

MORNING WATCH

A HERALD OF CHRIST'S PRESENCE, AS BRIDEGROOM, REAPER AND KING!

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CHRIST AND CHRISTMAS

Christmas as generally celebrated today is one of many carry-overs from Roman Catholicism that survived the Reformation. Historian Will Durant reminds us that Roman Catholicism grew out of the merger between paganism and Christianity that took place under Constantine in the early 300s. Commenting upon the resulting "Christianization" of the Roman Empire, which Reconstructionists such as Coalition on Revival (COR) director Jay Grimstead look back to fondly as a model of what they hope to achieve, Durant wrote:

Paganism survived...in the form of ancient rites and customs condoned...by an often indulgent Church....Statues of Isis and Horus were renamed Mary and Jesus...the Saturnalia [Festival of Saturn in celebration of the winter solstice] was replaced by Christmas celebration...[I]ncense, lights, flowers, processions, vestments...which had pleased the people in older [pagan] cults were domesticated and cleansed in the Ritual of the Church....

In spite of its pagan/Roman Catholic origins and crass commercialization, we can rejoice that Christmas annually brings a reminder of the Savior's birth. Unfortunately, however, Christmas festivities generally perpetuate the confusion concerning who Jesus Christ really is, why He came, and what He accomplished. This is not surprising, considering the misunderstandings even among His own disciples at

the first advent--and the far greater confusion that the Bible warns will precede His second coming.

Christmas celebrations remind us that the same misunderstandings that prevented so many from recognizing Christ when He came to earth will prevail when He returns. The causes of confusion 1,900 years ago remain the key issues today: What is the Messiah's true mission --and the nature of His kingdom? When, how, and by whom will the Kingdom be established--and what is its relationship to Israel and the church? Many "Christians" today are blind in the same way as those early "disciples" who turned from Christ because He didn't meet their false messianic expectations.

Even John the Baptist became so disillusioned that he demanded of Christ, "Art thou he that should come, or look we for another?" (Mt 11:3). Such doubts seem impossible for the one whom God had sent to "prepare the way of the Lord"! Already filled with the Holy Spirit as a six-month-old embryo, John had leaped in the womb of his mother Elizabeth upon hearing the voice of the virgin Mary, who had just learned that she would give birth to the Son of God. Called and inspired of God to be the "forerunner of the Messiah," John testified, "He that sent me to baptize...said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he...and I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" (Jn 1:33-34). Confident in that supernatural reve-

lation, John boldly declared, "*Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!*" (Jn 1:29). Yet the day came when, in despair, he sent two disciples to ask Christ whether He really was the Messiah after all!

Although given supernatural revelation as to His identity, John completely misunderstood Christ's mission. Hadn't the prophets said that the Messiah would set up His kingdom and reign in Jerusalem? Then why was *he*, the herald of the Messiah, in prison! John did not understand that Christ had come to die for our sins so that both Jew and Gentile, united in one church, could go to heaven. Nor did he comprehend that there had to be a *Second Coming*.

So it was with the disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane. Amazed, they watched the One whom they thought had all power, as, seemingly powerless, He was arrested, bound, and led away. Obviously, Jesus of Nazareth couldn't be the Messiah after all! Dreams shattered, they fled for their lives. Likewise the two on the road to Emmaus: "We trusted that it had been he which should have redeemed Israel... [but they] crucified him!" (Lk 24:19-24). His death, which we recognize today is the very heart of the gospel and without which we have no life, convinced Christ's contemporaries that He could not possibly be the Messiah, the Savior of the world.

"If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him!" (Mt 27:40-44) was the jeering taunt of the bloodthirsty mob and the religious leaders gloating at the foot of His cross. "If thou be the Christ, save thyself and us!" echoed one of the thieves hanging beside him. Whom He came to save, from what, to what, and how, was clearly not understood at the time by anyone--not even by His closest disciples.

