

The So-called Apostolical Fathers on the Lord's Second Coming

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A brief survey will suffice to test the worth of these scanty remains of Christian antiquity for the truth in question. The marvel is that any man of spiritual judgment who has read them with care should count them of the least weight, especially on such a matter. They have indeed a sorrowful interest, as they attest the rapid departure and profound downfall from apostolic teaching. Can anything be conceived more evident or striking than the immeasurable distance which severs these earliest writings from the scriptures? The Apocrypha, merely human as it is, does not so startlingly differ from the O.T. as do Barnabas, Clemens Rom., and Hermas from the apostles Paul, Peter, and John. Yet these productions were read like the scriptures to Christian congregations in early days; and Clemens Alex. quotes the most heterodox and nonsensical of the three as scripture! Even the Sinaitic Uncial has appended to the N.T. Barnabas and Hermas, as the Alexandrian has Clemens Rom. What a contrast these and all the rest from the dignity, holiness, love, and authority of the inspired Epistles! These early relics are merely the word of man, betraying not only weakness but trumpery. If able and learned men have lauded them to the skies, it only proves that tradition has blinding power, and that all have not faith.

Yet a pious man of our day ventures to say that "in God's gracious providence we possess such early writings." To what can one attribute infatuation like this in an evangelical clergyman but to his passionate zeal for the Jewish hope against the Christian one? Judaizing in any form tends always to strife and bitterness. How strange to be directed first to the "Didache" or "Teaching of the twelve Apostles"! Here then are the editio princeps of Bryennius (Constantinople, 1883), that of Hitchcock and Brown (New York, 1884), moreover that of H. de Roumestin (Parker and Co., Oxford and London, 1884), and Dr. C. Bigg's little volume with at least equal discernment critically as any.

The fuller title is daring enough, "The *Lord's Teaching* through the twelve Apostles to the nations."

But it is a meagre compilation, beginning with the Two Ways of life and of death, which occupy six chapters, or nearly half of the little treatise, without one word to show how life is given or guilt removed.

Then follows an inept chapter on baptism, prescribing a fast to precede; and another chapter on fasting in general. The great difference from "the hypocrites" seems to be that they fast on the second and the fifth days of the week, whereas the right fast is on the fourth and sixth (or preparation)! They are also not to pray as "the hypocrites," but as the Lord commanded, and thrice a day! In chapter 9 about the Eucharist, take the following flight: "As this broken [bread] was scattered over the hills and gathered together became one, so let thy church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into thy kingdom." Can any thought be poorer?

The notable fact is that the Twelve apostles are made to forget the all-importance of Christ's death in both baptism and the Lord's Supper. Again, the name of David figures strangely in 9* and 10 where we have "the four winds." After eccentric talk in 11 - 13 we have in 14 Mal 1: 10, 14 utterly perverted, as do the Papists notoriously to the mass. It is the old unbelief of substituting the Church for Israel. Does our brother fancy that from east to west the name of Jehovah is yet great among the nations, or ever will be till the Lord returns in glory? Is he not as assured as those to whom he foolishly

ascribes "the modern theory," that only then, never before, "in every place incense shall be offered to My name, and a pure oblation; for My name shall be great among the nations, saith Jehovah of hosts."

* The equivalent appears in Clem. Alex., and Origen, all referring, as Dr. Bigg judges, not to the Lord, but to the Eucharistic cup! It really seems so; but how incongruous the mixture of Jewish figure with a strictly Christian institution!

Hence no apostle ever applied this prediction to Christianity in the N.T. It is the misinterpretation of the spurious Didache; for the true Twelve never really sanctioned it. But it suited the pride and the ignorance of the Catholic church even before Popery. Matthew Henry perhaps well skips the verse, for the nonconformists give scant heed to prophecy; but W. Lowth, T. Scott, and perhaps all other commentators boldly follow the antiquated delusion in full chorus. The late Dr. Pusey of course laboured to prove it, looking only at the Jews of the past and present. But his argument defeats itself; for the prophet speaks of *no* "new revelation of Himself," but rather of the old promise made good in grace and power, not for Jews only but among the nations, when Jehovah shall be king over all the earth, one Jehovah and His Name one in that day. There is no excuse for misreading this bright prospect, still future, into the truly new and deeper revelation of His name as Father, which the Lord Jesus made known (John 4: 21-23) for the hour that "now is," when the true worshippers worship the Father in spirit and truth.

