

contrast with the sudden optimism springing from that love of God which is capable of conquering the whole of humanity ?

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QUESTION AND ANSWER

MARANATHA

In 1 Cor. 16:22 we find the word Maranatha, one of the few Aramaic expressions to be preserved in the New Testament. What does this word mean, and what is its doctrinal significance ?

The words—for there are two of them—come immediately after a plea for the condemnation, *anathema*, of those who do not love the Lord Jesus. In antiquity the phrase was divided into *maran atha*, 'The Lord has come' or 'The Lord comes.' There is found in old Jewish formulas of condemnation a similar expression, 'The Name (i.e. God) has come.' Thus, if St Paul was thinking along similar lines when he was finishing his epistle, such a condemnation would be a manifestation of our Lord's capacity of sovereign judge who punishes the wicked (cf. Mt. 25:31-46).

In more recent times many scholars divide the expression into *marana tha*, 'Our Lord, come !' If this is the meaning of the phrase as used by the Apostle, then he shows his desire for the definitive stage of the reign of Jesus to arrive. Such a desire is certainly implicit in the petition of the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy kingdom come.' In this understanding of the phrase there is reference to Jesus as judge, for he will upon his return immediately pass judgment upon mankind (cf. Mt. 25:31-46) ; moreover it is precisely as judge that our Lord is asked to come in Apoc. 22:17-21 where the command 'Come, Lord Jesus' is equivalent in meaning to *marana tha*.

The importance of the second coming of Jesus in Christian belief is reflected in the article of the Apostles' Creed 'I believe . . . in the resurrection of the body.' The general resurrection will take place at the time of the parousia (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16-18). The importance of our Lord's second coming and what follows from it was better realised by the members of the early Church than it is by most today. This return of the Saviour was the hope and expectation of the first generation of believers, though they knew 'Neither the day nor the hour' (Mt. 25:13 ; cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-3). At the second coming of our Lord his victory over sin and death will be complete, for Satan will

no longer be able to tempt men, and death, the result of sin (Rom. 5:12 ; cf. Gen. 3:19), will be no more (1 Cor. 15:54-8) ; those who were ' faithful unto death ' will indeed have the ' crown of life ' (Apoc. 2:10), glorious life not only of soul but of body (cf. 1 Cor. 15:36-49 ; 1 Thess. 4:13-5:11) when our humble bodies will be made conformable to the glorious body of Christ (Phil. 3:20), and will rule triumphant with him who has already risen triumphant over the devil and death (cf. Acts 2:22-36). At the parousia the restoration of all things in Christ Jesus will be fully accomplished (cf. Eph. 1:10) ; finally all creation will be in perfect harmony with its Creator and hence with itself.

This theological teaching is correct. Whether or not it is implicit in the saying of St Paul found in 1 Cor. 16:22 depends upon which of two possible interpretations of the text is correct. Today there are both Catholic and non-Catholic exegetes who champion one or the other explanation of the phrase. St Paul did not tell us what he meant by it, as he did when he used the Aramaic *Abba*, ' Father ' (Gal. 4:6 ; Rom. 8:15), and so it is impossible to be certain. Here as occasionally elsewhere we are reduced to regretting that the sacred author was not more explicit.

Maranatha is found in the tenth chapter of the *Didache* ; here we are faced with the same difficulty regarding the division of the phrase. This chapter is generally considered as containing prayers belonging to the Eucharistic liturgy. The two pertinent verses read : ' Let grace come and let this world pass away. Hosanna to the God of David. If one is holy, let him come ; if one is not, let him do penance. *Maranatha*. Amen.' It seems clear that there is here a remembrance of or a reference to 1 Cor. 16:21f. There is no logical development found in this section of the *Didache* ; hence from the eschatological desire of the one verse one cannot argue with certainty to the eschatological interpretation of the second.

Maranatha was employed in some of the early liturgies also. However, it is not possible to interpret St Paul's text from them. The expression—no matter how it was divided and thus understood—could have been and possibly was used in many senses : a cry that our Lord be in the midst of the praying community or a recognition that he was in its midst (cf. Mt. 18:20), a cry of hope for the final consummation of the world (Apoc. 22:17-20), perhaps a prayer that the Eucharistic transubstantiation be effected, a cry before communion. The liturgies are often lacking in logical development : they are concerned with the worship of God from various aspects and with various petitions for the Church and its members, centred of course on the Eucharistic sacrifice and Communion ;

the strict application of logic could stifle the various aspects of prayer.

In the context of 1 Cor. 16:22 the title *maran(a)* is referred to Jesus. He was considered as Lord, a divine being. He was so considered not only in the Greek church, but also in the Palestinian church, the mother church. St Paul would only have used an Aramaic expression when addressing a non-Palestinian group if such an expression were common in the Palestinian church and known to the other communities as such. Moreover, this belief in the divinity of Jesus was current in the Church from the beginning, ante-dating the earliest Christian writings. While this truth is manifest elsewhere we have here an unintentional confirmation of the belief. To Jesus are subject all things as the Apostle declares earlier in the same epistle (15:27), but this belief in the divine sovereignty of Jesus is not the creation of St Paul; it was something common and at the same time proper to the Church antecedent to him.

No matter what the temporal reference of (*a*)*tha*, the context of 1 Cor., as well as that of Apoc. 22, shows that we are concerned with Jesus, Lord and Judge. The importance of this aspect of our Lord's activity has never been forgotten in the history of the Church, though the accent has been placed in later Christian piety upon the judgment of each individual human being immediately after death. Nevertheless the stress placed in the New Testament upon the definitive judgment of all mankind together, at the second coming of our Lord, should lead us to ponder the meaning and importance of the last judgment when our Lord will exercise to the full his office of judge.

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BOOK REVIEWS

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