

tells His disciples that they will do more and greater than He does. So, one must conclude about these events that their only extraordinariness is our own extraordinarily tender blood for believing their existance.

ONE SALIENT CIRCUMSTANCE

Over only three things of the "miraculous" sort do we need to pause to reflect upon their significance for the problem at hand: namely, Christian and Islamic statements regarding the Nature of Jesus. These three things are omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence, three attributes which, rightly, are regarded as belonging to the Godhead alone. About these attributes as they pertain to Jesus of Nazareth the Bible is of a double mind and tongue. In the Synoptic Gospels, none of these attributes is attributed to Jesus as from His Birth. He is presented as possessing decidedly divine powers, but not absolute omnipotence. He is shown knowing events and thoughts in advance but not having absolute omniscience.

Omnipresence is an attribute the Synoptics attribute to Him only after His Ascension. By contrast, the Pauline and Johannine literature -- followed in extenso by the Creedal Conventions -- portrays Him as having these attributes from before birth but, prior to birth, emptying Himself of the bulk or weight of them so as to enter this transitory life with a mere fraction of the Glory which He is and has by right as One Person of the Godhead.

These two views of the attributes of omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence as they pertain to Jesus are not necessarily contradictory, although they may appear so. They are, in fact, a fairly precise foretaste of the sort of intellectual dissonance that will obtain between Christians and Moslems regarding this fellow, Jesus. But what we need to observe here is that both views can -- shall we say, rather, do! -- subsist in the same Bible because one is concerned to describe His Nature during His Heavenly Career (John and Paul) and the other to describe His Nature during His earthly Career (Synoptics), although the Pauline and Johannine literature also describes His Nature during His earthly Career. So, we have the familiar picture of the Godhead electing to divest Itself (Kenosis) of the greater part of Its Glory for the purpose of descending to show men how they should live, that is, in love. Presumably, were the Godhead to descend in Its Full Glory, especially as Personified, men could not relate to It easily, if at all, and so would be unable to learn from Its Example, to be edified unto Salvation. The mainstream of the Christian tradition did not have a lot of trouble perceiving the Divine Drama in these terms and so remarked its main outlines in the great Creedal Statements.

But the witness of the Synoptics regarding omnipotence, omniscience and omnipresence and Jesus has intrigued scholars for many years. These Gospels are so close to what we can recognize as daily human existence, even when rendered heuristically, that one gets to thinking that there may be a few fictile facts in the fact that in the Synoptics Jesus very definitely does not have these attributes in full measure. And when He Himself goes to speaking as if what fraction of them He does have is, really, given to Him by the Father, the idea becomes very persistent that perhaps in

His earthly Career this fellow is very much akin to a number of other great spiritual teachers and practitioners who, also, had and exhibited numerous divine powers but not those three fundamental attributes of divinity. In other words, one starts to wonder whether the Synoptics might actually present a truer picture of His earthly Career than John and Paul do. Or, if not truer, then, at least, less inductively arrived at -- or, what some would say, less speculative -- or, what others might say, less heuristic.

For example, did Jesus know He was the Messiah? From birth? From mid-Career? Ever? Certainly the Synoptic Evangelists know that He is. But the textual evidence leaves room for considering that he did not, at least not from birth. Certainly by the time He opens His ministry He knows Himself as the Messiah, although His declarations of the fact are elliptical in the extreme. What about His earlier years? Did He know Himself as the Messiah then? The textual evidence will not support that He did or that He did not. The scene with the lawyers in the Temple, which marks the beginning of the great lacuna in the chronicle of His life, could be carried off by any precocious prophet in formulation. Samuel, as a youngster, was no less brainy or profound.

What is clear is that the textual evidence does permit, although it does not directly support, the premise that Jesus did not know He was the Messiah until sometime after His twelfth year. On first appearance, the evidence also permits, a silencio, but does not support, the premise that He did know Himself as the Messiah from birth or before that event. I will show, however, that upon closer examination, the evidence does not

even permit this premise. That the mysterious visitors from the East knew Him as the Messiah -- from before His birth, incidentally! -- is witness enough to His implicit importance in world history, but it does not obviate the possibility that He Himself does not know Himself as the Messiah until later years, perhaps not even until just prior to the start of His ministry.