But let us turn to the last chapter of the Didache, "still more apposite" it is said. No one can doubt that Matt. 24 is therein mixed up with other scriptures which speak of the Lord's coming, whether to mankind invisible or visible." And then shall appear the signs of *the truth* (!): first a sign of an opening in heaven; then a sign of trumpet's voice (or, sound); and the third, resurrection of the dead. Yet not of all, but as it was said, The Lord will come, and all the saints with him."

Now Matt. 24: 30 speaks, not of the sign of "an opening in heaven" appearing, but of the Son of man in the heaven as a sign of His coming to the earth, which causes all the tribes of the earth (or, land) to lament. But even the Didache cites Zech. 14: 5 for all the saints coming *with* Him at this very epoch. Now this is our thesis, and it necessarily implies their previous change in order to come suitably to His appearing in glory. The mission of His angels (in ver. 31) with a great sound of trumpet cannot be for the gathering together unto Him of the glorified who all come with Him, but for the *subsequent* act of gathering together, after He appears, the elect of Israel from the four winds, scattered till then all over the earth. There is not a trace here of "the last trumpet" when the dead saints shall rise and we are changed, in order to come with Him in due time to gather the elect of Israel to the great King in Zion. For we must have been caught up before, that when He shall be manifested in glory, we too may then be manifested together with Him in it. There is no catching up in Matt. 24. Nor does it speak of the third sign of the resurrection of the saintly dead. Indeed no scripture treats it as "a sign." They were raised to appear with Him when He appears and "the world sees the Lord coming on the clouds of heaven."

If it be argued that Rev. 20: 4 speaks of the First Resurrection (after His appearing and the judgment of the Beast and the False Prophet with the kings of the earth and their armies, as well as the binding of Satan), not only is this admitted but its importance is insisted on. For it proves that there are stages in that resurrection as well as in Christ's presence. We learn from that verse that the general company of the glorified (all the saints of O.T. and New, till Christ come for them) compose those who emerge from heaven as the Lamb's followers. They were seen now seated on thrones, and judgment given to them; thereon two special classes of saints succeed, martyred in the earlier and later periods of the Apocalyptic crisis, who, as yet disembodied, were made to live, in order to reign with

Christ for the thousand years, no less than the general company already enthroned. These all make up the First Resurrection. It is false and directly contradictory to this scripture that those Apocalyptic sufferers rose at the same time with the first company.

Is it too much to say that of the truth here revealed, the Didache, and Christians at large are still wholly ignorant? Why should that be incredible which the Revelation makes known in the clearest terms? These early writings are most defective and, through ignorance of the scriptures, often opposed to the truth; and so are moderns. Scripture alone is the standard; and the Christian is not left without a divine Guide dwelling in him to lead into all the truth. Let us believe God's word as a whole, and not accept one part while we omit another.

But what we thus learn scatters into thin air the assumption that there were not to be distinct and different objects, both for blessing and for judgment, which unpractised eyes merge in one. Matt. 24 of course practically coalesces with 1 Thess. 5 and 2 Thess. 1 and many other intimations of the day of the Lord *i.e.* His coming judicially. But no one is entitled therefore to take for granted that the promised comfort and heavenly joy of the saints in John 14 and in 1 Thess. 4: 15-17 will be at that same time, any more than that the Lord's "Parousia" in 2 Thess. 1 synchronises with "the appearing of His Parousia" in ver. 8. If these be equally seen by man, where would be the propriety of the change of phrase? The connection too is so different that the Parousia in ver. 1 is with sovereign grace, the epiphany of His Parousia is with signal vengeance. It is equally His presence in either case, but absurd to assume that they must happen together.

As the Lord's character of Son of man in that day will be judicial (John 5: 22), the Parousia of the Son of man goes with His appearing. Thus He comes for Israel and the nations (Matt. 24: 30, 25: 31), but not so receives us to Himself for the Father's house. It is not that we deny in a general way what these brethren advance about "that day." In 2 Thess. 1 we have, as simultaneous effects of the Lord's revelation from heaven, the relief and vindication of the troubled saints, and the trouble and punishment of the wicked. But these are alike the exercise of righteous judgment, and not of sovereign grace; and hence neither can be till He appears in glory. Why should any be so absorbed in the earthly side of the Lord's Parousia as to be bitter against such as see and firmly hold the heavenly side also? We believe the heavenly hope to be an immense gain for the Christian, having already known what it is to be ignorant of it, as almost all thus begin. But growth in the truth, or elevation above the visible sphere, if sound and spiritual, is a boon beyond price; yet God's word and Spirit alone can safely lead on.

