

Sermon on Why the Lord Came into the World

Lessons: Psalm 45:1-7, 17
Isaiah 25:1-9
True Christian Religion 86:1, 2

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"The Lord from eternity, who is Jehovah, came into the world in order that he might subjugate the hells and glorify His Human, and apart from this no one of mortals could have been saved; and they are saved who believe in Him."

(True Christian Religion 2)

During this busy holiday season, as we have been preparing for Christmas and family gatherings, we have also been turning our thoughts toward the Advent of the Lord, thinking about the meaning or purpose of Christmas -- the reason for the season as some say. Too often the customs and traditions of the Christmas season so dominate over the meaning, that our minds and time are taken up with activities with little or no time left for consideration of the essence of Christmas.

Let us consider now the real essence of Christmas. That essence is expressed in our recitation and text from True Christian Religion 2:

"The Lord from eternity, who is Jehovah, came into the world to subjugate the hells and to glorify His Human..." (True Christian Religion 2)

This Advent of the Lord has great meaning for us. In fact if the Advent had not taken place, we would not be here now, because, as is said in True Christian Religion 3:

"Jehovah God...descended and assumed the Human, on account of the end, that He might reduce into order all things which were in Heaven and all things which were in hell, and all things which were in the Church, since the power of hell then prevailed over the power of Heaven, and on earth the power of evil over the power of good; hence a total damnation stood at the doors and threatened. This future damnation Jehovah God took away through His Human, which was the Divine Truth, and thus redeemed angels and men..." (True Christian Religion 3)

Now this total damnation with which the human race was threatened occurred a little over 2000 years ago. Today most of us rarely think of "total damnation". It is a term we rarely use, especially in connection with the Christmas season. Ask yourselves, "When was the last time I gave any thought to 'total damnation?'" We do talk fairly often of nuclear, chemical, biological, or ecological destruction. And perhaps we equate a total damnation of the human race to destruction from these causes.

Yet, despite the current presence of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons and the possibility of ecological disaster and global warming, it is not said in the Word that we are threatened by total damnation today. Rather, it is said that 2000 years ago, when people were still fighting with spears, shields, and bows and arrows, that then the human race was faced with total damnation. In worldly terms, the potential for worldwide destruction is much greater now than it was then, but in spiritual terms, the danger was much, much greater then than it is now for the whole human race.

How can this be? The answer has to do, not with the natural state of mankind with regard to the presence of, shall we say, weapons of mass destruction, but with the spiritual state of mankind, and with the power of the hells at that time to bring about a mass destruction of men's souls. Two thousand years ago, when weapons were much cruder, the hells were threatening to destroy all men's souls, as "the power of hell then prevailed over the power of Heaven, and on earth the power of evil over the power of good..." We tend today to be concerned and frightened by the destructive power of modern weapons and rightfully so. But consider that power in comparison with the not so obvious power the hells had to destroy all men's spiritual life and in so doing to destroy all of mankind.

The Third Testament states that without the Lord's Advent into the world all mankind would have fallen into total damnation and the lost forever in spiritual darkness. Such a claim about the state of the world at that time represents a pretty radical idea. Is there historical evidence which supports the truth of that statement? As a matter of fact there is. Some cultural anthropologists and New Testament scholars note that the people of that time were externally motivated in almost all of their actions. They avoided introspection as uninteresting, and evaluated behavior on the basis of external activity. Belief in polytheism was everywhere in the ancient world. They believed that there were many gods for many things. People were motivated by a need to win favor with these gods,

and to appease them, so that they could survive or so they thought. There was little belief in an afterlife, and of those that did, it was thought of as a shadowy empty existence. It did not matter whether one lived a moral life or not, everyone went there. In the Old Testament this place was called Sheol, in Greek mythology Hades. Demonology, sorcery, and demon possession reached its peak at the time of the incarnation. In the words of one church historian, "Everywhere people saw indications of the work of evil spirits; every misfortune, every illness, and particularly under the name of possession, all disorders of the nervous system were ascribed to them."

