



THE
P A R U S Í A
EXPECTATION

BY
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The Parousia-Expectation: Does it impact evangelization?

Parousia meaning rapture in the bible where Christian have a fervent expectation of the second coming of Christ

by

IRFAN IFTEKHAR

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ABSTRACT

What is the essence of the theology behind the return of Christ? If there is, to say, no delay in the expectation of Parousia, and Christ returns this day, then as true Christians we have to take it as our last and then evangelize, whosoever we can. But if it does not happen so. Should I baptize? As a faithful Christian we must believe at His coming. God never revealed when Christ would come, although He informed us all about his second coming but not the precise time of his coming. Evangelism is crucial for those who desire to hear it, second come discipleship. Preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is like fulfilling the great commission. "Go therefore make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you?" Matthew 28:18-20

Dedicated to
The loving memory of my parents

Mohammad Nesar

Ahmadi Begum

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

What is the essence of the theology behind the return of Christ? If there is, to say, no delay in the expectation of Parousia, and Christ returns this day, then as true Christians we have to take it as our last and then evangelize, whosoever we can. But if it does not happen so. Should I baptize? As a faithful Christian we must believe at His coming. God never revealed when Christ would come, although He informed us all about his second coming but not the precise time of his coming. Evangelism is crucial for those who desire to hear it, second come discipleship. Preaching of the Gospel of Jesus Christ is like fulfilling the great commission. "Go therefore make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, The Son, and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you?" Matthew 28:18-20

Another crucial factor fostering the climate of disinterest and antipathy is the fact that evangelism has been linked almost exclusively with a particular cluster of schools within modern Christianity, namely with fundamentalism and evangelicalism. Even dictionary definitions of evangelism reflect this, for some confuse evangelism with evangelicalism. This is not accidental, however, for evangelicals have owned evangelism as a distinctive if not exclusive characteristic of their contribution to modern Christianity. Certainly evangelicals deserve great credit for insisting that evangelism cannot be dropped from the activities of the modern church without shedding any theological tears.

On the whole, however, they have not expressed their concerns in this fashion; their primary concern has been practice rather than theory. In their theological work they have focused most of their attention to shoring up impossible theories of biblical inspiration and to keeping at bay the acids of modern biblical criticism.

It is objected further, in the same line, that the Parousia of Christ was to be accompanied by the resurrection of the dead, the Day of Judgment, the end of the world, etc., and as these did not occur in that age, the Parousia itself could not have taken place. This is probably the most formidable objection that has been or can be urged against the views. But the difficulty, to my view, lies in the restricted ideas which we have been so accustomed to give to the Parousia, limiting it without warrant to a brief time, as a single day, or a point in duration. The word itself conveys no such limited meaning; rather does it denote relations of permanence with men, which, beginning with the overthrow of the ancient dispensation, its sacred city and its temple, once dwelling place of Jehovah but now "left to them desolate," is to last as long as the Messiah reigns.

The real meaning is controversial about apocalyptic (Glasson 1980). What is of particular interest here theologically is the way in which apocalyptic expectancy and hope for the imminent coming of the Parousia and the kingdom of God has radically slackened, even vanished, over the course of Christian history, and the connection this has with the theological shape of Christian mission in relation to the kingdom of God and the world.

Ernst Käsemann (Ernst Kasemann 1994) famously argued that early Christian eschatology is characterized by the apocalyptic expectation of the imminent coming of God's kingdom, of the Parousia of Jesus Christ, and the dawn of the new creation. For Käsemann this view is especially characteristic of the theology that governs Paul's letters. Yet, within the New Testament itself, Ernst Käsemann noted, one can already discern a modification of eschatology, which eventually ends in the "final extinction" of apocalyptic from the dominant forms of Christian theology and practice. With the disappearance of apocalyptic expectation there arises the establishment of the "great Church which understands itself as the *Una Sancta Apostolica*." (Ibid). Käsemann describes this shift polemically in terms of a transition from apocalyptic to "early Catholicism." And while there is no doubt that Käsemann formulates the issue in terms of a polemical opposition between the "Protestant view" and Roman Catholicism, such clear-cut and confessionally loaded designations cannot be so easily sustained. Rather the issues are deeply internal to Christian theology itself, arising no less in Protestant and even radical Protestant theological traditions than in Roman Catholic circles.

