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<sup>14</sup> St. Mark 13:32-33 (KJV).

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, 13:33-37.

<sup>16</sup> This is the unfortunate preoccupation of people who identify themselves as “Pre-Millennialists”, “Millennialists”, and “Post-Millennialists”. One of the principal sources of this kind of distraction is the system of highly selective and misleading notes, cross references, and comments in the very popular SCOFIELD BIBLE. I suspect that many, if not a majority, of those who purchase that work do so (a) because of the prestige of its publisher, Cambridge University Press, for which it is a significant money maker, (b) for the rare beauty of its typography, and (c) for the high quality of its printing and binding. It is one of those books that is a physical joy to hold in the hand. However, its purchasers certainly cannot be attracted by its editor’s credentials as a Biblical scholar, for he had none.

These artificial issues have been given specious new life and energy by the recent publication of the “Left Behind” series of novels of LeHay and Jenkins.

## A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE APOSTLES’ CREED -- 7.

The Reverend Canon John A. Hollister

**I BELIEVE in God the Father Almighty,  
Maker of heaven and earth:**

**And in Jesus Christ his only Son our  
Lord: Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost,  
Born of the Virgin Mary: Suffered under Pon-  
tius Pilate, Was crucified, dead, and buried:  
He descended into hell; The third day he rose  
again from the dead: He ascended into heaven,  
And sitteth on the right hand of God the Father  
Almighty: *From thence he shall come to judge  
the quick and the dead.***

***I believe in the Holy Ghost: The holy  
Catholic Church; The Communion of Saints:  
The Forgiveness of sins: The Resurrection of  
the body: And the Life everlasting. Amen.***

**“From thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”**

The seventh segment or phrase of the Apostles’ Creed deals with the events we call the “Judgements”. These occur after our deaths and the Church has traditionally taught that there are two of them. One is the *Particular* Judgement, in which each individual, after his death, stands before Christ to receive the reward of the type of life he has lived here on earth, *i.e.*, either to spend eternity in heaven with God or to spend eternity in hell, cut off from God.

This is what the Creed means when it says “he shall come to judge the *quick*”, for the literal meaning of “quick” is just “living”. Thus to say “that was quick”, meaning “that was rapid” is just a metaphor for what might otherwise be said as “that was lively”. Similarly, where we might say “Hurry up!”, not long ago it would have been common to say “Look alive!”

The other event referred to in this part of the Creed is the *General Judgement*. That is Christ’s Judgement of all people who are living at the time of His Second Coming *and* all those who ever lived prior to that Coming. That is what the Creed means when it says “he shall come to judge the *quick and the dead*.”

As we discussed earlier, in connection with the fifth clause of this Creed, these *Judgements* are the points at which each person must give an account to Christ<sup>1</sup> of his life and of all that he has done during it, for good or ill. Christ will then judge that person and his earthly doings and then, on the basis of that Judgement, assign him his appropriate eternal reward, *i.e.*, heaven or hell.

This is the point of the Gospel parable<sup>2</sup> which pictures the Church here on earth as a pen or fenced field. The pen contains a flock of sheep and goats, representing the mixture of saints and sinners that presently populates the Church. The shepherd, who stands at the open gate as the animals run out and separates them into two streams, one entirely of sheep and one entirely of goats, is a figure of Christ conducting the Judgement.

What do we know about the nature of this hell? Is it, as some people picture it, a place of fire, of torture, or of torment? Those attributes of hell have been common beliefs for millennia and have frequently been depicted in art, in story, and in proverbial phrases.<sup>3</sup> However, all that the Church tells us for certain is that this hell is “The place of departed spirits”.<sup>4</sup> Because Christ went *from* this “place” *to* “heaven”, this place called hell is clearly not heaven, but somewhere different. Further, because Christ in heaven “sitteth on the right hand of God”, we know heaven is the place where people are in close fellowship with God, so by clear

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to it as “hell fire” is recorded at St. Matt. 25:41 and St. Mark 9:43-49. However, in the contexts of these remarks, they may well have been intended more to indicate in a vivid image the overall unpleasantness of eternal punishment than to convey precise information about the mechanism for inflicting that unpleasantness. What we can be certain about is that Hell involves complete separation from God.

