

APOCALYPSE NOW: HOW THE LORD COMES
REMEMBERING ISAIAH 2:11-12

A Pre-Advent Morning Retreat

Led by

Dr. Wayne J. Hankey

Carnegie Professor of Classics

Universities of Dalhousie and King's College, Halifax, N.S.

Saturday, December 2, 2006

King's College Chapel

Apocalypse ought to be unthreatening; it is only an uncovering, the disclosure of a mystery, what is hidden. Apparently, however, things are such with us that disclosure, opening up, is cataclysmic. We take these apocalyptic words of Jesus as a threat:

For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known. Therefore whatever you have spoken in the dark will be heard in the light, and what you have spoken in the ear in inner rooms will be proclaimed on the housetops. (Luke 12: 2 &3)

Silence is apocalyptic. My method is suggestive and intended to open questions. Listen, let everything enter: the liturgies and the suggestions and then let them move the spirit in you.

We start with a picture of a leopard on his knees. Visconti's rendition in film of di Lampedusa's *The Leopard* begins and ends with the gigantic and elegant leopard, the Prince of Salina, on his knees; a posture appropriate for a work dominated by comings. Because *The Leopard* contains what is formally called an *Adventus Domini*, the Advent of the Lord, it gives us a beginning for our meditations.

The film and the book open with the Prince kneeling at the head of his whole noble family, with its chaplain and servants, leading their daily recitation of the Rosary. "*Nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.*" are the first words of the novel. They terminate the perpetually repeated petition of the Rosary:

*Hail Mary, Full of Grace, the Lord is with thee;
Blessed art thou among women and Blessed is the fruit of thy womb, Jesus.
Holy Mary, Mother of God, Pray for us sinners
Now and at the hour of our death.*

Here are linked, on the one hand, the Archangelic salutation to Mary when he announces the Advent of the Lord to her and in her and, on the other hand, our prayer for our mother's help when God comes to each of us "at the hour of our death." It is not surprising, then, that, in a masterstroke of cinematic genius, Visconti alters the novel to end *The Leopard* with the Prince kneeling again anticipating his own death and that of his world. This time he is revering the Blessed Sacrament of the Body of Christ and the Sacred Oils of the Last Rites, Extreme Unction, being hurried through the beginnings of dawn in a slum street by a priest on the way to an impoverished deathbed: "*Nunc et in hora mortis nostrae. Amen.*"

Nunc et in hora mortis: our petition is for Mary's assistance in the hour of our death and *Nunc*, now, *Hic et Nunc*, here and now. Our meditations will have three centers:

1. *Adventus Domini*, the Advent of the Lord, which will ask how the Lord comes
2. *Hic et Nunc*, which will ask about the time of his coming or rather how his coming shapes time
3. On our knees, which will inquire into the relation between humility and judgment.

These three elements provide a way of reflecting on the Collect repeated at every service every day during the four weeks of Advent as the darkness deepens in the annual approach of the Winter Solstice. Fashioned in the 16th century for the Anglican liturgy in English from Latin prayers used on the day before Christmas, this piece of spiritual genius is something you will want to keep mentally ready at hand for use during the hours we are spending together:

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, now and ever. Amen.

Let us return to a kneeling leopard.

I *ADVENTUS DOMINI*

As Visconti depicts it, the first prophetic sign of the coming of the Lord of history in judgment on the leopard's world appeared during that particular daily recital of the Rosary. While the noble family was on their knees the corpse of a young soldier was found in the great gardens of the palace. Wounded in a skirmish with rebels he had "come up there to die, all alone, under a lemon tree."¹ His *bora mortis*, hour of death, belonged to an episode of military violence in the late 19th century revolution (tardy by European standards), in Sicily. Then the Sicilian aristocracy and Church, with its grasp and dependence on the land and feudal obligations, lost place to the bourgeoisie and the new market economy where land became a commodity. This was for them what Karl Polanyi called *The Great Transformation: the political and economic origins of our time*.² The story concerns the way in which the Prince and his family suffered and dealt with that revolution. This is not, however, our interest this morning. Rather I want us to attend for a few minutes to representations of the coming of the Lord at the centre of novel in order, by contrast, to get some sense for the differences in how God comes to us *hic et nunc*.