These sorts of thoughts may be regarded as most reprehensible speculation by many scholars of the New Testament. But once again, as before, when the train of my thought appeared speculative, I have to point out a salient circumstance -- one which is too little recognized but of fundamental importance -- before I am asked to volunteer as the pidgeon for an academic firing squad -- presumably one whose proud escutcheon is brazened with the word, Veritas. This circumstance revokes irrevocably all permission we might presume to have for believing that Jesus knew Himself as the Messiah from birth or before.

The circumstance I refer to is the same one which perplexed the German scholars many years ago and which has still not been adequately explained. It is the heart and soul of the quest for the historical Jesus. It is the cornerstone of this little essay and will be the irrefragable center-piece of Christian Theology henceforth, as long as Time shall last. It is that Jesus refers to Himself during His ministry, that is, at the end of His life, in three different ways: as a Messenger of God, as the Son of God and as identical with the Father. Were these appellations all of one logical type, as calling a chair a stool or a bench, there would be no issue. But it is an unassailable fact that these three appellations are of three different logical types and mean three quite different things. In

addition, they fit together as expressing a progressive deepening and nearing of affiliation with the Godhead.

A Messenger of a King can be anyone duly deputed to bear a message from Him. Usually it is a courtier, outside the King's own family. A Messenger, therefore, while important because he is on royal business, is not very close to the King personally. A Son of the King, however, is very close to Him, a member of His own loins and family, in fact. Such a one comes and goes with the King almost at will, certainly without having to conform to the ordinary rubrics of courtly life that invest all those outside the King's immediate, personal family. But, a Son is still in some sense distinct from the King, separate from Him. He is tied closely to Him but he is not the same Person as the King and so does not hold His authority or responsibility. Again, a Son does not experience and react exactly as the King, his Father, does. However, when one goes claiming essential and absolute identity with the King -- Jesus' final self-affirmation -- one has said that no least distinctions or differences or separations remain, and a person making such a statement has to be taken as madness itself or as having some experience which is, to say the least, atypical of the common run of humanity.

The point we are making here is that it is permitted us to suppose that Jesus does not understand Himself as the Messiah at least until some time after His twelfth year, and I am saying that, before some academic guardians get the idea that this is not more than fanciful speculation and I not more than a hair-brained lunatic, I shall insist that these guardians explain to all and sundry exactly why it is that Jesus refers

to Himself with three profoundly different appellations. For if, as is undeniable, in His last years He is seen to be using self-appellations which differ fundamentally in logical type and which show stages of His (ours too?) experience in nearing God, it is not at all unreasonable, and may actually be imperative, to surmise that He, at some time earlier in life, did not even feel Himself as a Messenger of God but as, perhaps, just common humanity casting about (sound familiar?), and that, therefore, He did most assuredly not know or experience or feel or understand Himself as the Messiah at least until He experienced Himself as the Messenger, namely, late in life -- and a very brief life at that. This thought, in turn, suggests strongly that even His self-realization as the Messiah grew gradually and deepened and broadened in the fulness of time rather than falling on Him at once in whole cloth.

In other words, I am saying that Jesus was an aspirant, very much like you and me, but a little better motivated and, in the event, specially deputed for a specific task -- that of fulfilling the Law and the Prophets, or, what we may say, revitalizing, reinvigorating, reestablishing the ancient religion of Hebraism. But, He did not know this at first or even fully at once. He was very much a man, like you and I, who grew in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. He was an aspirant who realized the Goal of every aspirant: "I and my Father are One." In particular, He was a Great One among many such personages God has sent from time to time to reignite a genuine spiritual thirst and yearning in men, to re-mark and clear off the path of love which gets overgrown with the thistles and brambles of hate and envy. Jesus is one among many such who have come to reestablish, as Calvin would say, true religion. And the fact of this

Mission dawned in Him gradually, along with His developing experience of nearness to the Godhead -- even though God the Father had ordained Him as Messiah from before birth. The sense of Mission in life and the developing religious experience of every man come about just this gradually, in stages. For Jesus it was no different than for any other man.

We are admittedly here speaking of probabilities, but I believe the evidence is sufficiently strong to regard these probabilities as facts. A virtue of our construction is that it handles smartly the fundamental suspicion of modern scholarship that this fellow, Jesus of Nazareth, does not, at least as related in the Synoptic Gospels, exhibit the qualities of omniscience, omnipotence and omnipresence. This construction also leaves room for believing -- what is also suspected -- that Jesus is not a self-conscious Messiah from birth. Although it is unusual for anyone to suggest that Jesus underwent the stages of spiritual development that any other aspirant must undergo, and although such an opinion of His life will probably be construed with extreme prejudice by the academic guild of Biblical scholars, this construction is the only one known to me that makes any sense or reason out of the profoundly different appellations He uses for His own Person. Furthermore, it is what Jews and Moslems have been saying all along.