The Didache then may have interest as being rather ancient, though of no doctrinal importance. It departs from the truth, even as to the saints choosing bishops (chap. 15); whereas scripture speaks only of apostles, or their delegate, choosing elders for *them* (Acts 14: 23, Titus 1: 5). This was a radical change. Yet we need not suppose that it purposely left out elders, but (like Clem. Rom.) identified them with bishops, as scripture does: compare Acts 20: 17 with 28; Phil. 1: 1; and Titus 1: 5, 7.

But with the earliest age how strange to hear of the "apostolic Constitutions," betraying as it does internal evidence of being centuries later? What evidence can it afford of "the first century belief"? The Didache just lets us see the growing decay a little earlier; the Apostolic Constitutions came after that. Both misapplied Matt. 24 to Christendom.

The Epistle of Barnabas was long before those spurious "Apostolic Constitutions." Who this Barnabas was we know not. It dishonours the apostle's early friend and fellow-labourer, "a good man and full of the Holy Spirit and faith," to attribute to him a document so childish in its mystical reveries. Yet it stands favourably contrasted with the probably interpolated Epistles of Ignatius, which too

evidently evince the desire to cry up the clerical order. The Barnabas before us appears to have had at heart to counteract the judaizing of that early day. But a mighty chasm separates his work from the Epistle to the Hebrews, which with divine energy really translates the Levitical types as the figures of heavenly things. Tertullian, etc. show lack of discernment by assigning the inspired Epistle to the companion of the apostle (himself too without doubt the man whom the Holy Spirit calls an apostle). Yet *this* author sets up no such pretension, but had a due sense of his humble position. The true hope of the Christian is nowhere seen. All is vague and earthly, as with others far abler down to our own day. Spiritual intelligence in this respect is of the rarest.

Again, it is surprising that anyone who has the least regard for orthodoxy or even decency should cite from "The Shepherd" of Hermas. Besides, the Muratorian Canon has convinced all scholars, that this Hermas lived at about the middle of the second century, a brother of Pope Pius I, and not therefore "the brother" mentioned by the apostle. Far be it from my wish to expose the mere trash of a weak and fanciful mind in its Visions, Commands, and Similitudes. But it is a far graver case, when Hermas talks of God's holy angel filling a man with the blessed Spirit! of men's having all their offences blotted out because they suffered death for the name of the Son of God! and, worse still if possible, of the Holy Spirit being created first of all! Think of citing such a one on the question of our having to pass through the great tribulation! and of the comment on all this worse than nonsense, "Such was the belief of the Apostolic Christian." But let us draw a veil over the addendum on the false prophets who branded Jeremiah, and on Ahab, Zedekiah, and Shemaiah. Such vituperation must injure those that indulge in so acrimonious a spirit on a question that needs the quiet and holy guidance of the Spirit of God.

It is singular that the Epistle from the Church in Rome to that in Corinth (assigned to Clement, perhaps the earliest of these extra-scriptural remains) is passed by; for it is comparatively sober and grave, earnest and affectionate. Yet it seems inconceivable that the Clement (a name then of frequent occurrence), to whom the apostle alludes as "my fellow-labourer," could have written, as this Epistle does, of Danaides and Dirces* (chap. 6), or of the fabulous phoenix. This last first appears in the Fragments of Hesiod (Loesner, p. 450), and swells into the legend that Herodotus relates in his garrulous way (ii. 73). See also Tacitus (Ann. vi. 28), and the elder Pliny (Hist. Nat. x. 2). Is it not humbling that what the old pagan historian found incredible was accepted by Clement of Rome, with a whole cluster of later Fathers assenting, such as the Latins, Tertullian and Ambrose, and the Greeks, Origen, Epiphanius, Cyril Hier., Greg. Naz., etc.? Archbp. Wake and Mr. Chevallier were influenced by P. Young (Junius) to omit the heathen reference in chap. 6 as an interpolation; but the discovery since of added MS. evidence corroborates the insertion, however discreditable it must be to those who drew up the letter to Corinth. For Clement does not claim the Epistle as his own. It was probably a composite communication, like the letter from the apostles and elder brethren to the brethren of the Gentiles in Antioch and elsewhere (Acts 15), Clement taking the part in Rome that James had done before in Jerusalem. But what a wide difference between the brief and authoritative wisdom divine in the one, and the prolix elaboration, with faulty and compromising details, in the other!

* "To say that those heathen women "attained the firm centre of faith" and that they "weak in body received a noble reward" is to surrender the gospel, unconsciously but really. It is inexcusable error, not to say downright folly.

