

## Christ's Advent: The Climax and Conflict of History

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— CHRIST OR CAESAR —

*But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law*

Galatians 4:4

*He made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His kind intention which He purposed in Him 10 with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.*

Ephesians 1:9–10

*And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.*

Acts 4:12

The advent of Christ, under the reign of Caesar Augustus, was the anticipated climax of redemptive history.

Paul, writing to the Galatians, declares, "...when the *fullness of time* had come, God sent forth his Son, *born of woman...*". He is referring to Christ as the promised seed of Abraham (Gal 3:16-17) born of the free *woman* Sarah (Gal 4:22), but also alluding to the *protoevangelium* (proto-gospel) proclaimed in the Garden that the *seed of the woman* would crush the serpent's head (Gen 3:15).

Consequently, a redemptive thread runs throughout human history, progressively growing in strength until culminating in Christ as the *seed of the woman*—Mary's boy. From the primeval fall in the Garden, God comes in redemptive grace and promise first to Adam as the representative head of humanity in the proto-gospel, and then to Abraham, to Moses, and to David, finally – as the climax of history – finding fulfillment in Christ *born of woman* as the last Adam – the final representative head of humanity – who succeeds where the first Adam failed. God's purpose for man is restored and the dominion mandate fulfilled (Gen 1:28); a redeemed humanity is called to steward the earth as God's vice-regents.

God's plan for the cosmos is now complete. Through the man Christ Jesus, Satan is crushed, sin and death are vanquished, Christ is victorious and all things are brought together in one head.

As a paean of praise this redemptive thread rises in voice throughout history until – in Christ's advent – it becomes a crescendo with all heaven exclaiming:

10 ... "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. 11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is *Christ the Lord*. 12 And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,

14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"

Luke 2:10–14

Christ's coming, as a baby in Bethlehem, signals the accomplishment of all that was foreshadowed in the promises and the covenants and in which God's people had hoped through the ages. His supernatural conception in Mary's womb as the God-man – truly God and truly man – enables him to be born a Saviour, *Christ the Lord*, who crushes the serpent's head—the controlling organ of the body, signifying government and lordship. As incarnate deity, only he, in contradistinction to all other lords, is qualified and able to bear the sins of the world, reconciling humankind to the absolute God and bringing everything under his sway. Christ is the promised ruler of the nations—"the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15).

Eight days after his birth the Christ-child is presented at the temple. Simeon, a devout man who had been shown that he would not depart until he had seen the Lord's Christ, took him up in his arms and moved by the Spirit declared:

29 Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; 30 for my eyes have seen your salvation 31 that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, 32 ***a light for revelation to the Gentiles***, and for glory to your people Israel.

Luke 2:28–32

For long ages God had been preparing history's stage for the advent of his Son as Saviour of the world. *Christ the Lord* is sent as light into pagan darkness to restore the cosmos. In the *fullness of time* he had finally come as "*a light for revelation to the Gentiles*".

Not only through the promises and the covenants, his advent was also revealed through prophecy. Of special import was Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the image of a human colossus (Dan 2). Through Daniel's interpretation the whole of human history is foretold, outlined in four consecutive empires. Commentators generally agree that the head of *gold* represents Babylon; the chest and arms of *silver*, Medo-Persia; the middle and thighs of *bronze*, Greece; and the legs of *iron* and feet of part iron and *clay*, Rome. A stone is carved out, but without human hands, and is cast upon the feet of iron and clay. Not only are the feet shattered but also the whole human colossus collapses so that not a trace remains. And the stone becomes a great mountain filling the whole earth.

Daniel declares the meaning to Nebuchadnezzar:

And in the days of those kings [Rome] the God of heaven will set up a kingdom that shall never be destroyed, nor shall the kingdom be left to another people. It shall break in pieces all these kingdoms and bring them to an end, and it shall stand forever

Daniel 2:44

In the days of the Roman Empire (the fourth kingdom of iron and clay), specifically in the reign of Caesar Augustus, Christ – the stone cut without human hands – was cast upon the feet of the image, bringing down the entire humanist construct—destroying every prideful speculation raised up against the knowledge of God and its personification in the messianic state. The preaching of the gospel of God's government, proclaiming Christ as Lord in the face of the Roman emperor cult, was culturally subversive.

Contrary to humanist belief, autonomous man's pretensions to godhood – personified in the state – sets culture on a devolutionary spiral, not evolutionary! In rebellion against God, autonomous man devolves – decreasing in cultural worth – through four great empires from gold, to silver, to bronze, to iron, and then to clay. In fact, the whole humanist construct by the time of the Roman Empire teeters on a tenuous footing of iron *and* clay—irreconcilable elements, rendering it worthless. The time was set for an alternative.

