

## XX. - The Second Coming of the King.

And I saw in the right hand of him that sat upon the throne a book written within and without, sealed with seven seals. REVELATION 5:1.

Christ, our King, has prepared His Kingship in Israel, with deep with the roots to paradise. He established it, by his incarnation in Israel, before now twenty centuries. He has been gradually working his Kingdom into the life of mankind for centuries. But one day, this third period of gradual working will also come to an end, and the final period, that of completion, will begin, gathering around the great event of His return. This absolute revelation and announcement in Holy Scripture must not be undermined, shrouded or spiritualized. It must be firmly established and clearly expressed to us that the period of gradual effect in which we are now living will one day come to an end and pass into the final period of a supernatural revelation of power that will encompass the whole of this world, indeed, with this world, the entire universe. The path of gradualism cannot bring the final triumph. It ends in failure. And when it has become clear in the course of history that natural, gradual development does not and cannot lead to the final goal, then, but only then, will our King intervene in a wholly supernatural manner to nullify all opposition and to make the full glory of his Kingdom break through. It must have been determined and proved beforehand that gradual development could not lead to his triumph. It must not be possible to say from the back: "If only God had seen fit to leave mankind to its own natural development, everything would have come out naturally. No, the facts of history must show that mankind itself is powerless to do this. It must therefore be given time. Time to absorb all the blessings of Christianity gradually. The time to try in every way and manner whether she herself, with the help of the Gospel, can save herself. And only when, at the end of that ample time, it will have become apparent that mankind is not succeeding because the very root of her life has been poisoned, and with each new development the demonic power finds new ways and means to penetrate her veins and destroy her inner self, Only then will the Christ suddenly interrupt this period of gradual development, leavening and working through, and intervene with His full royal power, now not to preserve, but to judge, and with supernatural power to bring about the completion of His Kingdom.

The leading thought here is this. Mankind is created as one whole, and thus represented in a natural head, i.e., Adam. Sin breaks this organic unity. After the fall, humanity no longer has a head, no longer has a King, and therefore falls into continual disintegration and dissolution. Either humanity continues to decompose,

and finally loses all meaning as a unity. Or, humanity must receive a new head, and God must give it a King. The latter has been accomplished. In Christ, humanity receives back a King, but now in the second Adam much more gloriously than was the case in the first Adam. From the fall comes not the same thing that would have come out without the fall, but something far more glorious. This is what Augustine called the *Felix ciilpa*, the fall that brings happiness. This gift to mankind of such a glorious King has now proceeded in such a way that first the high life of mankind is drawn together in the national existence of a single, chosen people. This has happened in Israel. In this chosen people, the idea of a holy kingship gradually emerges. It is not real, because everything in Israel is shadowy and imaginary. But the idea takes root nonetheless. A Son of Man, not of mankind, but infused into it, as its spiritual head, becomes the popular ideal; already with Daniel the formula of the Son of Man is firmly established. Finally, the King appears in Israel. But now the figurative and shadowy nature of reality is also breaking through. As we expressed it in a previous article, the shell splits and the pearl emerges. With that, Israel falls as a nation. The fleshly Israel of Abraham is replaced by the spiritual Israel of the reborn. Christ is the real King of that Israel. It is He who creates His people and unites them in one body with Himself as its Head. This spiritual Israel is formed from all generations, nations, tongues and languages. Thus, there is a separation in the life of mankind. On the one side stands that portion of mankind that truly lives by Christ as its King, is ruled and protected by him, and on the other side stands that other portion that refuses to submit to him as its King. Whether the followers of Christ or the subjects of the King increase in number from thousands to millions, the contrast does not disappear.

A part of humanity persists in rejecting the King. This is so now and will remain so until the end. The power of the demonic is now firmly established in this unruly part of humanity. It is the Tempter once again who wants to be the ruler of the world and who is trying to set his kingdom against that of Christ and to maintain it, even to destroy the Kingdom of Christ. And this our King will put an end to by his Second Coming. He will break down the history of mankind by His Second Coming and bring it to an end. He will destroy and crush the power of the demonic for good. And He will sit as Judge to judge the living and the dead, gathering into His kingdom all the human race, in so far as His Kingship will have penetrated into it, and casting off from the trunk of our race all those few branches and leaves and withered blossoms that will have persisted to the end in rejecting His Kingship. Thus, in the end, nothing will remain but the Kingdom of Christ. All that will

constitute the human race will be submissive to Him. And then the Kingdom of glory will begin. A kingdom that will therefore be the kingdom of glory, because all of nature and the spirit world, together with all of our sanctified gender, will then be included in perfect harmony in the unity of life and government established by our King.