How again could Christian saints of intelligence cite Isa. 64: 4, and 1 Cor. 2: 9, and stop short, as ignorant souls do to-day, of the apostolic addition, "But unto us God revealed [them] through the Spirit"? (See chap. 34) For this is just the wondrous favour we enjoy above the O.T. saints by Christ's redemption, and the gift of the Holy Spirit. It means unwittingly, that one ignores the vantage ground of Christianity in the presence of the Spirit, that we are no better off as to this than Israel of old.

This Epistle is also exceedingly reticent as to the Lord's return, and hence precarious in its quotation of prophecy. Take that from Isa. 60: 17 in chap. 42. This is the application. "Preaching therefore through countries and cities, they [the apostles] used to appoint their first-fruits [a hazardous statement] to be bishops and deacons over those who should believe, after having proved them by the Spirit. Nor this in any new way; *for in truth it had in long past times been written concerning bishops and deacons!* For the scripture somewhere saith, I will appoint their bishops in righteousness and their deacons in faith." Now a Christian has only to read the prophet in order to be convinced of the outrageous mistake. The chapter as a whole supposes the day of glory come for earthly Jerusalem, the city of Jehovah, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel; when the afflicted but spared people shall become a strong nation, and, what is better still, shall all be righteous. It is a picture quite different from the glorified church, the holy Jerusalem that comes down out of heaven from God. The force of ver. 17 is that in the day of restored Israel Jehovah will make their rulers peace, and their officers righteousness. Neither war nor exaction shall be any more. Is this fulfilled as yet?

There is here absolutely no room for an allusion to bishops and deacons in the churches; it is pure hallucination. But it is worse by far. It indicates, like the Epistle of Barnabas, that which soon overran Christendom like a flood, the sprouting of the Gentile conceit, of which the apostle warned the saints in Rome. The promises abide for Israel, who are yet to be blessed as a people under Messiah and the new covenant. Branches of the olive-tree by their unbelief were broken off, and Gentiles meanwhile grafted in; but the Gentile tenure is by faith and contingent on their continuance in goodness: *otherwise they also shall be cut off*. Nothing is more certain than that the professing Gentiles have utterly failed, are unbelieving to excess, and must end in the apostasy as the apostle predicted.

Equally certain is it (even from this chapter and all the prophets) that Israel will not continue in their present unbelief, but shall be grafted in again. Their hardening is only till the fulness of the Gentiles be come in; "and so all Israel shall be saved." These are enemies in the gospel days which will soon end. God has not forgotten His promises, or His election of the fathers; He only awaits the right moment, when the Gentile complement is made up, to prove His faithful love to Israel. For His gifts and calling do not admit of change of mind. Christendom from early days assumed on the contrary that He had cast off Israel, and given the church an indefeasible title: a false, proud and ruinous delusion. Here in these apostolic fathers the germ grows and spreads apace as it were flag-weed, till judgment destroys it for ever.

Are these the men or the writings to produce as of value to interpret the scriptures which reveal a truth incompatible with this vain conceit? For their denial of Israel's hopes led to the transfer of earthly glory to the church now, and the consequent refusal of present suffering, forgetful of future glory on high: the abandonment of the true portion of God's church. These early fathers had lost the truth of our calling upwards, and took more and more the glowing visions announced to Israel as meant for us, and not for them. To maintain the heavenly privilege in its power and purity we must own that to Israel God destined the earth, with the Gentiles rejoicing in willing subjection. But we are blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies even now in Christ, and to be *with* Him there in the day of glory. To seek earthly power and glory now is for the church high treason to Christ.

But the principle of looking to "the early belief" is a false one, the *ignis fatuus* of the Tractarian movement, and the fully developed lie of Popery; which, if there is to be an interpreter, demands and professes to have an infallible one in itself, the Holy Catholic church, and now indeed the Pope. This of course when plainly stated the Protestant abjures. The Christian, the church, believing in the ever abiding presence and operation of the Holy Spirit sent forth on and since Pentecost, has what the latter confessedly lacks, what the former vainly and madly professes. The Spirit dwells here below to guide

into all the truth, and makes this good in the measure of our faith and spiritual state. For He is here to glorify Christ, not the saint or the church; who are only right in awaiting Christ's coming for our glory with Him. Now is the time for lowly service, unworldly devotedness, and self-renunciation, yea for sharing His rejection and suffering. It is no time for reigning without the apostles, and without Christ; it is the time for entire dependence on Him in separation from the world, content ourselves to be meanwhile reviled, persecuted, and defamed like our betters for Christ's sake. The scripture is the standard; in no way what the Christians may have believed, thought, said, or done, even in apostolic days.