And so, history climaxes in the advent of *Christ the Lord* (the stone) and his kingdom (the mountain) as the fifth and final world empire—the supernaturally cut stone that becomes a mountain that fills the earth. In him an "administration (*oikonomia*—i.e. economy; literally *law of the house*) suitable to the fullness of times" is introduced where the seemingly irreconcilable – iron and clay / heaven and earth – are reconciled as one. In his incarnate deity we see the full revelation of the triune-God (the three-in-one) in whom the age-old humanist dilemma of *the one and the many*—of oscillation between political tyranny (one) and anarchy (many) is now resolved. Each person of the trinity (the three-in-one) is equally God and thus *universals* (the one - iron) and *particulars* (the many - clay) are both equally ultimate, resolving the unresolvable—philosophically *and* politically. Order is restored to the cosmos.

Christ's lordship and victory in history put the first Christians in conflict with Caesar's claim to be lord. We are to "render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's" (Mtt 22:21). There is a clear delineation in Scripture for that which belongs to Caesar. The state's jurisdiction is defined by its responsibility for peace and order—by administering justice, weights and measures, defence, international relations, and taxation. Consequently, the early church was not intentionally subversive. There is a clear biblical role for the state. Nonetheless, the fallen principalities and powers – angelical *and* structural – stand judged under the proclamation of Christ as Lord in the face of the Caesar cult—the pagan totalitarian state. In its claim to absolute lordship it overreaches its jurisdiction.

The totalitarian state's claim to lordship is a declaration of war against God's sovereignty. Caesar Augustus took on the title and office of *Pontifus Maximus*, the high priest of the Roman state cult, combining political and religious authority. As a polytheistic culture, Rome's pantheon of gods grew with the empire and consequently Rome practiced religious toleration to the degree a religion acknowledged Caesar as lord. This the early Christians could not do. Thus Peter's proclamation of Christ's gospel of salvation and sovereignty in the face of the false gospel – the Emperor cult – declaring that "*there is salvation in no one else [i.e. Caesar], for there is no other name [i.e. Christ's] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). The word "gospel" (*evangelion*), despite its theological roots deep in the Old Testament, was repossessed from the Emperor cult. With the advent of Caesar Augustus – the god-man – it proclaimed that a new era of salvation had begun for the whole world. The messianic emperor and state were sovereign. Thus, while practicing *religious toleration*, Rome could not allow *religious liberty*. Toleration permitted *freedom of worship* but never *freedom of religion*—freedom in the public square. Tertullian refers to *religio licita* (permitted religion) in his *Apologeticum* (21.1) which, while not found in other literature of the time, does suggest either state licensure or at least informal recognition of compliant religions. The totalitarian state is supreme over the secular *and* the religious.

This is where the 21st Century West now finds itself. In the name of Enlightenment Humanism and all things "progressive" the pagan totalitarian state of the 1st Century is in renaissance. With a politically correct mantra of *inclusivity, equality, and fluidity*, the media has hopped into bed with lawmakers and governments to legislate conformity to secular humanism's tenets. In fact, as a belief system, secular humanism has taken on all the attributes of a de facto religion—the worship of man as his own measure (Protagoras) personified in the state as God walking on earth (Hegel). Its creeds and councils through the organ of the godless state stand supreme. Those churches and churchmen that do not submit their hearts and minds to the revelation of God in Christ in the Scriptures and the apostolic faith will increasingly apostatize as they ally themselves with the pagan state. They will advance the humanist agenda through their churches and seminaries, promoting state control of education and social ethics, especially in regard to gender theory and homosexuality. Ironically the mantra of *inclusivity, equality, and fluidity* only applies to those who conform. Pluralism is a myth. In losing freedom of religion and along with it freedom of speech, those who do not conform will suffer the full force of humanist law.

Nonetheless, as with the 1st Century, the 21st Century will experience a fresh in-breaking of God. As with Christ's first advent, so again with every fresh outpouring of his Spirit. In the fullness of time the stage of history is set for a quantum increase of the kingdom of God: instead of Roman roads we have the information highway; instead of *koine* Greek we have English as the *lingua franca*; instead of *Pax Romana* we have *Pax Americana*; and instead of the Roman pagan state we have the Western secular state. And we still have the same God! When paganism and its tyrannies seem in the ascendant Christ the Lord breaks into human history as its Saviour and Judge. God's people, imbued with his Spirit and holiness, will stand again in the face of statist tyranny. Even though diabolically animated to abort the seed of the woman through policies of death (abortion and euthanasia) and persecution of Christian dissenters statist tyranny is doomed.

Christ's advent is the divide of history. To the degree a civilisation yields to the ultimacy of God in Christ (the one - universals) to that degree it flourishes (the many - particulars). The prideful pretension of the human colossus (Dan 2) – humanistic statism – has been definitively defeated in Christ's incarnation and ascension to the right hand of the Father from whence he sends his omnipotent Spirit to prosecute his victory in the earth.

The mountain kingdom that fills the earth – the fifth and final empire – has come. A redeemed humanity is restored to the dominion mandate (Gen 1:28) and God's reign prevails in the nations (Mtt 28:18-20; Isa 2:1-5). Every humanistic pretension to godhood and dominion through the state is destroyed.

As a witness to Christ's victory over statism, John the revelator echoes Daniel 2:

Then the seventh angel blew his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, saying, "The kingdom of the world has

become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he shall reign forever and ever.”

Revelation 11:15

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