

Eschatology has often been infected with a sizable dose of fear. Popular theology of the end of the world today stresses cataclysmic world events and awesome pictures of human conflict. Too often it seems that the blessed hope has become a dreaded expectation. Some see the saints as being delivered by a rapture prior to the great tribulation, others see the saints going through the tribulation and its accompanying anguish to be delivered at the moment a civil death decree is passed against them. The result of these views has often been to create a panic theology.

The impact of this emphasis for many is poles apart from what one finds when the New Testament proclaims the end of the world. The latter implies that because the advent is "the blessed hope," its contemplation automatically leads to increase in faith, hope and love. This is a far cry from the apocalyptic fever which is frequently associated with modern presentations of the End.

But how can one contemplate the appearance of Christ, the great Judge, being aware of one's own residual imperfections, and not panic? The answer is that *the second advent must always be viewed through the lens of the first advent*. It is a cardinal principle in theology that many things which can and must be distinguished, should never be separated. This is true of the members of the Trinity (for the Father was not crucified for us, neither did the Spirit lie in the tomb for three days before resurrection), the two natures of Christ (it was not his divine nature which died, for deity cannot die), justification and sanctification, law and gospel, faith and works, etc.

In the area of eschatology, while the second advent must, of course,

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Must Eschatology Be Panic Theology?

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be distinguished from the first, it should never be separated. Only those who have by faith been crucified with Christ, those who have perceived that they already have exhausted the wrath of God in their Substitute and Surety, only these can contemplate the return of the King of kings with calmness. They are "complete in him," "accepted in the Beloved," and for them there is no condemnation, neither today, nor at the hour of his appearing (Col 2:10, Eph 1:6, Rom 8:1, 33-34).

Many churches have separated the second advent from the first by failing to proclaim it. Others have erred in reverse, particularly sectarian groups, in stressing the second coming, but paying only lip-service to the preeminence of the Cross and the first advent. The principle of theology which demands distinction but no separation suggests that those who look to the second advent as the great saving act have failed to rightly distinguish that event from the hour when, concerning our reconciliation with Heaven, the Savior declared, "It is finished."

We wish now to illustrate this principle, not only as a preventive measure against panic theology, but as a vital hermeneutical key. What is here repeated is of first importance for both Christian doctrine and Christian practice.

When Christ from the Mount of Olives gave his revelation of events associated with the *second* advent,

he drew largely from the Messianic prophecy of Daniel 9:24-27, "the foundation stone of the Christian religion," a passage often understood as applying only to the *first* coming of Christ. Our Lord's exposition of this text makes it clear that he saw it as embracing his second advent as well as the first. But as he used the specifics of Daniel 9:24-27 applying them in his second coming, he did so by interweaving allusions to his approaching passion. Thus when we look at Daniel 9:24-27 through the eyes of Christ, a great prophecy about the first advent is seen also to embrace the second (illustrating again that some things distinct must yet never be separated). Similarly, when we contemplate the second advent discourse of Matthew 24-25 (Mk 13; Lu 21), we suddenly discover that it heralds an end time which will rehearse Christ's own last days.

The chart below illustrates these allusions to Daniel.

Commentators on the Gospel of Mark, which is usually accepted as the first written, have pointed out the correspondence in motifs and terminology between Christ's Olivet discourse concerning the second advent (Mk 13) and the succeeding passion chapters. The most prominent include the following:

"betray" 13:9, 11, 12 (3 times); cf. chs. 14, 15 (10 times).

"watch" 13:33, 35, 36, etc; 13 cf. 14:34, 37, 38.

The Olivet Sermon and Daniel 9:24-27

"What will be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?"	Mt 24:3; Lu 21:7; Mk 13:4; Dan 9:24-27
"When ye therefore shall see the abomination of desolation spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place . . ."	Mt 24:15, Dan 9:26, 27
"You will hear of wars"	Mt 24:6; Dan. 9:26
"... the temple . . . there will not be left here one stone."	Mt 24:3; Dan 9:26, 27
"the end"	Mt 24:6, 13, 14; Dan 9:24, 26
"... its desolation has come."	Lu 21:20; Dan 9:27
"these are days of vengeance to fulfill all that is written."	Lu 21:22; Dan 9:24
"your redemption"	Lu 21:28; Dan 9:24
"the kingdom of God"	Lu 21:31; Dan 9:24

"hour" 13:32; cf. 14:35, 41.

Thus 13:32-37 acts as a transition to the narrative of the passion, particularly the section of 14:33-42. In Gethsemane, three of the same four disciples mentioned in 13:3 are given the command to watch. The word "watch," occurring in both passages indicates that the passion began the troubles predicted in chapter 13, thus placing the apostles, in Christ's succession, on the path to glory via sorrow and crucifixion. Says Hendrikus Berkhof: . . . *in all synoptic Gospels, statements about the future are summarized right before the passion story. The themes dealt with are watchfulness, oppression, decrease of love, flight, and finally spectacular natural phenomena and the coming of the Son of Man in glory. It is conspicuous that all these themes recur in the following chapters which deal with Christ's suffering, death, and resurrection . . . the meaning is obviously that the future will show — on a larger, and eventually world-wide scale — a repetition of what has happened in the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus* (Well-founded Hope, pp. 23-4).

