

Second Coming of Christ

PREMILLENNIAL ESSAY

OF THE

PROPHETIC CONFERENCE,

HELD IN THE

CHURCH OF THE HOLY TRINITY, NEW YORK CITY.

WITH AN

APPENDIX OF CRITICAL TESTIMONIES.

BY

NATHANIEL WEST.

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Ναὶ ἔρχομαι ταχύ. Ἀμήν, Ἐρχοῦ, Κύριε Ἰησοῦ.



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## THE COMING OF THE LORD IN ITS RELATIONS TO CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE.

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I HAVE heard that it has been said that Pre-Millennarians constitute the "infant class" in Theology. Most willingly, gladly, do I take the place thus assigned me, for I have not now to learn that the Master often hides the great things of His Kingdom "from the wise and prudent and reveals them unto babes." I can conceive of no higher honor, no greater blessedness on earth or in heaven, than to sit as a child at the feet of Jesus and drink in the words of instruction as they fall from His lips. God grant that with the simplicity of a child I may learn the truth from Him to-day, and that with like simplicity I may recite it.

I have been requested, not to read a formal paper, but to deliver an address on the Relations of the Coming of Christ to Christian Doctrine. It can not, of course, be expected or desired that I should retrace the subject so fully and ably presented last night. I shall, therefore, confine my remarks to a brief discussion of the relation of the Pre-Millennial Advent to the Catholic doctrine concerning the Office of the Spirit in Regeneration, and one cognate subject.

The central doctrine of Pre-Millennarianism is this: That an Advent of Christ, in His glorified body, is ever imminent for the establishment of what is generally known as the Millennium. We believe that when the Gospel of the Kingdom has been preached as a witness in every land (as it has already been)—that when the elect number (the

*pleroma*, the fulness) of the Gentiles has been gathered in (which may be, for aught we know, before the sun sets, which may not be for centuries; we who stand on this platform are no calculators of the secret things which God reserves in His own knowledge)—we believe that then the Redeemer shall come to Zion; that then He shall destroy Antichrist by the brightness of His Appearing; that then He shall gather now-blinded Israel to His side; that then “the kingdom and dominion and greatness of the kingdom under the whole heavens shall be given to the people of the Saints of the Most High.”

The Catholic doctrine, which this is said to contravene, is, that it is the office of the Spirit to apply the redemption purchased by Christ—that the Spirit is the Renewer. This doctrine we believe and proclaim as completely, we think, as any class of men. It may be said, however, that whatever our thoughts may be, the doctrine of a Pre-Millennial Advent is logically inconsistent therewith—inconsistent either with the continuance of the Spirit’s office after the appearance of Christ, or with His dignity in the exercise thereof.

That our doctrine is not, in Jehovah’s esteem, inconsistent with the idea of the continuance of the Spirit’s office in a glorious and miraculous Appearing of Jesus is manifest from the declarations of the Scriptures. The Apostle Paul was called and converted in such an Appearing. (Acts 9: 3-10.) And yet he writes to Titus (3: 5): “According to His mercy He saved us (not you, but us, including Himself) by the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.” The Apostle, be it remembered, was “as one born out of due time” (1 Cor. 15: 8), not *late*, but *early*. He was born, not as a lagging member of a brotherhood already called, but as the elder brother of blinded, persecuting Israel, “the *pattern* of them that

should afterward believe" when the Lord should rend the veil from their hearts. He was the type of those to be *in like manner* effectually called in the day when the promise spoken by Zechariah (12:10) shall be fulfilled—"I will pour upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the Spirit of grace and supplications; and they shall *look upon Me* whom they have pierced." The glorious Appearing unto Paul was but the harbinger—the morning star—of the day which shall yet be; the work of the Spirit wrought in him was but the earnest of that which shall then be wrought in now benighted Israel.

It may be said, however, that whilst our doctrine is not inconsistent with the continuance of the Spirit's work, it is inconsistent with His dignity in that continuance. This objection can proceed on only one of two foundations, both of which I will briefly consider.