According to Ernst Kasemann the early eschatology is identified by the apocalyptic expectation, of Parousia and a new creation. This according to Kasemann is an important feature of theology governing the letters of Paul. But there is a modification that can be discerned in the New Testament itself and this is about eschatology, that ends in the "final extinction" of apocalyptic from Christian theology. This leads to the issue the way in which the slackening of delay in Parousia coincides with the lack of godliness, visible decrease in church numbers; and also in spirituality.

Apocalyptic has three roots. There is, in the first place, Old Testament prophecy. In common with prophecy, apocalyptic sought to declare and relate God's word to the men of its generation.' To some extent there is a concern to re-interpret unfulfilled promises, a process already begun by Ezekiel. The scope of prophecy embraced past, present and future, and this total sphere is also apocalyptic's concern. Thus the older tendency to eliminate any predictive element from cc6 is as erroneous as the suggestion that apocalyptic is concerned only with the future. (Burkitt FC 1914).

There are, of course, differences, but these are mainly of emphasis: apocalyptic is especially concerned with the future and lays more stress on the expected age of bliss as a divine irruption into history than do the prophets. But its basic presuppositions it shares with the prophets of the Old Testament. The problem of a delayed Parousia ceases to be a problem, if it can be shown that Parousia involving a second coming of Jesus never formed part of Jesus' own understanding and teaching. The variations on the theme of realized eschatology are many. Dr. C. H. Dodd (C.H. Dodd 1936) himself, while adopting the position in *The Parables of the Kingdom* that the kingdom of God in all its fullness has arrived, nevertheless allows that there is every reason to believe that Jesus "contemplated a further period of history after his departure," and agrees that such a saying as Mark certainly belongs to the earliest tradition of logia. (C. H. Dodd, 1936). Yet Dodd's main contention is that the predictions by Jesus of his survival and of the triumph of the cause of God in his person, were interpreted by the early church in the light of its own experience. Where he had referred to one event, the primitive Christians

distinguished two-resurrection. Uneasiness is rightly and inevitably experienced in the face of any attempt to peg down eschatological realizations in temporal confines, and this is a further reason why we are not so far compelled to eliminate from the teaching of Jesus the possibility that he himself anticipated an interval between the resurrection and the Parousia mentioned, a period that would culminate in the appearance of the Son of man for judgment, with vindication. The truth prevails while the missing element is timing; uncertain; Mark 13. (N. Perrin, 1963).

In his book *Jesus and his Coming*, J. A. T. Robinson professes himself unwilling to build on the NT teaching about the second coming "more or less as it stands," and he prefers to "move downstairs" in an attempt to discover how the primitive Christian expectation of Christ's return which cannot be extracted from the *verba Christi*, arouser's. He claims that Jesus' own expectation involved the twin notions of vindication and visitation, but suggests that these referred respectively to the immediate vindication to God of Christ and of his own, and to the visitation in judgment already inaugurated by his ministry. In the face of a Parousia that did not actually occur, the early church provided a second focus for an expectation already contained in its own *Κηρυχ* (pa, and this involved "the splitting of a unity" rather than "the deliberate creation of a duality"(Robinson JAT, 1957).

In order to come to terms with anticipation which did not materialize, an explanatory scheme was launched by the early church which developed as time went on. Sayings were introduced which contained a note of uncertainty about the time of the arrival of the kingdom-Mark 13, as with the parable of the Ten Maidens (Matt 25),

suggesting that the promise was merely delayed. Finally, the situation demanded the promises (such as Mark and Luke) that the end would come despite its delay; and this was supported further by the synoptic apocalypses which outline all that must take place before that could happen.

It is impossible to assess in critical detail all the arguments so far outlined. It has simply been suggested that no *prima facie* reason exists for eliminating from the synoptic teaching of Jesus his own expectation of a postresurrection period. It's yet to provide within the gospels against which this conclusion may be tested, and to discover how much shaping (if any) of synoptic material was provoked by the delay of a second Parousia clearly (if, on the showing of some scholars, wrongly) expected by primitive Christianity.