At the heart of the film and the novel what was literally called the *Adventus Domini* is depicted. The Prince and his family arrive for their annual stay at their ancestral seat in Donnafugata. There the vast palace is next door to the Cathedral, and, at the edge of the town, lies the strictly enclosed "Convent of the Holy Ghost" of which the Prince is both patron and Visitor. The advent of the lord to his domain follows a strictly ordained ritual. What is described here is a minor version of advents which would have been repeated

¹ Guiseppe di Lampedusa, *The Leopard* (London: Collins and Harvill, 1960), 14.

² Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation: the political and economic origins of our time* (Rinehart, 1944).

everywhere throughout Christian Europe for more than a millennium. Many medieval, renaissance, and baroque towns were laid out relative to the noble seats on their central heights so as to give effective grandeur to these advents of their Lord “in his glorious Majesty” when he came, so that the stewards might render an account of their stewardship, to judge, and to enjoy his domain. These feudal advents and their settings reproduce in European circumstances royal advents in Israel which have left their liturgical remains in the Psalms (and in Handel’s *Messiah*):

Lift up your heads, O ye gates, and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Who is the King of Glory? it is the Lord strong and mighty, even the Lord mighty in battle. (Psalm 24: 7 & 8)

It is well seen, O God, how thou goest, how thou, my God and King, goest into the sanctuary.

The singers go before, the minstrels follow after, in the midst are the damsels playing with the timbrels:...

There is little Benjamin their ruler, the princes of Judah and their company, the princes of Zebulun, and the princes of Naphtali. (Psalm 68: 21, 22, & 24)

In rural Sicily at the end of the 19th century the tattered remnants of the millennia long tradition is presented to us. When the family arrived in their carriages:

Beyond the short bridge leading into the town were waiting the authorities, surrounded by a few dozen peasants. As the carriages moved on to the bridge the municipal band struck up with frenzied enthusiasm... after this at a warning by some urchin on the look-out the bells of the Mother Church and of the Convent of the Holy Ghost filled the air with festive sound...

According to ancient usage, before they set foot in their home they had to hear a *Te Deum* in the Cathedral...and they moved there [on foot] in procession, the new arrivals dusty but imposing, the authorities gleaming but humble.... All was in order and after a short address by Monsignor Trottolino, they all genuflected to the altar, turned towards the doors and issued into the sun-dazed square. ...

[At] the moment when the Prince crossed the threshold of his own palace, [he found there]...exactly two steps outside the gates [the family’s local steward] flanked by lackeys and eight keepers with golden leopards on their hats: “I am happy to welcome Your Excellencies to your home. And I beg to hand back the palace in the exact state in which it was left to me.”...

Centuries old tradition required that the day following their arrival the Salina family should visit the Convent of the Holy Ghost to pray at the tomb of Blessed Corbèra, forebear of the Prince and foundress of the convent, who had endowed it, there lived a holy life, and there died a holy death. The Convent of the Holy Ghost had a rigid rule of enclosure and entry was severely forbidden to men. That was why the Prince particularly enjoyed visiting it, for he as a descendant of the foundress, was not excluded...this privilege [he] shared only with the King...(The Leopard, 56-81)

It may help us to understand this form of advent to remember that King’s too, like every college in Oxford and Cambridge, and hundreds of like institutions, has a Visitor—in our case the Bishop of Nova Scotia. In him or her (the Queen is Visitor to some communities) is vested the last appeal, the person who can enter everywhere, throw a light

on every dark secret, strip naked every abuse and fraud. The Leopard has lost his fangs and claws; the Visitation is now only a privilege of which he was “both jealous and childishly proud.” (*The Leopard*, 81) His work as lord has disappeared, so now must he:

The wealth of centuries had been transmuted into ornament, luxury, pleasure; no more; the abolition of feudal rights had swept away duties as well as privileges; wealth, like an old wine, had let the dregs of greed, even of care, and prudence fall to the bottom of the barrel, leaving only verve and color. And thus, eventually it cancelled itself out... (*The Leopard*, 33)

The essence evaporated and only enough remained to remind us of a past form in which much of Christendom experienced the Lord coming to them with divine authority. Perhaps the last remnant of that form of advent left to us now is the liturgical procession in the Western church. In it the priest, the *alter Christus*, another Christ, ascends to the altar through the midst of the ranked people of God to effect an advent in word and in bread and wine of the Lord come in blessing and judgment.

My aim in asking you to reflect upon these past forms and leftovers of advent and visitation is not a nostalgic one. The apocalyptic advent now befalling us is a situation too serious for longing for lost causes. I seek to bring before us the connection between universal and particular so that we can form a question about our time, so that we may see how the Lord comes to us now.