The first is that our doctrine implies that the Spirit can not renew the world by existing instrumentalities—that the Spirit is unable to renew it without the presence of Jesus. We hold no such heresy as this, nor is it logically connected with our doctrine. That the Spirit *will* not thus act without the presence of our Lord we believe and affirm—that He *can* not, we deny. We believe, I believe, that the Spirit could have converted Paul, even as he converted Titus, without the intervention of a glorious Epiphany. We believe that under the simple preaching of the Gospel, by a babe, He could bring every sinner that now walks the earth to the knowledge and confession of the truth. The question we are considering is one of *purpose*, not of *natural ability*. Do our opponents measure what the Spirit can do by what He does? Do they hold that the fact, that the Spirit has not converted the world by the preaching of the Gospel during eighteen centuries, manifests His inabil-



ity to do it? This is the logical sequence of the objection. I repeat it, the question we are considering is one of *purpose*, not of *ability*, and I insist upon it.

There is indeed a secondary, a subordinate sense, in which it is necessary Christ should appear in glory before the Spirit performs His great work of renewing the Nations—a necessity arising from what is essential to the fulfillment of prophecy—from what is essential to the realization of declared purposes. Thus, for instance, it was necessary that Christ should be born in Bethlehem and that He should be sacrificed in Jerusalem. Not necessary in the nature of things—another town than Bethlehem, another city than Jerusalem, might have been chosen. Not necessary as a matter of *ability* that He should have been born at all, or that He should have been sacrificed at all. He could have destroyed His murderers. But necessary in order to the fulfillment of prophecies concerning Him, necessary to the carrying out of the declared purposes of Jehovah. This use of the term is often confounded with the former, and hence, I suspect, the objection. In this secondary sense, and in this only, is it affirmed by any that it is necessary Christ should come before the general renewal of the world by the Spirit.

A second foundation on which it has been alleged that our doctrine is inconsistent with the dignity of the Spirit, is that it implies subordination in working on His part. I answer, it implies precisely the same subordination that is implied in the present dispensation—the same, neither more nor less. It is the Catholic doctrine that, among the co-eternal, co-almighty, co-equal persons of the adorable Trinity there is not *inequality*—that is heresy—not inequality, but *subordination*. The Father is of none—neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is of the Father, begotten; the Spirit is of the Father and the Son, proceeding. And

so, in the economy of grace, there is like subordination. The Father sends the Son to redeem; the Father and the Son send the Spirit to renew. The Spirit is styled the Spirit of Christ. He is given in answer to the intercession of Christ; He is poured forth by the power of Christ; He acts as the agent of Christ; He takes of the things of Christ—either the personally absent or the present Christ—and shows them unto us. Thus hath it been from the beginning; thus is it now; thus shall it be when Christ shall come again in glory.

The doctrine of the Pre-Millennial Advent is naught opposed to, but is in all points at one with, the Christian faith concerning the office of the Spirit.

Cognate with the general objection we have been considering is another, viz., that our doctrine is inconsistent with the doctrine that the Spirit is to convert the world simply through the instrumentality of the preaching of the Gospel by a militant Church. We admit the inconsistency, nay, we proclaim it—affirming that the doctrine with which ours is inconsistent is neither Scriptural nor Catholic. It is, I admit, the now prevalent doctrine of the Protestant Church; that it is neither Catholic nor Scriptural has been abundantly demonstrated on this platform. It forms no part of the work assigned me to controvert it. It is in place, however, for me to endeavor to disintegrate from it, and thus bring more clearly to light, the true Scriptural doctrine that lies at its foundation—a doctrine held by the primitive Church; a doctrine that everywhere, in all ages, has had its adherents. Every prevalent error, I may remind you in passing, has its basis in truth. It is a truth that the Church was commanded to go forth and preach the Gospel among all nations—it is a truth that during the absence of her head, by such labor under the influences of the Spirit, she propagates herself, gathering