The present interest in eschatology owes much to J. Weiss and A. Schweitzer.' The question they raised was that of the overall structure and significance of New Testament eschatology, but this was bound to involve considerable examination of the idea of the Parousia in particular.

Surprisingly this renewal of interest has not fostered in the church a firmer conviction regarding the Parousia expectation. In fact the idea of the Parousia, at least in the form in which traditionally it has been expressed, has had to face many criticisms from various quarters. From within the realm of critical theological investigation the Parousia hope has encountered considerable opposition. Schweitzer maintained that Jesus held to a Parousia hope only because it formed part of the contemporary Jewish apocalyptic which he accepted, and that such first century

apocalyptic has no place. It was introduced into this country with varying sympathy by W. Sanday and F. C. Burkitt, (1914)' is expressed strongly to-day by M. Werner and others.' An apologetic elimination of the Parousia hope, or at least a radical re-interpretation of its traditional expression, has flourished particularly in for recent reviews of the eschatological thought of the past 50-60 years.

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As a result of reflection on the Servant figure in II Isaiah and on the fate of John the Baptist, he realizes that he must bear the suffering alone. He must himself absorb all the Messianic woes, die vicariously on behalf of the many (Mk 10:45), and thereby precipitate the End. In the one act he could fulfil his Messianic vocation and bring in the Kingdom of God. Thus he expected the End to occur simultaneously with his own death. There would be no gap between the Resurrection and the Parousia, his own and the general Resurrection would be one and the same event. Jesus also both knew and prophesied that he would be revealed as the Son of Man when the Kingdom of God came. His whole life was shot through with events of an eschatological nature, the Entry into Jerusalem and the Last Supper. In fact, everything which Schweitzer considered to be authentic in the Gospel records of Jesus' life is both subordinated to and interpreted by the dominant theme of eschatology. Like Glasson, JAT Robinson also tries to show that the Parousia belief of the early Church does not correspond to the expectation of the historical Jesus. Unlike Glasson, however, he admits that Jesus did expect a future consummation of all things, a general Resurrection and a final Judgement, which would involve the separation of the saved and the lost." However, in his overall interpretation of Jesus' teaching this theme plays no great role and is never clearly defined. Robinson's emphasis is on generalized eschatology, and most of the references to future events in Jesus' teaching are interpreted in terms of historical rather than apocalyptic occurrences.

Finally, we can note the more theological understanding of the tension between realized and unrealized eschatology, which also allows for an extensive continuation of history after Jesus' death. For example, C. E. B. Cranfield's statement that , "

In some sense the Parousia is near. It is near, not in the sense that it must necessarily occur within a month or a few years, but in the sense that it may occur at any moment and in the sense that, since the decisive event of history has already taken place in the ministry, death, resurrection and ascension of Christ, all subsequent history is a kind of epilogue, an interval inserted by God's mercy in order to allow men time for repentance, and, as such an epilogue, necessarily in a real sense short". (Cranfield C.E, 2004). This approach assumes that Jesus did believe in an imminent End, but that this belief was such that it did not preclude him from foreseeing that history might well continue for several centuries.

On the first view, Jesus could not have expected, prophesied or commanded a Gentile mission such as we know took place after his death, since he did not envisage any continuation of history. Even if he expected there to be a short interval between his resurrection and the Parousia, SUCH an interval would scarcely be long enough to contain a mission such as is envisaged in Mk 13 10 pars, a problem which Kummel recognizes and then solves by denying that Jesus foresaw a Gentile mission On the second view, where Jesus foresees an indefinite period of ongoing history, he could have foreseen and prophesied the Gentile mission which took place after his death for those who think he did envisage such a mission, this can become as with Glasson - an argument against Jesus having expected an imminent End. Our task now is to make a detailed study of Jesus attitude to the Gentiles and the Gentile mission, and to try to work back from this to his probable views on eschatology.

In plain, unequivocal language Jesus limits his own and his disciple' stativity to the confines of Israel. That this is not an expression of undiluted nationalism can be seen from the other material

where Jesus condemns the Jews and in the same breath announces that the Gentiles will participate in the future Kingdom. It appears then that Jesus expressly excluded the possibility of a full - scale historical Gentile mission. However, closely connected with these verses and their interpretation is the problematic verse in Matt 10 23, and to this we now turn Matt 10 23.

