



## Introduction

*“You don’t really believe that s\*#t? Do you?”*

Several months ago I sat down with a neighbor I had just met. We talked over a cup of coffee and it turned out that we had a fair amount in common. We were both retired teachers; he had been a social studies teacher and I had been a science teacher. We spent some time sharing funning stories about our classroom experiences and the problems with public education. We talked a bit about politics, but somehow the topic turned to religion. It turned out that he was a committed atheist and was perplexed that I, a science teacher, could be religious. Did I really believe in the virgin birth, walking on water, the resurrection? Yes, I replied. He was aghast. We were discussing the nature of faith, how we come to know, and criteria of truth when suddenly he stopped as though he himself had a revelation of sorts.

“Do you believe in the Second Coming?—you know, Jesus returning.”

“I do,” I replied, matter-of-factly.

“No,” he said, emphatically shaking his head in disbelief. “You don’t really believe that s\*#t, do you? Why?”

“He said He would,” I replied, with a composure that frankly surprised me.

Later, when I was reflecting on this conversation, I wondered why it was easier for my “new friend” to accept that I could believe the virgin birth, miracles, and the resurrection, but that the Second Coming was simply too fantastical. It came to me that Western Civilization and Christianity has lived, grown, and learned from each other for the past two thousand years. The stories of the Bible, particularly the New Testament, are integrated into the very fabric of society and culture of the West including its literature, art, music, and seasonal celebrations. Most of the agnostic and atheist I know still enjoy listening to holiday music, decorate a Christmas tree, and enjoy Easter egg hunts with their children. I understand that these Christian feasts have been secularized and are little more than shadows of the realities from which they originated. Yet, they are still part of our cultural psyche like a mutually shared mythology. For many secularists, Christianity is at best nothing more than set of moral guidelines like, “Do unto others as you would have others do unto you,” wrapped in an unbelievable mythology that a modern, educated individual has no business taking seriously. The authors of the New Testament were a simpler, superstitious people who are no more credible than those who wrote the mythologies of the Olympian gods. To suggest that “mythological” character of Jesus is going to return to our modern world is as absurd to the secular mind as for a solar astronomer to peer into his telescope and suddenly see Helios ridding his fiery chariot across the sky.

The modern secular way of thinking has crept into the Church affecting both clergy and laity alike. Unless you are a member of an Evangelical or Pentecostal church you may not have had any serious teaching on the subject of eschatology, the study of the “end time.” Now you might be wondering why I’m bring this up given that these essays are about the Bride, so here’s the answer, unless you don’t recognize that Jesus is our Bridegroom, that He is coming back for His Bride, then you will not appreciate that your destiny and the destiny of the Church is to be His eternal Bride and understanding this reality is what these essays are about. It is for this reason that you and I were created. And when you realize this, what the Bridegroom has in store for His Bride, you will love Him even more and it will put this life with all of its blessings and trials, joys and sufferings into their proper perspective.

What I will be suggesting in these essays is that if we are not eagerly anticipating the return of the Lord then we have lost our first love (Rev 2:4). Why is this? Because the Church is not an institution it is a Bride and a bride who is not eagerly awaiting the arrival of her bridegroom is bride who has allowed her love to wax cold (Matt 24:12). This is the hope of our calling. It is not to be good, respectable followers of Christ. It is not to unite ourselves in an institutional church so that we

can better leverage our influence in the political arena. It is not even to eliminate poverty, injustice, and despair in the earth. It is to become united by the Holy Spirit into the Bride without spot or wrinkle, conformed into the image of the Bridegroom, and to be mysteriously united with Him in the Trinity by partaking in the divine nature (2Pet 1:4).

Now for a disclosure:

It is inevitable that some of what you'll find in these essays will be new to you, some controversial and may be even disagreeable to you. For example, when I speak of the Church as the Bride you may ask yourself, "Which church is he speaking about—The Catholic Church? The Orthodox Church? Some Protestant denomination? Yes. That right there will be controversial, but let me say right from the start, the Church will not be some amalgamated jumbled up syncretic Christianity formulated by a group of ecumenically minded wishy-washy theologians and clergy. Nope, all the king's horses and all the king's men are not going to be putting this Humpty Dumpty back together again; this is going to be the work of the Holy Spirit and I have no clue how He will pull this off, but He will. The other thing that I must disclose is that I have, at various times in my life, been a member of each of those three groups I listed above, and I have been blessed by the learning and experiences that I have had in all three. But, God places us in the Body as it pleases Him so I find myself in the Catholic Church, and I love Her although I am grieved by what is going on in the Church, but that is story for another time.



**Icon of the Parable of the Ten Virgins  
Matthew 25:1-13**