The God whom we worship and expect came to be when the particular, exclusive, and unspeakable worship of Israel became “the Lord, a great God, and a great King above all gods” (Psalm 95: 3), as the Psalm we recite daily at Matins puts it. The Persians played a crucial role in this transformation. Inspired by their religion to be the most tolerant and life nurturing of imperialists, they allowed the Jews to return from their exile in Babylon to Judea. In addition, their king Cyrus, whom Isaiah calls the Anointed of the Lord (Isaiah 45: 1) provided for the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem and endowed its worship so that as Cyrus wrote (according to Ezra 6:10): “the priests... may offer sacrifices of sweet savour to the God of heaven, and pray for the life of the king, and of his sons.” Thus, both the Persians and the Jews called what was worshipped in Jerusalem “the God of Heaven, ...the title of Ahuramazda,” the Persian deity.³ Having conceded that their God was the god of the high heaven, like Ahuramazda, Zeus, and Jupiter—just to make a beginning—the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob came to possess as his due the worship, the dominion, and the names which all nations in various ways attribute to the highest. He became the God of all. To him belonged as St Paul famously preached in Athens what is worshipped as known and as unknown (Acts 17:23). Translated into Greek the ineffable worship of Israel became *Kyrios*, the Lord, and the Latins received him as *Dominus*. As Handel makes us sing in this season, His advent is then as the King of kings and Lord of lords, “Wonderful, Counsellor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

His advent was, is, and always shall be as the universal Lord, but also, and therefore, by an inescapable turn of the screw, known and experienced, unknown and missed in the particular order of our world. St Paul commands:

³ Elias Bickerman, *From Ezra to the Last of the Maccabees, Foundations of Post-Biblical Judaism*, translated by Moses Hadas (New York, Schocken Books, 1962) 16,

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God: and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation....Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. (Romans 13: 1-7).

The Prince of Salina enacts a faded shadow of an old *Adventus Domini* and “some urchin on the look-out” became his John the Baptist to the bell ringers of the Cathedral and Convent. What is the shape of the Lord’s coming to us *hic et nunc*, here and now? And who are his prophets? The messengers sent to prepare his way before him, who are the ministers and stewards of his mysteries, of his hiddenness among us?

II

HIC ET NUNC

Advent shapes Christian time, being essential both to its circular and its rectilinear motions. The annual cycle ends and begins *Hic et Nunc*. Today, Saturday, is the last day of the last week of the year, it is the last day before Advent. Tomorrow morning, Advent Sunday, inaugurates a new year. Advent Sunday is not only, like every Sunday, the first day of the week because it is the day of resurrection, recreated life, this Sunday is the first day of a new year. It is a new year’s day. End joins beginning, and the great articulated circle of fast and feast, of penitence and forgiveness, of death and new life, of longing hunger and filled satiety turns again on its eternal axis.

Equally Advent inserts us into movement in a straight line with a beginning, a middle, and an end. The Lord has come in great humility, is now hidden in our midst demanding our discernment, and in the last day, he shall come again in Majesty and judgment for the living and the dead.

This two-fold structuring of time is for the sake of what Augustine calls the one thing of moment: the will. The liturgy of these days and of this season centers on one great problem, one great question: the problem of desire, the question of will. How can we be moved?

Advent raises and deals with desire and will in many subtle ways. Let me direct your attention to the most obvious. Today’s collect of course puts it straight before us. It prays: “Stir up,...O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people,” move them to good works. The collect does not stand alone: it belongs to a lesson from the prophet Jeremiah showing God moving his people out of exile to their homeland. The odyssey of desire shall not be frustrated. The Gospel asks “What seek ye?” and announces the finding of the one sought, the desire of all nations is come:

This is he, whom seer and sibyl
Sang in ages long gone by;
This is he of old revealed
In the page of prophesy;
Lo! He comes the long expected;
Let the world his praises cry!
Evermore and evermore.

Tomorrow's collect places us in the midst of a shaped beginning, middle, and end. The epistle storms into our bedrooms shouting urgently: it is high time to wake out of sleep, the day is at hand, awake to become a lover. "Owe no man anything but to love one another." (Romans 13:8) Love! In the Gospel Jesus on the move enters Jerusalem for the last time in humility, "Meek upon an ass" for those who would receive him, and comes in judgment on the temple of God casting out all them that sold and bought:

Wake, O wake! With tidings thrilling
The Watchmen all the air are filling,
Arise, Jerusalem arise!
Midnight strikes! No more delaying,
"The hour has come!" we hear them saying,
Where are ye all, ye virgins wise?
The Bridegroom comes in sight...

