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the new materials available now for the study of Semitic religion, and the new light which has been shed on the subject both from the side of anthropological and psychological investigations, and from that of linguistic and archæological researches in the ancient history and civilization (how complex, we are only now realizing) of South-West Asia. These new materials and sources of information will yield fresh guidance in the region of Biblical and

allied studies in so far as the investigator of to-day carries on his task with the same painstaking yet zestful zeal, with the same comprehensive outlook, with the same sympathy and reverence, with the same scientific methods, as enabled William Robertson Smith to inaugurate a new epoch by the labours of which some results are presented with illuminating and stimulating power in *The Religion of the Semites*.

A Note on the 'Second Coming.'

BY THE REVEREND CANON BINDLEY, D.D., DENTON, NORFOLK.

I HAVE often wondered whether the Christian Church has not been as much mistaken about what is called the 'Second Coming' of Christ as the Jewish Church was mistaken about the First Coming of its Messiah. The Jews looked for a Prince of the House of David, a Conqueror who would crush the Gentile oppressors, rule them with a rod of iron, and break them in pieces like a potter's vessel, One who should 'redeem Israel' and 'restore the kingdom.' And our Lord had to teach His disciples the real meaning of the Scripture prophecies which they were so 'slow of heart' to understand. They had looked for a kingdom of this world in this world, one that 'came with observation'; and they were taught that His Sovereignty, although to be established in this world, was not of this world; that it was to be established in the hearts of individuals, slowly permeating like the leaven, and unhurriedly spreading in growth like the mustard bush.

Their Messiah did come to the Jews, but in a guise very different from what they expected. A lowly Babe, in humble station, who yet grew up under the Spirit's indwelling into a Teacher of loftiest insight and sublimest ethical revelation of the nature and requirements of His heavenly Father who was the God not of Jews only, but of every race and of every individual human being and of all Nature.

The earliest generation of Christians seems to have misunderstood the 'Second Coming' of Christ in much the same way. They looked for a catastrophic event within their own lifetime, and the 'Coming' proved to be an agelong process, a continuous present Judgment, the constant Presence of Christ with His followers. Nothing could have been clearer than the words placed upon Christ's own lips by the writer of the Fourth Gospel. 'I

will not leave you orphans: I come to you': that was His promise, paralleled in the First Gospel by 'I am with you all the days, even to the end of the world.' Here were definite assurances so plain that it seems hard to see how they could be misunderstood. By the time that the Fourth Gospel was written the expectation of the speedy earthly Return of Christ was seen to be a mistake. The eschatology of the Synoptists has been refined. Eternal life is shown to consist in the knowledge of God, which is quite independent of time and its changes, and is to be enjoyed here and now, not postponed to some future existence after death or at the end of this world. Jesus corrects Martha's notion of a resurrection at the last day by the proclamation that He *is* the Resurrection and the Life. In another context, His 'Going' to the Father is a 'Coming' to His disciples. He comes to be with them as 'Another Comforter.' His Spirit is as truly identified with Himself as He was identified with the Father. 'He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.' 'I and the Father are one.' 'The Father will give you Another Comforter, the Spirit of Truth. . . . I come to you.' The true meaning of these expressions seems to have been hidden from the understanding of the early believers. They interpreted them in the light of their apocalyptic expectations that the glorious Coming would be a visible Advent of the Son of Man on the clouds of heaven, as depicted in the Books of Enoch; to inaugurate with catastrophic overthrow of all evil a reign of righteousness on this earth. Hence the millenarian views of the first two centuries. This was the atmosphere, the background of belief and expectation, in which nearly all the books of the New Testament were written. It is prominent in St. Paul's letters, in the epistles attributed to St.

Peter, and especially in the Apocalypse. The last book is indeed a typical setting forth of visions and hopes, coloured by Old Testament and other Jewish apocalypses—notably Enoch, Jubilees, and the Twelve Testaments—which times of persecution elicited. Millenarianism disappeared after the third century, but the language and beliefs of the Christian Church still clung to the fundamental error of Millenarianism; and consequently the notions of a Grand Assize, and a Last Day, and a simultaneous universal Judgment of quick and dead, have been characteristic of Christian creed and teaching ever since.