Austin Farrer said: ". . . the substance of the Last Things and the substance of the passion are one and the same." (*A Study in St. Mark*, p. 285).

The second advent sermon . . . points out that there is a cross for every believer as well as for the Master.

Why did Mark originally include in his gospel the second advent sermon? The answer is that this ancient tract has long been recognized as "the martyr's gospel." Many parts of it point out that there is a cross for every believer as well as for the Master. It was written for a believing community in an alien and hostile world, needing doctrinal instruction and strengthening exhortation.

So much for the purpose of the Gospel as a whole. But why did the Evangelist include his thirteenth chapter? It is the only place in Mark where we find Christ delivering a long speech on a single theme. It is the only lengthy discourse that is recorded by Mat-

thew, Mark and Luke, and all three use it as the climax to the Gospel story prior to the passion narrative. Mark's tract would have seemed tolerably complete without the Olivet discourse. But, on the other hand, there was no more appropriate time in the ministry of Christ when such instruction could be given.

Scholars have recognized the strategic relief in which the events of Christ's life and death are placed by this interposed address on the return of him who seemed but another rabbi. Nineham suggests that this discourse "brings out the infinite significance the Evangelist saw in the events of the ministry" (*The Gospel of St. Mark*, p. 341). It is only because the ministry of Christ is God's ultimate saving intervention in time that it will be followed by the End and the coming of God's kingdom. Says Beasley-Murray: *It has long been recognized that the discourse holds a significant place in the Gospel of Mark in that it forms both a conclusion to the teaching ministry of Jesus and an introduction to the passion narrative immediately afterwards. The horror of the betrayal and execution is not minimized, but the proportion of the tragedy is changed. The cross for Jesus is the pathway to glory; he knows whither he goes, and the shadow of impending judgment falls upon the people that reject their King* (Jesus and the Future, p. 216).

Just as the Gospel as a whole seems to have teaching purposes, and, in particular, aims at strengthening those who must suffer for Christ's sake, so with this chapter. It gives Christ's own instructions regarding the anticipated end of Jerusalem and the world, but in particular, it displays a theology of the cross rather than a theology of glory. This would act as an appropriate rebuke to those whose zeal outstripped their good sense as they fervently expected Christ's imminent appearing but shunned daily duty. And simultaneously the admonitions would have encouraged the more balanced believers.

R.P. Martin has suggested that this Gospel sets forth "the paradox of Jesus' earthly life in which suffering and vindication form a two-

beat rhythm" and S. Schulz speaks of the "pattern of humiliation and exaltation" (see "A Gospel in Search of a Life-Setting," *Expository Times*, 1960, pp. 361-64). This pattern is obvious in the Olivet discourse. While the first two-thirds of Mark 13 speaks of evil times, seducers, betrayal, and suffering, the account is balanced by the picture of the vindicating Lord coming in the clouds of heaven to gather his oppressed elect. The promise of the return of the Son of Man in power and glory in Mark 13:26 would convey to the early Christians the same consolation as did Daniel 7:13 to the persecuted remnant in Maccabean times.

The coming One is he who once hung upon the cross for our sakes. Our future is in his hands.

The various key words of the chapter reappear in the following description of the passion in such a way as to teach that the disciples' course must be similar to their Lord's, and that there is no path to glory except via the cross.

Certain truths should now stand out. Jesus teaches us clearly as he expands the Daniel prophecy of his first advent that that event conceptually embraced the second advent also. Therefore, to rightly understand the cross, we must see its impact on God, man, and the universe as a whole. It was, in a real, though not materially manifest sense, "the end of the world." Compare Heb 9:26; 1 Jn 2:17; Jn 12:31; Heb 1:2; 1 Cor 10:11; Rom 13:11, 12; 16:20; 1 Thess 4:15; Jas 5:9.

Secondly, our Lord tells us that *if we would understand the events awaiting us, we should keep in mind the pattern of the cross, for it is the cross event climaxing the first advent which is the paradigm for the experience of the church in the last days*. These truths, implicit in this first "Revelation of Jesus Christ" about the future, are sounded again through his last revelation made to John on Patmos. The Bible's closing book is the book of the second advent. More than any other part of the Scripture, it stresses judg-

ment and all associated with it. But for the consolation and assurance of the believer, it never sets forth the second advent as separated from the first; distinct, yes — but separate, no. Any commentator or preacher on the Apocalypse who fails here, fails everywhere.

Thus Revelation opens with allusions to Christ's being pierced for us, his having been dead, and his passage through the grave (Rev 1:5-7). That keynote is struck again and again in the succeeding chap-

ters. It is the Lamb that was slain who sits upon the throne, and who is coming once more to deliver his people. That Lamb is so named twenty-eight times in the book. Therefore, there are no grounds for panic theology as we study this book about the return of Christ. The coming One is he who once hung upon the cross for our sakes. Our future is in his hands. Those who know of a "blessed assurance" may also be certain of a "blessed hope."