of the future, and quotes this reply, "We get rid at once of all the difficulties which have troubled those who assumed that His first Coming took place at Bethlehem and that it was to His Second Coming that He referred when He spoke the words quoted above."



passages as 'Ye shall not have gone over all the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come'; and, 'There be some of them that stand here who shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom'?"

"I will say quite frankly that if we had no report of the Lord's words but that in St. Matthew, there would be no escape from the conclusion that in these sayings He anticipated a manifestation of the Son of Man, which, in fact, did not take place." The Archbishop's solution is to correct the words of St. Matthew by the corresponding passage in St. Mark, in which the words "Son of Man" are omitted, and to regard them as an editorial addition of the former Evangelist.

The late Principal Denney writes: "When all qualifications are made, it is impossible for any candid writer to get rid of the fact that Jesus conceived the triumph of the Kingdom to come with His own Coming in glory, and that He spoke of it as so near that the very people whom He addressed must be in constant readiness for it."

Then in guarded words he goes on to make it quite plain that Jesus took a "fore-shortened" view, and he asks, "Does it change our attitude to Jesus to think of Him thus? Are we the less willing or the less able to call Him 'Lord,' when we realise that in the days of His flesh He walked by faith and that the assurance of His triumph, in which all history is His justification, did not enable Him to hold up to His disciples a mirror in which the course of history could be foreseen? In substance His words are true, but, as in all prophecy, the form is inadequate to the substance, and this state of the case must simply be recognised." What an amazing amount of verbiage it takes to camouflage a simple but unpleasant statement that the Christ made a mistake!

Again, the same writer says that in St. John's Gospel

“the eschatological hopes of the earlier Gospels are not simply omitted, they are replaced.” The evangelist has “substituted a spiritual for an outward coming”—a “bold transmutation of the prediction of Jesus, which was forced on the evangelist by the teaching of events and by the Spirit.”

Personally, I should feel that if I could accept such statements as these I should have very little foundation left for any faith at all. Yet that is the accepted teaching among many of the Modernists of to-day. Christ, they suggest, held a fanatical belief that the world was coming to an immediate end, and He was to make an immediate spectacular coming surrounded by clouds which were not to veil, but to display His glory. All these expectations were disappointed, and out of the ruins of its Master's hopes arose the Holy Catholic Church!

All these distressing theories and needless emendations would be scattered like morning mist if it were realised that the First Coming of the Son of Man to the whole world—the Coming to which these passages refer—took place at Pentecost, when He became incarnate by the Holy Ghost in His mystical Body, the Church.

In conclusion, I need hardly say that while I am urging that many passages which have been mistakenly applied to the Second Advent were meant to refer to the First, I am not for a moment questioning the truth or reality of the former. There are, of course, many prophecies and many promises subsequent to Pentecost which necessarily can apply to that alone.

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