The last collect of the season responds to the proclamation of the forerunner, John the Baptist, and the epistle's announcement that "the Lord is at hand" and indeed in our midst. It prays that the Lord will raise up his power, overcoming what stops and hinders us, so that we can run the race set before us. The salvific structure of time is for awakening desire, moving the will, freeing love. It is in this context that the nature of our *hic et nunc*, our here and now, to which the Lord comes makes itself plain.

I spoke at the start of this meditation about the week, our Christian ordering of the seven days in which God worked and then rested from all he had done, and how we restructured it to emphasise its start rather than its end. The day "Thou shalt keep holy" we moved from the Sabbath of rest to the Sunday of the new beginning. Within the last months Nova Scotia, against the expressed will of its people, under the pressure of the market economy, abolished that structuring of our world. This abolition of the shape and purposefulness of our common time was undertaken for the sake of desire: appetite could be more conveniently satisfied every day, no waiting or postponement would be required, the ever-created new desires would be delayed no further than the time the drive to the store takes. Desire ever finding new objects will expand without even the tiny limits which a Sunday rest provided, the economy as a whole will grow ceaselessly, and the means of human happiness will expand. Such is the new account of the connection of time and desire: desire depends not on the structuring of time but on its homogeneity, every time is equally a place for the same: the endless expansion and filling of appetite. My daily experience manifests an identical logic in respect to seasons.

I am compelled to enter the apartment building in which I live by the service entrance or the backstairs. If I enter through the main entrance and lobby, I must pass through the perpetual party. At present and for the last ten days we have had full scale Christmas in place: a vast & artificial lighted tree, nuts & three feet high top-hatted nutcrackers, electrified candles & bowls of candy everywhere, as well as more plastic formed into Santa Clauses, Red nosed reindeer, wreaths and all the other seasonal rubbish, than my most pornographic imagination can fashion. This kit succeeded the Halloween gear, which replaced the Thanksgiving plastic turkeys in the hay, and other evidence of our hearty thanks to the creator and sustainer of Styrofoam. Santa Claus will give way only to New Year's happy crepe and plastic champagne glasses, and then we are well on the way to the cute cherubs and slain hearts of Valentine's, and the bunnies in chocolate and their eggs in blue and pink sugar which make our Easter.

It goes without saying that the content of every one of these observances has disappeared: who among those disguised as Halloween ghosts is on their knees on All Souls' praying for the souls who have not found rest and joy? Who of those devoting six weeks to Christmas cheer and an at least slightly inebriated chummy "peace on earth good will to men" could fathom why the Church sets this Psalm for Christmas Day:

The Lord said unto my Lord,
Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.
The Lord shall send the rod of thy power out of Sion;
be thou ruler, even in the midst of thine enemies. (Psalm 110: 1&2)

And what of eros, desire, love? Let me return one last time to *The Leopard*. In it those who held power and wealth in the old world salvage these by marriage to those who have grabbed wealth in the new money economy unbound by the old obligations and constraints. The couple who symbolise this victory by which everything changes so that everything can remain what it is—i.e. we keep money and power by letting a few more in—enjoy the discovery of their love while still restrained within the boundaries set by life in the palace at Donnafugata:

When they were old and uselessly wise their thoughts would go back to those days with insistent regret; they had been days when desire was always present because always overcome, when many beds had been offered and refused, when the sensual urge, because restrained, had for one second been sublimated in renunciation, that is into real love.⁴

In our perpetual party there is never any fast, never any desire intensified by unsatisfied longing, and will has disappeared in the endless succession of equally false symbols and shallow pleasures. In our society Ramadan is as inconceivable as nuns veiled in the way many Moslem women still are; yet I can still remember such nuns as well as Advent and Lent as social seasons, noiseless Good Fridays in which it seemed all were struck silent before the awful work of redemption. Above all what we need now is *need*, what we lack is *lack*: quiet which no cell phone can interrupt, dark which has blacked out the banal glare of the city, cold, hunger, solitude, emptiness, desolation of the cross, longing for the coming of justice, desire for the good. In these is the *Adventus Domini* in our *hic et nunc*.