When Christ tried to explain that He must die for the sins of the world, Peter rebuked Him for being so "negative." Yet Peter, only moments before, had declared by revelation from

the Father that Jesus was the Christ (Mt 16:16-17). Obviously he didn't understand the Messiah's mission, even though he knew who He was. "Get thee behind me, Satan!" (Mt 16:22-23), Christ had retorted quickly to Peter, showing the importance He put upon correcting such a gross misunderstanding of His mission.

So it was with those in Jerusalem (Jn 2:23-25) who "believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did." They believed He was the Messiah, but they had a false view of what that meant. "Jesus did not commit himself unto them" because He knew what was in their hearts and that they would not believe the truth. We see the same error in those in John 6, who, because Christ had healed and fed them, wanted to "take him by force to make him [their] king" (Jn 6:15). There were many who called themselves His "disciples" (today they would be called "Christians") who had a false view of the Messiah, and when He tried to explain the truth to them, would not hear it but "went back and walked no more with him" (Jn 6:66).

We learn from Christ how to handle the multitudes who want to follow Him for the wrong reasons. We must do today what He did then. Many came "forward" to tell Jesus they believed in Him and would follow Him faithfully. Contrary to today's methods, Christ didn't have His disciples quickly sign up such persons as "church members" before they changed their minds, and get them involved in the choir or some committee in order to keep them active in the church. "The foxes have holes and the birds have nests, but I have nowhere to lay my head" (Mt 8:20), Jesus told the eager would-be converts. "Are you certain you really want to follow me?" Such "negativism"!

"So you want to follow Me?" Christ would say. "Then let Me tell you where we're going. I'm heading for a hill outside Jerusalem called Calvary where they'll nail Me to a cross. So if you would be faithful to Me to the end, you might as well make up your mind: take up your cross

right now, and follow Me, because that's where we're going!"

Today we're far too sophisticated to present the gospel in such negative terms. We've studied success motivation, psychology and Dale Carnegie courses in "How to Win Friends and Influence People" and consider such new techniques to be ideal for "winning people to Christ." So we fill the churches with multitudes who imagine that Christ's mission is to make them feel good about themselves by building up their self-esteem, answering their selfish prayers and fulfilling their self-centered agendas.

The Reconstruction/Kingdom/Dominionists are more confused than John the Baptist, though their error is similar. They refuse to walk in the rejection of Christ, bearing the reproach of His cross, because that would be "defeatism." They imagine that we're in the Millennial kingdom already and are supposed to act like "King's kids." They think that it's our task to establish that Kingdom through taking "dominion" over the media, educational institutions, and political leadership. The "signs and wonders" promoters imagine that they are in the process of taking dominion over all disease and even over death itself without the resurrection and return of Christ.

It's all very positive and ecumenical. Christian lobbyists are willing to work with Moonies and Mormons and all others who are in favor of bringing traditional values back to America. And at Christmas time, once again, being able to publicly display a cross or a crèche becomes a rallying point--a very low common denominator indeed for ecumenical agreement. In defense of such folly, Christian leaders stoutly defend the correctness of working with all those "who call Jesus 'Lord.'" Seemingly forgotten are the words of Christ: "Many will say to me...Lord, Lord, have we not...in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me..." (Mt 7:22-23). There are multitudes, such as Mormons and Catholics (to say

nothing of many Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists, et al.) who call Jesus "Lord" but are not saved.

On October 17 [1989], Paul and Jan Crouch welcomed three Catholics to their *Praise the Lord* program: two priests and a woman lay leader. Paul displayed his usual naïveté and incredible ignorance of theology by smoothing over any differences between Protestants and Catholics as "simply matters of semantics." In his eager embrace of Transubstantiation, a heresy so great that thousands died at the stake rather than accept it, he declared: "Well, we [Protestants] believe the same thing. So you see one of these things that has divided us all of these years [Transubstantiation] shouldn't have divided us all along because we were really meaning the same thing but just saying it a little differently....I [am] eradicating the word 'Protestant' even out of my vocabulary....I'm not protesting anything anymore...it is...time for Catholics and non-Catholics to come together as one in the Spirit and one in the Lord." But Catholics have a different gospel of salvation by works and ritual through the essential mediation of that Church.