The final event that will occur at the Second Coming of Jesus, that will be decided by the Last Judgment, and that will bring about the completion of Jesus' Kingdom and the Kingdom of Glory, is announced by the Holy Scriptures in the visions that were given to John on Pathmos. We cannot, therefore, arrive at a clear conception of the Kingship of Christ unless we first draw attention to these visions; and it is certainly a gap in the minds of the faithful that they know so little to drink from these Revelations of John of the comfort and spirit which Scripture offers them. But though it is particularly in Revelation of John that this final period of the consummation is portrayed to us, yet that final event is announced to us just as surely in prophecy, in the Gospel, and in the letters of the apostles. Nowhere in Scripture is the prospect of a completion of things through gradual spiritual development given. The constant teaching of Scripture is that the course of history will one day be broken off, broken down for good, and that then by a supernatural intervention, which will encompass both the entire unseen and the entire seen world, the realization of the high, holy ideal is imminent. Already Joel, one of the oldest prophets, announces the day on which "the harvest of the earth will have ripened" 13:3, and the sickle will be driven into that harvest, and the day of the Lord will come. And that this coming of the Lord will not only be a spiritual action, but will also penetrate to nature and her elementary powers, is evident from what he writes, that not only the Spirit will be poured out, but that also "wonder signs will come in heaven and on earth, blood, fire and smoke pillars, and that the sun will be changed into darkness and the moonlight into the color of blood, before that great and august day of the Lord comes." And in 3:15 Joel repeats again, that when the day of the Lord is near "the sun and the moon shall have become black, and the stars shall have withdrawn their lustre."

No less emphatically than the prophets of Israel, Jesus himself, shortly before his death, announced that day of days to his disciples. Read it in Matthew 24:27 ff, where it says: "As lightning goes out from the east and shines to the west, so will the future of the Son of Man be. Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not shine, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be moved. Then shall appear in heaven

the sign of the Son of man; and the nations of the earth shall weep, and shall see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven, with great power and glory. And he shall send forth his angels with a trumpet and great sound, and they shall gather together his disciples from the four winds, from one end of the heavens unto the other." And then follows in Matt. 25:31 ff. just as decidedly the announcement of the judgment, which will immediately follow His Second Coming: When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory, and all nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. These shall go into everlasting pain, and the righteous shall go into everlasting life." At Jesus' ascension, the same announcement is again made, this time not by Jesus, but by the angels to the disciples: "Two men stood by them in white garments, which also said: Ye Galilean men, what stand ye and look up to heaven. This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will so return, just as you saw Him ascend into heaven."

In the apostolic letters, therefore, the Second Coming of Jesus is an integral part of the Gospel, which they carried into the world. At a moment's notice," so it is said in 1 Cor. 15:52, "at a moment's notice, with the last trumpet: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised in immortality. And when this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be done what is written: "Death is devoured unto victory. And likewise in 1 Thess. 4:16: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God; and they that died in Christ shall rise first." The Apostle even states more and more clearly that there will first be a time of elaboration and fermentation, and that the Second Coming of the Lord will not take place until after that. Thus in 2 Thess. 2:7 ff: "The hiddenness of iniquity is already being wrought. Only those who still resist will continue to do so, until he is removed from the midst. And then the unrighteous one will be revealed, whom the Lord will destroy through the spirit of His mouth and through the appearing of His future." And that this Second Coming of the Lord would be accompanied by a supernatural intervention in the existing order of things, also in nature, Peter expresses emphatically in these words: "The day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a noise, and the elements will perish with fire, and the earth and the works that are in it will burn up. The heavens, being kindled by fire, shall pass away, and the elements shall burn with corruption." And then the kingdom of glory will come, for "we expect, according to the promise, new heavens and a new earth,

wherein shall dwell righteousness." The fulfillment of the time-honored prophecy in Isaiah 65:17: "For behold, I create new heavens and a new earth, and the former things shall be remembered no more, and shall not arise in the heart."

Even if the Revelation of John had not been inserted into the New Testament as a keystone, the Second Coming of the Lord would still have been firmly cemented into the fabric of our Christian confession on the basis of the prophecy of the O.V., Jesus' own testimony, and the clear statements in the Apostolic letters. Without the Article about Jesus' Second Coming on the clouds, no Christian profession in the elaborate sense is conceivable. The twelve Articles of Faith, therefore, contain the confession: "Ascended to heaven, from whence He cometh to judge the living and the dead", and all Christian Churches without distinction have accepted the twelve Articles of Faith with this part in it. In the last nine centuries, however, this confession of Jesus' Second Coming has been little more than nominal on the part of the Churches. It is true that from century to century there have been small groups and circles which have devoted themselves, even too unilaterally, to this one doctrine, and which soon became involved in all kinds of dreams. But, with the exception of these groups or sects, the Second Coming of the Lord has not lived as an animating motive in the preaching, and has not come into its own in the faith of the church in any one church. In times of pressure and persecution the belief in Jesus' Second Coming revived briefly. This was also the case during the Reformation in those countries, where the Reformation either could not stand upright, or, even worse, after having arisen for a short while, sank away again. In such days of fear and dismay one again reached for the promise of Jesus' future. But hardly had the position of the various Churches in the 17th century been established against and next to each other, or one began to feel at home in the world again; shifted the end of things to an unseeable perspective; and began again, as before, to make the confession of Jesus' future an almost dead letter of our confession. So it was in the Greek, so it was in the Roman Church, so it was in the Lutheran and Reformed Churches; and even among the Baptists, the heirs of the former Anabaptists, who had been powerfully versed in the doctrine of the last things, a willing resignation to the quiet progress of history soon became perceptible.