What does our perpetual party in this shapeless time serve? Inwardness, reflection, the concentration, the conditions of freedom, are prevented so that we serve banal consumption and the endless repetition of the same under the name of difference. Boredom at the roots pretends joy. As Canada's great Christian philosopher George Grant writes in *Time as History*, his terrifying study of how this all came to be: "The last men simply use the fruits of technique for the bored pursuit of their trivial vision of happiness."⁵ As for what underlies the surface triviality, he wrote:

In the conceptions of history now prevalent among those 'creative' men who plan the mastery of the planet, changing the world becomes ever more an end in itself. It is undertaken less simply to overcome the natural accidents which frustrate our

⁴ di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, 151.

⁵ George Grant, *Time as History* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1969), 35.

humanity and more and more for the sheer sake of the ‘creation’ of novelty. This movement inevitably grows among the resolute as the remnants of any belief in a lovable actuality disappear. We will, not so much for some end beyond will, but for the sake of the willing itself. In this sense, the challenge of the will is endless to the resolute, because there is always more ‘creation’ to be carried out. Our freedom can even start to make over our own species.⁶

We have contemplated what the vulgarisation of novelty as distraction means for ourselves; we are witnesses to our own disintegration as loving and knowing beings seeking union with the true and the good, and we have considered what the coming of the Lord must be for that condition, what judgment upon it must be. But there are other costs of the perpetual party. One is the very structure of the economic system it serves. The working of the remorseless machine increasingly widens the gap between rich and poor both at home and globally. Apocalypse now comes in the fact that this system, because it is idealised as a self-regulating machine detached from nature as well as from human and divine ends, is destroying the conditions of life everywhere—although first of course among the poor. The disappearance of love of the actual, and of the contemplative disciplines and practical virtues of that love, bring on our apocalypse in the destruction of nature both outside us and within. How does the Lord come to this? Or better, what Lord comes here and now to this? And who are his prophets?

Clearly the *Adventus Domini* is not now the coming of the Prince of Salina: that gathering of the world natural, religious, social, and political in the knowledge and will of the divinely authorised ruler directing all to a supernatural end is past for us. The monarchy is only a fragment by which we remember what is gone. The same applies to the conception of the church as moulding the human community into the form of the divinely ordered cosmos, as effecting by its prayer the communion of earth and heaven. For what rules us Jesus is permitted only as and is exalted as *my personal* saviour; the church is relegated to the margins, to the care of those who the unquestioning system systematically destroys.

Still there are prophets of the Lord and they are close at hand and, just as in Israel, they are not found in the temple priesthood. In our churches here those who claim for themselves the title of prophet are usually busy pushing the implications of market economics to their last extremes—or resisting these implications while promoting the system. It was a Dalhousie professor of Oceanography who became *Jeremiah redivivus* recently when he showed us the oceans as poisoned deserts and polluted rubbish heaps in forty years—just as the Lord of Clearwater replayed the role of the Kings of Israel who refused to hear the Word of the Lord declared by his prophet. At this College we have a prophetic series on trust in science. It is designed to destroy our worst hope—the dominating one—the fantasy of a technological fix enabling us to continue the perpetual party which destroys soul, mind, body, and world, erecting a permanent blasphemy against everything holy on earth and in heaven. I could detail a long list of prophetic utterances pointing to the Lord who is coming and how he shall come. You do not need my list because you are already attentive to these prophets.

I conclude this meditation by disclosing the Lord who must come now in a way only the Church can do. The Lord coming in apocalyptic judgment is covered over in the sentimentality of this season. He is the Lord the Church proclaimed before St Francis of Assisi made mangers, cribs and cattle dominate the Christmas scene. He is the Lord, not of

⁶ Ibid., 19.

the candlelight drunkenness of the midnight carol service, but of the Gospel of Christmas Day:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.... All things were made by him ... In him was life and the life was the light of men...And the Word became flesh and dealt among us. (*John* 1)

The Lord coming to us and at us now is the cosmic Word. He is the divine Light which brings forth light and life, who sustains all life, and guides all life. By his light he draws our darkness and chaos into the order and purpose Providence ordains for each and for the whole. Our coming Lord holds in his hand the eternal blueprint, the forms, species, and ideas conceived in him as the “manifold wisdom” and “eternal purpose” of God (*Ephesians* 3.10-11). He comes to bring justice on the earth. His rod is in his hand:

The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool. The Lord shall send the rod of thy power out of Sion; be thou ruler, even in the midst of thine enemies. (Psalm 110: 1&2)

III IN GREAT HUMILITY

Apocalypse, the uncovering or the disclosure of a mystery, what is hidden, confronts us in several forms. We referred to the first at the beginning of these talks:

There was a faint tinkle and round the corner appeared a priest bearing a ciborium with the Blessed Sacrament; behind, a young acolyte held over him a white canopy embroidered in gold; in front another bore a big lighted candle in his left hand and in his right a little silver bell which he was shaking with obvious enjoyment. There were the Last Sacraments; in one of those barred houses someone was in a death agony. Don Fabrizio ...knelt on the pavement...⁷

The divinity is present hidden in the sacrament as mystery, as effective sign of grace. The apocalypse is by faith. As St Thomas Aquinas puts it and we sing: “Faith our outward sense befriending makes the inward vision clear.” Humility, reverence, even in the Prince, is the response. The leopard knelt on the pavement.

The original uncovering, apocalypse, of mystery in the Church was by disclosing the hidden and true second or spiritual meanings of texts. As C.S. Lewis points out, we read Scripture this way because we are committed to it by our Lord Himself. Psalm 110 is set by the *Book of Common Prayer* for Evensong on Christmas Day (and by the Roman liturgy of the hours as a canticle for Vespers throughout the year):

The Lord said unto my Lord,
Sit thou on my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool.
The Lord shall send the rod of thy power out of Sion;
be thou ruler, even in the midst of thine enemies.
Thy people shall offer themselves willingly in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.

⁷ di Lampedusa, *The Leopard*, 198.

The LORD sware, and will not repent, Thou art a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

The Lord at thy right hand shall smite even kings in the day of his wrath.

He shall judge among the nations, he shall fill them with the bodies of the slain; he shall smite the heads over many countries.

He shall drink of the brook in the way: therefore shall he lift up the head.

Our Lord read this Psalm spiritually. As Lewis puts it:

When He asked (Mark 12, 35-36) how Christ could be both David's son and David's lord, He clearly identified Christ and therefore Himself, with the "my Lord" of Psalm 110, he was in fact hinting at the mystery of the Incarnation by pointing out a difficulty which only it could solve.⁸... The Psalm seems to have been originally either a coronation ode for a new king, promising conquest and empire, or a poem addressed to some king on the eve of a war, promising victory. It is full of treats. The rod of the king's power is to go forth from Jerusalem, foreign kings are to be wounded, battlefields to be covered with carnage, skulls cracked. The note is not "Peace and goodwill" but "Beware. He's coming." Two things attach it to Christ...The first is that He Himself did so. He is the lord whom David calls my lord. The second is the reference to Melchizedek...the priest-king [who because he has no lineage seemed to the authors of Scripture to have neither beginning nor end and thus is the anticipation of the eternal priest-king, Christ.]...For those who first read these Psalms as poems about the birth of Christ, that birth primarily meant something very militant; the hero, the "judge" or champion or giant-killer, who was to fight and beat death, hell and the devils, had at last arrived, and the evidence suggests that Our Lord also thought of himself in those terms....[T]he Psalm restores Christmas to its proper complexity. The birth of Christ is the arrival of the great warrior and the great king. Also of the Lover, the Bridegroom, whose beauty surpasses that of man. But not only the Bridegroom as the lover, the desired; the Bridegroom also as he who makes fruitful, the father of children still to be begotten and born. (102-109)

Having made some negative suggestions about the Franciscans' role in the development of our Western Christianity because of their contribution to crib sentimentality, I want now to put the other side. In the beginning, and still in the East, what the Church celebrated in the Christmas season was not so much the mystery, what was hidden, the coming of God here and now in this child, that God was one with the human here and now. Rather the old Church celebrated the apocalypse, the disclosure of God in this man, in short, it rejoiced in the epiphany, the manifestation, of God. The Church rejoiced in the disclosure, the uncovering, the apocalypse, when this child was worshipped by the Magi, and, above all, when God the Trinity was disclosed as the Son ascended out of the waters of John's baptism (the heavens opened, the Spirit like a dove descending upon him, and a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased [Mark 1 modified]), and when the child showed himself amazingly wise among the doctors of the law in the Temple. The Franciscan devotion was in contrast to the mystery of the Incarnation. Franciscans rejoiced in the God-child of the crèche, the hidden glory of Divine Son born among cattle in a

⁸ C.S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (Collins, 1967), 99.

broken down stable. They adored God in the least of these my brethren. St Francis founded the little brothers, the little in the service of the least of these my brothers. Embracing a leper was one of the inaugural acts of his ministry.