Hence the saints in Rome are warned not to be high-minded but fear; and we have already seen why. It was the very snare which misled them and all Christendom to deny God's faithfulness to Israel, and to claim the succession to Jewish power and honour now on earth, which could not be without forfeiting present rejection and future glory on high with Christ.

Still more manifest and manifold is the care to correct the church in Corinth (with all that in every place call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, theirs and ours) from their aberrations. There were internal divisions and carnal strifes; clashing schools of thought with chiefs (however themselves unwilling) dragged in to accentuate the rival parties. What more opposed to the one Head and the one body? They were puffed up, instead of mourning at the horrible leaven unjudged in their midst. They were not ashamed that anyone of them should prosecute his suit before the world, and not before the saints as the Lord had laid down. They were loose as to personal purity, the known prevalent immorality of the place. They needed to have the marriage relation etc. cleared and defined. They were admonished against their levity as to heathen temples and sacrifices. They were reminded authoritatively that those who labour in the gospel are entitled to live of the gospel, whilst it was the apostle's own joy to make it without charge, in the Spirit of Christ not using his right. They were warned that preaching to others without personal self-abnegation is an awful peril. Nor is it only preachers that need to take heed; but any Christian if unwary will fall, as is seen in the wilderness history of Israel, types of us. Open disorders too are reproved, not only in women forgetting their place of subjection, but in scandalous dishonour to the Lord, even at His supper, it would seem through mixing the love-feast with it, but really through their bad state of soul. Further, the principle and practice flowing from the Spirit's action individually and congregationally were fully stated to guide them and us, in chaps. 12-14. with the deeply needed intervening chapter calling for love to enforce and characterise both. Most pointed too in the bearing on our subject is chapter 15, which proves how little "early christian belief" can be trusted; for some among them questioned a resurrection, though it does not seem that they doubted the immortality of the soul.

It is the scripture that we accept, not only as the source of divinely given truth but as its criterion. The Holy Spirit is the sole unfailing interpreter, just so far as we look to Christ's glory. If we seek our own things, calling them perhaps the church's glory or right, we have no promise from God and no security for ourselves; but on the contrary we shall have to learn our folly. One might similarly apply several more of the Epistles, besides the greatest for general Christian doctrine, and the no less great for ecclesiastical truth and order.

Notably again the Epistle to the Galatians calls for a few words in proof that what the early Christians held is not the smallest guarantee for the truth. For the apostle writes to the assemblies of that considerable region in Asia Minor, where he had himself planted the gospel, to reproach them sadly and solemnly with having so quickly changed from him that called them in Christ's grace to a *different gospel* which is not another. It was truly a perversion of the gospel of Christ. If saints, after the best of all preaching in that early day, could so soon follow judaizers, and fall from grace into

legalism as the apostle affirms, can any thoughtful mind be surprised that they might soon slip into defective views and even error about the Second Advent?

But we need not assume this. The Epistles to the Thessalonians prove doubly the fact, and not the danger only. For the apostle, in instructing them more on that glorious truth, had in the First to correct, at least as soon, their mistake about their deceased brethren, and in the Second to expose a still wider and worse error about the day of the Lord for living saints. How plainly the mystery of lawlessness was already at work!

It is not for any one to minimise the incalculable moment of the proper hope of the Christian. But nothing is easier to understand than the difficulty it presented to the Jews that became Christians, accustomed only to the Lord's coming as predicted in the O.T. to deliver the godly remnant of Jews at the last gasp, as it were, from the apostate mass of their fellow-Jews with the Antichrist at their head and the Roman Beast his patron and ally, and from the vast assemblage of the Eastern nations, their embattled or besieging enemies under the King of the North, and the Russian Gog behind the latter. The remnant justly look for Christ's advent in displayed power and glory to overwhelm both their internal and external foes, and thus deliver themselves on the earth. Also Gentile believers, again, were slow to enter into the blessed wonder of Christ's coming to translate on high all real Christians, in its grandeur far beyond what Enoch or Elijah experienced of old: so completely was it beyond even saintly men's expectation or conception. Only Christ's promise and God's new revelation could account to our souls for such surpassing glory. Hence to the inspired word of the N.T. we confidently appeal, as it only is here entitled to convince any.