<sup>4</sup> The “rubric” or service direction at the beginning of the Apostle’s Creed says, “*And any Churches may, instead of the words, He descended into hell, use the words, He went into the place of departed spirits, which are considered as words of the same meaning in the Creed.*” THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 15 and 29 (PECUSA 1928).

<sup>5</sup> On the principle that “If some is good, more must be better”, people commonly think they can do more than the minimum God requires of us and, by these extra efforts, earn greater favor with Him. These extra efforts are called “works of supererogation” in Article 14, *The Articles of Religion*, THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 605 (PECUSA 1928). Attempting thus to “earn merit” by such works of excess is actually heretical because it effectively denies that God’s grace is His free and unearned gift to us and instead declares that it is something we can buy or barter for with what we ourselves do. This reduces Almighty God to the level of a Tammany Hall ward heeler whom we bribe in order to buy the patronage of his political machine.

<sup>6</sup> We call this “free will”, which means that we are free to choose to do that which God wishes us to do, to do that which is right, and that we are also free to choose to do that which God wishes us not to do, to do that which is wrong. Why He chose to give us this freedom to disobey Him is one of the mysteries of creation to which we have no certain answers although many people have speculated about it.

Archdeacon Donald B. Rice has observed that this radical freedom is patterned after God’s own total and absolute freedom, *i.e.*, is part of the *imago Dei*. Apparently this ability to decide preceded Adam and Eve’s eating of the forbidden fruit because otherwise that would not have needed to be forbidden.

<sup>7</sup> “From thence he [Christ] shall come to judge the quick and the dead.”

<sup>8</sup> St. Mark 13:32-37 (KJV).

<sup>9</sup> St. Luke 12:16-21.

<sup>10</sup> After reading this section, my wife suggested that Christ’s final coming will actually be His *Third* Coming. That is, just as we consider the Incarnation as His First advent here, so it would be reasonable to view the Resurrection -- His return to earth from hell upon Easter -- as His Second, making His Coming at the end of the world His Third.

<sup>11</sup> St. John 14:15-26 (KJV).

<sup>12</sup> THE BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER 71 (PECUSA 1928).

<sup>13</sup> St. John 3:3b (KJV).

same essential material. It is just a fuller explanation. In a similar way, the longer Creed also expresses Christ's unique rôle as our Savior: "Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, And was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, And was made man". Here, too, we can see the action of the Holy Spirit in giving effect in our lives to what the other two Persons, the Father and the Son, wish us to have.

### A Note on Timing:

Returning to the final Judgement, there is only one thing that Scripture tells us with certainty about when it will be. That one thing is that, no matter how much we puzzle and try to decipher the Book of Revelations or other sources, we shall not know beforehand when the final Judgement is coming: "But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father."<sup>14</sup> Therefore, all we can do is watch and pray, each of us always working to be as ready as possible to answer that call whenever it may come.<sup>15</sup>

Any time spent trying to piece together Christ's itinerary on that Second Coming<sup>16</sup> is like time spent speculating about the details of and differences between the two final Judgements. That is, it is time stolen from what God has commanded us to do and wasted on irrelevancies about which He has told us not to worry. It is also presumptuous to the point of blasphemy: because God has revealed to us everything we need to know in order to be saved, to try to inquire into things He did not see fit to reveal to us is to question His good sense and the depth of His care for us.

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<sup>1</sup> "From thence he [Christ] shall come to judge the quick and the dead."

<sup>2</sup> St. Matthew 25:31-46. Interestingly, when Christ used this parable to teach this point, He did not tell us which animal species represents the saved and which represented the lost. Although common usage seems to assume that the sheep are the saved and the goats are the lost, those who have had experience with both animals may well think the canny goats are the ones who will be saved and the brainless sheep the ones who will dazedly wander into being lost.

<sup>3</sup> One rather general reference to "unquenchable fire" as punishment is reported at St. Matt. 3:12 and St. Luke 3:17, and another somewhat more direct reference

implication hell is the place where people are emphatically *not* in fellowship with God.