The mystery is not only the incarnation of God in Jesus Christ, but the existence of Christ as the least of his brothers. Apocalypse is the disclosure that in our dealings with them we are encountering, serving, or rejecting the God-man. With this in mind I want to approach the apocalyptic Advent of the Lord *hic et nunc* in judgment on our consumerist destruction of self, community, and nature from the side of community, from our Lord's coming in the other.

I was helped to see this recently by Elizabeth May who not only knows about and acts for the environment but is also a budding theologian (and a former member of the congregation of this Chapel). In a talk at Acadia University she spoke about community rather than nature because, as she showed us, the good and just form of the first is necessary for justice in respect to the second. The BBC demonstrated the connection in a very troubling way last month, in a story about fishermen on the coast of Senegal. Certainly for hundreds, probably for thousands of years, the inhabitants of that coast have been able to make a living for their families there. Now they are drowning in large numbers as they try to use their dilapidated boats to get to Europe via Spain. They are forced into the deadly flight for work because Spanish and other foreign fishing fleets are so plundering their traditional waters that they cannot draw a livelihood from them. Justice, community, and the integrity of the environment go together.

Our Lord described how apocalypse working here happens as Matthew 25:31 and following records:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: **For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.** Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? **And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.**

The apocalypse is the discovery of fact that those who serve the least serve the Lord himself. The reward to those who serve our Lord come now in the time of this mortal life, in which he visits us in great humility, is to rise to the life immortal. For those who reject his coming in their fellow men, the apocalypse of the hidden presence is calamity, catastrophe:

Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye

took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, **Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me.** And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.

We saw the Lord come as a lord, the *Adventus Domini* of the Leopard and all his predecessors. We also saw the Leopard Lord kneel to pray and adore Christ in the sacramental mystery. These two belong together in that reiteration of Christ's coming, in that form of his Advent. Does he now come as a leper? As the least of these my brothers? In Canada we were given a striking and public prophetic sign that this is essential to the institutional form of his coming among us now. In 1953 Émile Leger reiterated an old form of the *Adventus Domini* when he arrived at Montréal coming back from Rome as a Cardinal, announcing himself: "Montréal receives her Prince." The theocratic Church was dethroned during the 1960s and in 1967 the Cardinal Prince resigned to serve lepers in Africa. Is this the new archetype of Advent? This is the compelling question.

Our urgent need is to uncover and reiterate in contemplation and imitative deed the mode of the union of God and man *hic et nunc*, here and now. Everything depends on this. When we work by prayer, reflection, and deed towards this apocalypse, this uncovering, we must always remember that our Lord's coming in humility is also a coming in strength and judgment. The child and the warrior king are no more to be separated than are the crucified and the *Pantokrator*, the almighty creator. For our religion, God the Son, the eternal Word, the Almighty who is also the crucified, performs all the acts of creation. His unity of divinity and humanity, the eternal Word born and obedient in great humility, the conquest of sin in and through death, make the Lord, the *Pantokrator*, the Almighty.⁹ Can it be that we must retain something of the form the Leopard instantiated in the new? Certainly we must resist an Advent confined to Jesus as *my personal* saviour and to a Church permitted to serve him in those the world destroys only so long as it leaves the governing system of the world unjudged. "Be not conformed to this world." (Romans 12:2) "The Prince of this world *is* judged!" (John 16:11) So far as even the leopard himself knew this he knelt on the pavement. We in our time, *hic et nunc*, must find and enact our Lord's coming in the just order of our souls, in our relations to one another and also the other creatures of our God and King.

Let us pray for the gifts of discernment and worship, for the grace to act in accord with what we know truly and love rightly. Let us place these petitions within our daily prayer in this season:

Almighty God, give us grace that we may cast away the works of darkness, and put upon us the armour of light, now in the time of this mortal life, in which thy Son Jesus Christ came to visit us in great humility; so that in the last day, when he shall come again in his glorious Majesty, to judge both the quick and the dead, we may rise to the life immortal; through him who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Spirit, now and ever. Amen.

⁹ See my *Pantokrator, the Cosmic Christ: A Christian Theology of Nature* (Charlottetown, Prince Edward, Island: St. Peter Publications, 2005).