But we specially invite the attention of our opposing brethren to a consideration which escaped all the Patristic remains, and every theologian till our day. For we love them, and mind not overmuch froth and fury signifying nothing, due also to their zeal for the little which fills their vision, having most of us passed through similar objections and prejudices. Scripture we found far larger and higher than a scheme based on the O.T. hope, confirmed as it is by N.T. revelation. For we frankly acknowledge its truth and its importance, if rightly applied. Yet the N.T. also reveals what was of old hidden but now manifested, that Christ, on His total rejection by Jew and Gentile, was to sit raised from the dead at God's right hand; and this, not merely to be Priest for ever after the order of Melchizedek, as He intercedes too for His friends, and by-and-by to strike through kings in the day of His wrath when His enemies are made His footstool. He was to be there now for a new order of things, far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come. For God put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all. This is the great secret now revealed.

It is not my aim to trace the means which the apostle unfolds, in pursuance of the exalted Head, that we may know God's operation in associating us who now believe with Christ in the heavenlies, as we read in Eph. 2 - 4, but to direct renewed and closer attention to the counsels of God who made known to us the mystery of His will according to His good. pleasure which He purposed in Him (or, Himself) for administration of the fulness of the seasons. These seasons will only be full when Christ comes again, to carry out to God's glory as the Second man all the trusts in which the first man has so conspicuously failed. In Christ will be then displayed the obedient Man, the Governor, the Depository of the promises, the One to make the law great and glorious, the Priest, the Prophet, the King of Israel and Son of Man, Ruler of all peoples, nations, and languages, the Head over all things to the church. For Satan is still the prince of the world, and the god of this age. And the Lord, though crowned with the chaplet of victory and King of kings in title, is not yet seated on His own throne but His Father's,

till He appears with His many diadems and establishes His world-kingdom. Then only will all things be summed up in Christ as the centre of the universe in the day of manifested glory, the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him in whom we also were given (or, obtained) inheritance, being predestined according to His purpose that works all things according to the counsel of His own will.

The heading up of the universe in Christ as in Eph. 1: 10 must be carefully distinguished from the gathering together into one of the scattered children of God, of which John 11: 52 speaks. For Christ died that there might be now the holy gathering into one of God's *children*, for which He also made request in John 17: 20, 21. But that heading up is of *all things* in God's creation, "the things in the heavens, and the things upon the earth," now so long severed, and the earthly at least made subject to vanity through man's fall. But all things groaning below shall be freed from the bondage of corruption when the coming glory is revealed, with Christ the Heir of all things at its head. At present it is an operation of divine grace to call out and together from Jews and Gentiles God's children (and if children, heirs also: heirs of God and joint-heirs with Christ), if indeed we suffer with [Him], that we may also be glorified with [Him]. This is the day of grace, and an indisputably elective process; that, a gathering of the whole creation both heavenly and earthly; which is so far from meaning the church either now or then, that we His members are expressly here distinguished from "all things." The inheritance we, God's heirs, are to share with Christ in that day. For this we have the Holy Spirit as earnest, who has also sealed us already for redemption's day.

This then is the revealed purpose of God for the glory of Christ and the church, His body and bride. Tradition furnishes not an echo of it. Universal consent, if we can speak of such a thing in presence of the Babel of Christendom, rises not above the earth. First, such writers as Justin Martyr and Irenaeus looked for a glorious metamorphosis of nature, for a grander Jerusalem on earth, and vines bearing prodigiously, not for Israel, but for the glorified saints (c. Haer. v. 333, ed. Massuet)! Then later Eusebius (V. C. iii. 15, 33, iv. 40, etc.), in a reaction from such grotesque stuff, treated the prophetic visions as fulfilled in Constantine's victory over Paganism, with worldly ease and honour for the Christian profession! Along with this came in souls blessed after death as an alternative interpretation; so that the resurrection as well as Christ's coming well nigh vanished, save for judgment; and the sheep and the goats were confounded with the great white-throne-judgment of the dead.

Yet the Lord had intimated even to Nicodemus that God's kingdom has "heavenly things" as well as "earthly." Again He pointed out to the disciples the distinction of the Father's kingdom on high for the glorified saints, from the Son of man's kingdom below out of which are to be cleared those that practise lawlessness. These truths paved the way for the Spirit to reveal that purpose of God for the heavens and all the things in them, and for the earth and all the things on it, to be set under Christ as the Head over all things to the church. Had this truth been received, it would have guarded saints from setting the one against the other, the common source of manifold error and evil. Here our brethren, like ourselves, have to take heed and learn.