Now a careful examination of the general tenor of Christ's own words would have avoided this. Symbolical phrases have been interpreted as if they were literal statements. A process has been degraded into a catastrophic event. Present tenses have been translated as futures. The Latins misrepresented *ἐρχόμενος* (continuous present) by *venturus* (distant eventuality). What was intended to be inconceivably dread and awful has been rendered practically ineffective. That which is postponed to a very distant date is difficult to realize and almost intuitively disbelieved. True teaching would have insisted that the Christ is always present: that the Judgment is always being enacted: that the evil character or the evil action carries its own punishment within itself. There is no gap between the clauses in the Nicene Creed: 'He ascended into heaven: Cometh to judge.' They are synchronous.

If our Lord's words are sanely interpreted, with a due regard to their Oriental symbolism where symbolism is involved, and quite explicitly where no symbolism is used, a great many difficulties disappear from passages which promise the Coming of the Son of Man or of the Kingdom of Heaven within the lifetime of that existing generation. Mt 10²³ promises that the first missionaries will not have gone through the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come. Mk 9¹ (with its parallels Lk 9²⁷, Mt 16²⁶) assures some of the bystanders that they will not taste of death till they see the Kingdom of God come with power. The writer of the First Gospel, *more suo*, amplifies the original of Mk 13 (Mt 24²⁸⁻³⁴) by introducing some fresh apocalyptic details. After the description of the terrors of the destruction of Jerusalem he adds: 'But immediately after the tribulation of those days, the sun shall be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken; and then shall appear the sign of the Son of Man in heaven; and

then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He shall send forth His messengers with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. . . . Verily I say unto you, this generation shall not pass away till all these things be accomplished.'

Interpreted in the light of apocalyptic symbolism, this language is seen to be descriptive of the passing of the Jewish Church and the birth of the new Christian era. The trumpet of God is the Gospel call beginning to sound throughout all nations, when the *ἄγγελοι*, the messengers of Christ, began their work of gathering together the elect from all quarters. That trumpet is still sounding, that work still going on, and the judgment, the distinction, the separation, proceeds all the time. The true meaning of Christ's 'Second Advent' is to be recovered, I believe, not by postponing it to some dim and distant day called 'The Day of Judgment,' or 'The End of the World,' but by realizing His constant Presence with us always, now, here, and wherever two or three are gathered together in His Name.

It is worth noting that the phrase 'The Day of the Lord' in its original popular sense denoted a victory of Israel's God over Israel's enemies. The prophets took up the popular term, but warned their hearers that unless they repented and changed their lives, *der Tag* would be one of black darkness and terror instead of brightness and joy (Am 5¹⁸⁻²⁰). They used it as a symbol of the great judicial vindication of the godly and of the penal retribution of the unrighteous, whether Jew or heathen. 'Day' thus ceased to connote Victory, and became a synonym for Assize or Judgment. Hence *ἡμέρα* could be used by St. Paul in 1 Co 4³ in this simple sense of 'judgment.' In 2 P 3¹² 'The Day of God' is used for the final destruction of this universe by fire. The trumpet call is also a favourite apocalyptic symbol, and finds its place, as we have seen, in Mt 24³¹, and in St. Paul in 1 Th 4¹⁶ and 1 Co 15⁵². In the Sibylline Oracles it signals the final conflagration which burns up the whole earth; and in 2 Es 6²³ it is mentioned in close connexion with the opening of the Books for Judgment. The trumpeter is the archangel Michael. Seven blasts were traditionally to be expected, and accordingly we find in the Revelation (8²⁻¹¹¹⁵) seven trumpets sounded by the seven angels of the Presence. Possibly St. Paul's 'last trump' may be the last of a series.