On the question of the authenticity of this verse we can refer back to all except the second of the objections which were raised with regard to Matt 10 5b~6, 15 24 and the appropriate answers

There are, however, additional objections to Matt 10 23, they are as follows

1. The saying is placed in the context of teaching about the persecution of the disciples, teaching of this kind normally had a late origin similarly, and many see it as having arisen directly out of a persecution, as over against a mission, situation in the Church
2. It is said that Jesus made no such temporal predictions
3. The use of the title Son of Man makes the whole verse suspect to some authors
4. It is said that in its present form the saying is not genuine J A T Robinson, for example, thinks that originally it spoke of an imminent historical crisis- maybe the flight to Pella. The temporal limitation of v23b is a later addition, since it takes the account of the life of Jesus and places it on some future event.

With regard to the first argument we can reply that although in their present form the passages about persecution have been coloured by the experience of the Church, there is no reason why Jesus should not have foreseen that his disciples would encounter persecution. As a result of his own experience of opposition it would not be a particularly difficult prediction to make the statement that Jesus made no such temporal predictions is based on an impossible exegesis of several passages (for example MK 9:1-13, 30 pars).

It is enough to note that for many scholars Matt 10 23 confirms the 'Naherwartung' of Jesus attested elsewhere the view that Jesus never used the title Son of Man is unconvincing The fact that the title appears only once outside the Gospels (Acts 7 56) is formidable evidence for the authenticity of at least some of the Son of Man sayings We can also note that in Matt 10-23 Jesus and The Son of Man are not directly identified, who for some is a mark of the authentic Son of Man sayings Even if the Son of Man title is not original , the saying itself may be a genuine saying of Jesus which was later recast on the form of a Son of Man saying.

Schniewind (Schniewind A, 2003) offers an exegesis which is even further the text the Jews are offered salvation but refuse it, hence it goes to the Gentiles When the Son of Man comes in an indefinite future - the conversion of Israel will be incomplete, but when the Parousia comes Israel may realize what she has rejected and repent. All this may well be true, but none of these ideas appear in the text of Matt 10 23. Grasser (Grasser E, 1985) reflecting on this verse in a missionary context, suggests two possible emphases it could be a stimulus for the disciples to encourage them to hasten in their task, or it could be a word of comfort in view of the trials and frustrations they will encounter in their missionary work. Both of Grasser's suggestions are fruitful, and a combination of them is possible with this in mind, we can conclude our study of this verse with the following observations

- a. The mission of Jesus and his disciples is once again limited to Israel
- b The clear implication of the verse is that this mission will not be completed because the Son of Man will appear very soon, in fact before all the towns of Israel have been covered.

The above observations and the plain meaning of the verse in a missionary context exclude any possibility of a historical Gentile mission. This is a convenient point at which to summarize briefly the results obtained:

1 Jesus limited himself, in his earthly ministry, to Israel and commanded his disciples to do likewise there is no evidence that he was diverted from this his main purpose or that he preached or even desired to preach to the Gentiles

2 Nevertheless, according to Jesus' teaching, the Gentiles have a definite place in the Kingdom of God this place is almost wholly reserved for the future, when the Kingdom of God will be manifested in all its fullness. As subsidiary points we note that this hope for the Gentiles is frequently played off against the present disobedience and obduracy of the Jews, and that it will apparently be effected after and as a result of Jesus' death

3 The link between the Gentiles and the Kingdom of God is frequently made in a context where Jesus appears to have thought that this Kingdom was imminent.

4. On exceptional occasions Jesus responded, though with considerable reluctance, to certain Gentiles who persistently appealed to him Jesus' response of healing shows that at least these few Gentiles were participants in the Kingdom of God which was, in a partial, hidden manner, in the process of realization This point is entirely consonant with what has been said in points 1-3

5. There is no evidence that Jesus either foresaw or intended any historical mission to the Gentiles such as actually took place in the early Church In fact, such a mission is indirectly excluded by Matt 10 23.

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