from among all nations the *pleroma*, the elect number of the Gentiles — the bride preparing for the bridegroom. Now, it is manifest that this gathering is in order to the Coming of the Redeemer — which Coming is in order to the inbringing of the Millennium. We therefore say, and the Church has ever said, that in laboring to spread the Gospel we are laboring to bring in the latter day of promised glory. And here is the confusion. On our platform we are striving *in order to* that end, but not *directly thereto*. The distinction I contemplate between striving *in order to* an end, and striving *directly thereto*, may be made clear by a simple illustration: In the dominion of some earthly king there stands a granite mountain, that retards the march of improvement. Broken into fragments, it would not only cease to retard progress, but its particles disintegrated would themselves become the instruments of blessing. The monarch commands his servants to labor to break in pieces that mountain. In obedience to his commands they go forth with pick and shovel and barrow to attack that which resists and to utilize that which they gather. They labor in every part, and from every part they gather with toil that which is useful. Now, there are two objects of labor conceivable — the one is that laboring in every part they shall dig down the mountain — this is labor *directly to* the end; the other object is that laboring in every part and gathering that which is useful, as do the others, they may prepare shafts and chambers in which some skillful engineer shall pour his dynamite, and in a moment, when the right time comes, blast that which hindereth unto usefulness — this is labor *in order to* the end. Now, our belief is that the latter is the form of labor assigned to the Church, which in these modern days has been by multitudes interpreted as the former. Our belief is that when the Church has accomplished her appointed work — when the right



time shall arrive—the Master shall come with the mighty outpourings of his spirit; and that the mountain of ignorance and sin shall flow down at his presence; or, to change the figure, when the Bride shall have been gathered out of every land, then the Redeemer shall come to her, and she shall arise and shine, her light being come, and the Glory of the Lord being risen upon her, and that then nations shall come to her light and kings to the brightness of her rising.

Such, we believe, is the doctrine of the Word of God. Does it, as is alleged by some, cut the nerve of missionary effort. It was by the hope begotten and fostered by this doctrine, that the Apostolic Church was energized; the hope that they might see the King in His beauty ere their eyes closed in death—that their tongues might swell the glad hosannahs that should welcome His approach—that they, by labor wrought by their redeemed hands, might hasten even unto their own day the coming of the time when He, the Redeemer, might see in fullness, the fruit of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied. This was the hope that filled the Martyr Church with more than Roman courage and Roman enthusiasm; that enabled them to penetrate into lands where Roman eagles never flew and Cæsars never won a triumph, there to struggle to the death with the powers of darkness, leading captivity captive, gathering to themselves, and into one, the scattered members of the Bride of Christ. This is the hope that energizes the great Missionary Church of modern times—the Moravian—that for more than a century has poured itself out on the Altar of the Lord, living only for this end—to preach the gospel to the heathen. This was the hope that inspired Heber, the great missionary bishop of the English Church, who gave us that glorious missionary hymn, “From Greenland’s Icy Mountains,” and who spent his

strength and rested from his labors on "India's coral strand." This was the hope that energized Gutzlaff, the opener of China, and Bettleheim, the opener of Japan. This was the hope that inspired and cheered and overjoyed McCheyne and our own noble Poor, and Lowrie, and Rankin, and Löwenthal, and hosts of others whom time would fail me to mention.

Oh! glorious doctrine; Oh! glorious hope sprung from its bosom! Wonder you if those into whose hearts it has entered have been the pioneers, the foremost laborers in missionary effort?

I charge not those who disagree with me with being the slothful servants who say Our Lord delayeth His Coming. That would be slander. Well do I know that amongst them are found many noble workers in the cause of humanity—in the Master's cause. But of this I am assured that that faithful servant in whose ears is ever sounding the midnight warning—Behold, I come quickly, can not in labor be behind his brethren. With heart and with voice and with work that hastes the Coming, he must ever answer back the cry of him who once leaned on Jesus' breast, and longed for His reappearing; "Even so, Come, Lord Jesus—Come quickly."