Christmas, with its emphasis upon "baby Jesus," tends to perpetuate another serious Catholic heresy: the pernicious myth of Christ's subservience to His mother, which Roman Catholicism has deliberately promoted for centuries. Mary certainly should be called "blessed" as the mother of our Lord--but she is not "Co-Mediatrix" and "Co-Redemptrix" as Romanism teaches. In Catholic cathedrals throughout the world, for example, one quickly notices that the paintings, statuary, and stained glass give Mary the dominant role. She is even at times shown on the cross as our Redeemer. Jesus is either a helpless babe on His mother's breast, a small child between her knees, or a lifeless victim of the Cross in her arms. Never is she in subjection to Him, and rarely if ever is He shown in the triumph of His resurrection. She is the "Queen of Heaven," where Jesus remains a child subject to her direction.

Typical is the beautiful thirteenth-century stained-glass window in a church in France. At the top are the words *Le Pergatoire*, indicating that it is a depiction of "purgatory." Mary and Jesus are shown on a cloud (i.e., in heaven), with the tormented souls in the flames of purgatory below them, arms extended upward in supplication. Are they crying out to *Christ* for help? No, they are appealing to *Mary*. *She* wears the regal crown.

And Jesus, the Lord of Glory, who triumphed over Satan at the Cross and now sits at the right hand of the Father--how is He depicted? *As a child about seven years old*, standing between the "Queen of Heaven's" knees! No wonder the souls in "purgatory" do not appeal to Him for help. At the bottom of the beautiful stained-glass depiction of this abomination are the words: *Mère Marie, sauvez nous!* ("Mother Mary, save us!")

Such heresy does not originate in the imaginations of the artists but in tradition and dogma not only tolerated but promoted by the Roman Catholic Church. The fear of purgatory is very real to a Catholic, and "Mary" has provided an escape for those faithful to her. She allegedly appeared to St. Simon Stock on July 16, 1251, and gave him what is known as "The Great Promise": "Whosoever dies wearing this Scapular [two pieces of brown cloth containing Mary's promise on one, her picture with "Baby Jesus" on the other, worn one in front, one in back, connected over the shoulder by two strings] shall not suffer eternal fire." Like the Mormon's magic underwear, the Catholic's scapular will supposedly accomplish what the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ could not. In 1322, Pope John XXII received a further promise from "Mary" known as "The Sabbatine Privilege": "I, the Mother of Grace, shall descend on the Saturday after their death and whomsoever I shall find in Purgatory [who died wearing the scapular], I shall free." St. Simon Stock's famous prayer ends thus: "O Sweet Heart of Mary, be our salvation!"

Christmas offers a rare opportunity to share

the true gospel of Jesus Christ and to expose and correct the ecumenical and confused picture it presents annually to the world. Millions are seduced into thinking they are Christians because they have a sentimental feeling for the "baby Jesus." Let us remember what Christ said to those who believed on Him: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (Jn 8:31-32). It is that truth that we are called upon to proclaim in clarity and power.

This being the last issue of the year 2010, we wish all a blessed new year to come, praying all your spiritual goals are achieved.

THE close of the year is an excellent time for the making of new resolutions for the year to come. Let us, beloved brethren, make plenty of good resolves respecting what we shall be willing to be, to do, to suffer, in fellowship with our Lord; that we may by His grace make of it the best year thus far of our lives--the year of largest hopes, of largest endeavors, and by the Lord's grace of largest successes in self-sacrifice, in overcoming the world and its spirit, in vanquishing self and the desires of the flesh, in resisting the adversary, and in glorifying our Lord and blessing His people. *R2551:5*

MORNING WATCH E-NEWSLETTER

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