

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

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The Second Coming of Christ by Robert Elliott Speer

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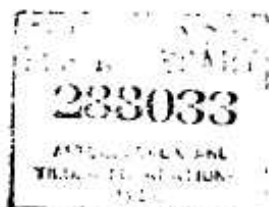
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ROBERT ELLIOTT SPEER

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If we ask the question, What is Christianity? we get many replies. One party answers, A set of facts, of highly accredited historic facts. If we object that this sort of definition will apply just as well to geology or any similar science, they answer, Yes, but these facts cluster about a person. A second party would reply, A set of emotions. If we object that the feelings with which we look upon nature or with which we listen to music might be defined in the same way, they answer, Yes, but these emotions center upon a person and are in the nature of a personal love. A third party answers, A set of opinions. If we object that this definition would apply as well to materialism they answer, Yes, but these opinions are beliefs upon a

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person and cluster around a living spirit. A fourth party answers, A code of conduct. If we object that this definition will apply as well to any standard of ethics they answer, Yes, but this conduct is expressible only in the terms of service of a person. Each definition resolves in the end into Christ.

In what sense is Christianity Christ? Christianity is Christ, first, as the historic Saviour and Pattern. Christianity is Christ, second, as the present Lord and Life of man. Christianity is Christ, third, as the Ideal and Head of humanity. Is that all? We should have a truncated Christianity if that were all, a Christianity very rich and full, but incomplete. Christianity is Christ not alone as the historic Saviour and Pattern; not alone as the present Lord and Life of man; not alone as the Ideal and Head of a new humanity, the expression of God's desire for every

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creature—Christianity is also Christ as our coming Redeemer and King. The hope of Christ's coming again is an integral part of our Christian faith.

We must go back to each of the conceptions of Christianity which I mentioned at the beginning and include Christ's second coming therein. If Christianity is a set of facts, what are its facts? First, that Jesus Christ came into this world by way of the manger—the great fact of the lowly incarnation; (2) that Jesus Christ went out of this world by way of the cross and the open grave—the great truths of the atonement and the resurrection; (3) that the Holy Spirit came into this world as Christ's advocate to abide here as His representative, and (4) that Jesus Christ is coming back again. If Christianity is a set of emotions, what are those emotions? The constraint of the love of a perfect Saviour, but also the desire that He should

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come again, and the emotions the prospect of His return awakens. If Christianity is a set of beliefs, what are those beliefs? That Jesus Christ was our Lord; that Jesus Christ is our Lord; yes, and that Jesus Christ is to be our returned and victorious Lord. If Christianity is a code of conduct, what are the sanctions of that conduct? The constraint of Christ's love; the righteous fear of Christ's judgment, but also the expectation that the Master whom we serve is coming back again and may find us at our service, maybe faithful, maybe disloyal to Him for whom we are to watch and wait.

The hope of Christ's second coming is an integral part of our Christian faith. It is also a necessary part of our Christian faith. It is necessary from the point of view of our Christian faith itself. Christ must come again in order to complete and fulfill His

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first coming. A Jewess said to a friend of mine, who was endeavoring to persuade her that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah: "I do not know. If He was, I know He must come again, and when He comes again He will tell us Jews whether He was here before." Christianity is an incomplete, and imperfect, and unfulfilled thing unless the goal of it is the return of Jesus to complete that which He began. The return of Christ is essential to Christianity from the point of view of the inner needs of Christianity for its own completeness.

It is essential to Christianity from the point of view of the personal requirements of our own spiritual lives. We need the hope of Christ's second coming as a buttress to our faith in the supernatural. Even in the days of Simon Peter the hope of Christ's return had begun to grow dim. Peter says men began to lose faith in the