In fact, some theologians have suggested that the essence of hell, the thing that makes it so horrible that it absolutely must be avoided, is not physical torture but simply the state of being cut off from God for all eternity. While we are here on earth we have some opportunities for contact with God, even in our fallen and imperfect condition, but those in hell have no such chance at all.

We do not know the precise timing or interrelationship of the two Judgements, although over the centuries theologians have wasted a significant amount of time speculating about those details. All that we, as Christians, need to know is that at some point each of us will, without any doubt, find himself or herself standing before Christ to render a personal account of his or her life and actions.

Any facts beyond that one would be both superfluous and a waste of the time we need to spend getting ready for that investigation. Christians believe that God has revealed to us everything we need to know and to do in order to be saved. Learning that and then putting it into practice is enough, and more than enough, to fill one lifetime; we do not need to go out looking for extra information or special religious practices over and above those Christ has set out for us.<sup>5</sup>

As we noted previously, most people much prefer to believe that their actions will have no consequences at all, let alone any bad consequences. Unfortunately for them, that is not what Christianity teaches. Instead, Christianity teaches that our acts *do* have consequences, that we are *responsible* for the choices we make in this life here on earth,<sup>6</sup> and that lives that have been lived in opposition to God's will and commandments come finally to very uncomfortable and undesirable ends.

Traditionally, Christianity has summarized this understanding by what it calls "the Four Last Things". These are "last" in time, that is, they are the last things that can happen in any one per-

son's life: Death, Judgement, Heaven, and Hell. As we are told in the seventh portion of the Creed, which will be discussed later, this *Judgement* is the point at which each person must give an account to Christ<sup>7</sup> of his life and of all that he has done during it, for good or ill. Christ will then judge that person and his earthly doings and then, on the basis of that Judgement, assign him his appropriate eternal reward, *i.e.*, heaven or hell.

One thing we are clearly taught in Scripture is that each of us does not know, cannot know, and will not know, when will come the Judgement that affects him personally:

But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is. For the Son of man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch. Watch ye, therefore: for ye know not when the master of the house cometh, at even, or at midnight, or at the cockcrowing, or in the morning: Lest coming suddenly he find you sleeping. And what I say unto you I say unto all, Watch.<sup>8</sup>

For example, this is the message of the parable of the man who congratulated himself on the wealth of his harvest, and planned to build new and larger barns in which to store the bounty, only to die that same night, leaving all his riches to be enjoyed by his heir.<sup>9</sup>

### **“I believe in the Holy Ghost....”**

The eighth section of the Creed begins the third paragraph, the one devoted to the Third Person of the Most Holy and Undivided Trinity, which rounds off the Trinitarian format of the Creed. “Ghost” is just an antique English word that means “spirit”. Thus when we talk about “the ghosts of the departed”, we are really just talking about “the spirits of the departed”.

This third paragraph is also the one that deals with the final phases of the Christian dispensation that occur after Christ's personal ministry on Earth, which ended with His Ascension. Shortly thereafter, on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit (Ghost) came upon the Church and, according to Christ's promise, that Spirit will remain with His Church until the end of time, *i.e.*, until His Second Coming<sup>10</sup> and the final Judgement:

If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you. ... But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.<sup>11</sup>

The Nicene Creed, which we recite at Mass,<sup>12</sup> follows the same format as does this Apostles' Creed, but it expands on some of the individual statements. At this point, for example, it says: “I believe in the Holy Ghost, The Lord and Giver of Life....” This addition grows out of that Creed's purpose to describe, not just *who* each Person of the Trinity is, but also something about *what* that Person does in relation to our world and our lives.

Here, it is telling us that the Holy Spirit works by enlivening us, making it possible for us to receive the new life -- sometimes called by the Latinate expression “regeneration”, which merely means “new birth” -- which Christ intends for us and gives us in Baptism: “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”<sup>13</sup>

This expansion on the statements of the shorter Creed is not a conflict between the two statements of faith, for both cover the