As a reaction against this cool indifference with regard to "the last things", some mystically inclined or bigoted persons appeared; or powerful singers were attracted by the moving visions of Jesus' Second Coming, as our country enjoyed in Da Costa; or new groups were formed, such as the Latter-day Saints, etc., who

believed that the future of the Lord was at hand, who believed they could await the future of the Lord while still alive, within a few years; but in the broad stream of church life the waters were barely rippled by this breath of the eschatological wind. Indeed, in broad Christian circles people gradually lapsed into so completely unscriptural an idea that they imagined little else than that the separated souls of the departed were destined to lead no other than a spiritual existence for all eternity in the Father's house, without any thought of a Resurrection of the dead, of a real last judgment, or of a glorification of the body humbled in death and grave. As the confession of Jesus' Second Coming faded away, so did its connotations; and though there remained some profoundly educated Christians who were absorbed in the doctrine of the last things, strengthened their faith by it, and enjoyed it, for the great multitude the confession of the last things ceased to be an essential part of their creed. The remains of the dead had been dealt with in the grave. Our dead now existed only as immortal souls in the Father's house. That Father's house was also waiting for us. And so, it would continue from century to century. Until one day the life of the world would end, and only the life of heaven would remain. And in that heavenly life, seeing again whom we had lost here and would find again in heaven would occupy just as wide a place as life in the service of the glorified King. People thought little about that King anymore. At the most there was still talk of a Friend who had saved and redeemed us and to whom we would bring our thanks. But of a Kingdom of glory, of a new earth under a new heaven, of finding ourselves again in a then glorified body, of a triumph of the Christ over His adversaries, of a judgment over the living and the dead, and of entering into the full glory of the Royal Regiment of the Christ, there was, except for a single sermon or a single song, hardly any more talk at the deathbed or at the opened grave. The doctrine of the last things was the first thing the congregation let go of, and exchanged for a superficial, one-sided spiritual representation that had formed in unbelieving circles.

The book of John's Revelations therefore no longer spoke to the congregation. They felt nothing for it anymore. They no longer understood it. She found no food for her faith in it. And when the persecution had ceased, she felt no need for the consolation offered by this last book of Holy Scripture. One still found much beauty in the seven letters to the seven Asia Minor congregations, and also in the description of the new Jerusalem and of the heavenly paradise one still found much that appealed through poetic beauty, but what lay between those seven letters and that drawing of the new Jerusalem ceased to captivate. One no longer read it.

People no longer knew it. And it had already become a dead letter, just like the article about Jesus' Second Coming in the XII Articles of Faith. And since in no book of the New Testament does the Kingship of Christ shine so brightly as in the visions of St. John on Pathmos, it could hardly be otherwise, than that this letting slip of the doctrine of the last things had to detract more than anything else from the veneration of Jesus' Kingship. Everything was leading to honor his Savior and Redeemer in Jesus, and especially to understand his Kingdom exclusively in a spiritual sense as the dominion of his high religious and moral ideas. The fact that Jesus' royal majesty would unfold in a demonstration of power over all creatures, not only over the self-conscious, spiritual creatures in man, but also over the inanimate creation throughout the whole realm of nature, down to its first elements, and not less over the rich world of spirits, which stood outside our human circle, was increasingly lost in the imagination of the multitude. Belief in the miracles in which Jesus displayed this power during His walk on earth weakened, and it was no longer understood that this same miraculous power would break through much more gloriously in the end of days, to reveal the royal majesty of Christ. Spiritually one wanted to leave all honor to Jesus, one still as Savior, the other only to praise him as a religious genius; but supranaturalists and moderns merged in this, that nothing more could be expected of a new, still higher and still much more violent revelation of power from our King in the future. The last judgment was to be understood only from Jesus' working in our consciences. And so, it was not least the abandonment of the doctrine of Jesus' Second Coming, by which for the consciousness of faith of the broad multitude all sound representations of Jesus' Kingship, as of a King who has authority over all things in heaven and on earth, ceased to be a force for life.