These observations of church historians and cultural anthropologists lend confirmation to the teachings that at the time of the Lord's Advent, the powers of hell were infesting heaven, the world of spirits, and also those living in the world. Very little spiritual truth was left, and what was left was being corrupted and disappearing. Also, people were being infested by demons, even children, as can be seen in several New Testament stories. And this power and infestation was growing. The Hells were becoming so strong that the Lord was less and less able to operate and be conjoined with mankind and so to save them. It was as if a thick cloud had come between the sun and the earth, cutting off all light and heat, and thus threatening all life on earth.

The Third Testament gives us this description of the situation:

They who before the Lord's coming had been of the church and had been evil as to life, were in such falsity as had not been before, and shall not be afterward, for the falsity which they infused had a direful persuasive power, and was deadly, such as never had been, and such as never can again be. By their persuasions they deprived other spirits they encountered of their whole ability to think ... let alone capable of thinking anything true. The reason was that they ... were not yet shut up in hell, but wandered about and infused dire and deadly persuasions wherever they could, and also into the evil in the church. ... (They) were in such (craftiness and) persuasiveness of falsity (that) unless the Lord when He was in the world had subjugated them and cast them into hell and had closed it up, no mortal could have been saved; for they were infesting and almost murdering whomever they met in the spiritual world. Unless the Lord by His Coming into the world had overcome them, nobody at all would be alive today on this planet, for everyone is governed by the Lord through spirits. (See AC 1673, AC 7686, AE 544)

Because the powers of the hells 2000 years ago then prevailed over the powers of the Heavens, threatening mankind with total spiritual destruction, it was necessary, in order for the human race to be saved, that the Lord take on a Human in the world. By means of this Human, the Lord redeemed angels and men.

In the Word we read:

"There are many reasons why God could redeem mankind, that is, could deliver them from damnation and hell, only by means of an assumed Human...Redemption consisted in subjugating the hells, restoring the Heavens to order, and after this reestablishing the Church; and this redemption God with His omnipotence could effect only by means of the Human.... For in no other way would it be possible for God, who is in the inmost and purest things, to pass over to outmost things, in which the hells are, and in which the people of that time were; just as the soul can do nothing without a body, or as no one can conquer an enemy without coming in sight of him, or approaching and getting near to him with proper equipment, such as spears, shields, or muskets... For it is impossible for Jehovah, such as He is in Himself, by His omnipotence to get in contact with any devil in hell or any devil upon earth, and restrain him and his fury and tame his violence, unless He be in things last as in things first."

(True Christian Religion 84)

So, the essence of the Christmas season is the idea that the Lord assumed a Human in order that He might subdue the hells, redeem angels and all mankind, and also glorify His Human. In the Advent of the Lord there is truly a "Joy to the World, for the Lord has come."

But such "joy" may be purely emotional and historical if we do not see how the Lord's Advent has application to us. The Lord came into the world to redeem all people. But by this means, (that is, by means of His first and second Advents) the Lord only keeps open the opportunity for us to be saved. The Lord stands at the door and knocks, but we must open the door to the Lord so that He may enter. Thus the Advent of the Lord applies in particular to

everyone. We can be saved only when we allow the Lord to be born as it were within us, so that we receive the Lord in spirit and in life.

We read in the Word again:

"The Lord is present with every person, urging and pressing to be received; and His first Advent, which is called the dawn, is when man receives Him, which he does when he acknowledges Him as God, Creator, Redeemer, and Savior. From this time a person's understanding begins to be enlightened in spiritual things, and to advance into more and more interior wisdom; and *as* he receives this wisdom from the Lord, he advances through morning into day, and this day lasts with him into old age, even to death, and after death he passes in Heaven to the Lord Himself..." (True Christian Religion 764)

The Lord makes His first Advent with us when we begin to be regenerated. In the first day or state of regeneration there is a first Advent of the Lord, and in each new day or state of regeneration there is a further Advent or coming of the Lord. Christmas, as a specific day of celebration, is not mentioned in the Third Testament. Yet it can be seen that Christmas, if properly regarded, has an essence which reminds us of the Lord's first and second Advents and of our part in relation to those Advents. What then is the spirit of Christmas but rejoicing for and seeking those things which the Lord has provided for our salvation? Let us then look to the Advent of the Lord within each of us, within our families, and within the Church as a whole, with the spirit expressed by those words in Isaiah:

"It shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him; let us exalt and be glad in His salvation." (Isaiah 25:9)

Amen.