We may remark in passing how fortunate we are that the text contains these three different appellations. This fact alone would suggest that the Synoptic Evangelists are not systematic theologians of our modern type, wanting one level of logic throughout their work, but have stuck pretty much to the historical record as handed to them. This record, called

Q Source (Q is for the German Quelle, meaning, "source") or the Proto-Evangelical material, contained these three different appellations which the Evangelists faithfully reproduced. Actually, Jesus' final self-realization, identity with the Father, is contained ^(most obviously) in the Fourth Gospel, but it is the sense of Luke 24:51.

In any case, I do not think any possible combination of academic firing squad can construct a life of Jesus that better quietens the traditional suspicions of scholars regarding the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth than this one does. If, therefore, anyone remains who wants to pull the trigger regardless, other motivations than intelligent ones must be ascribed to them for entertaining this urge. Furthermore, I am sure that this construction is true. So I shall treat it as a fact.

This construction has the serendipitous property of depicting Jesus in a context of world-wide spiritual questing. It opens the aperture of our lens, which has heretofore yielded us tunnel-vision of Him, if not an opaque miasma, and allows us to see Him as one among many, many great spiritual teachers and cynosures -- miracles, cloven hoofs and all. While some may feel that this construction fades their picture of Him beyond recognition, I feel just the opposite. By viewing Him in world-wide, affirmative context, we see Him shoulder-to-shoulder, bearing the burden, repeating the injunction that has to be brought again and again to the attention of slothful mortals by countless spiritual guides: "Repent and believe the Gospel;" "Awake, arise, throw off slumber and hurry out to meet the Bridegroom." That is, turn around from clutching the world and have faith that by clutching God you will have happiness and peace. For me,

to see Jesus in context of all God's deputed leaders and guides makes Him the more vivid and historically precise because we know that this sort of Person happens frequently. He is no longer just the abstracted Christ of the Creeds but the working, living, serving Christ of a religious renaissance. And it should not be necessary to mention that that renaissance, not the Creeds, is the only thing that will account for the history that has emerged from His curt Career. Ideas do not so move men as other men do. And therein lies His genuine historicity -- a man, a teacher ("Rabboni"), a leader, a guide, a Model, a Spur -- one among many, in fact.

Finally, this construction gives some substance to our generally, if vaguely, felt perception that Jesus has somewhat expanded the traditional concept of the Messiah. Not only did He expand His contemporaries' view of the Messiah as Warlord -- a view held as much at Qumran as elsewhere, and as wrongly -- but He has also expanded the Prophetic teaching about the Messiah. This Messiah is not just a Messenger or even a Son of the Father. He is an aspirant who undergoes, in His own spiritual pilgrimage, the three fundamental stages of approach to the Godhead, or, what Teilhard might say, of divinization. He cuts clean through each and every tendency to regard externals, even of the spiritual or religious life, and declares, finally, that the Goal of this life is not more than to experience the reality: "I and my Father are One." Every incidental of religion -- creeds, theologies, liturgies, good works, artistic creations, etc. -- has only this end in view, this experience as the consummation. It is all internal, vastly inward, completely inside. Wisdom is the end even of Love. To know Who one Is is the Goal of each and every aspirant, the purpose of all religious activity, the purpose of Life itself.

The Messiah is He Who can lead and guide one to that Goal, that inward awareness, the final Bliss. And, it is of the essence of the Messiah that He has already, in His own Person, undergone the spiritual renaissance which He is insisting that His fellow men recapitulate in their own persons -- or, as St. Paul says, He is the "first fruits of Salvation." Jesus has expanded profoundly all previously held views and statements regarding the nature of the Messiah. Once again, our preconceptions regarding what and how God can and will write, produce, direct and star in this Drama of History are nullified by the actuality of His Act.

A BRISK OR BRUSQUE BIOGRAPHY
OF JESUS OF NAZARETH AND GOD

Let us, therefore, give our construction a full airing. The ancient Israelites, in common with their Semitic bretheran throughout history, developed a very intense and powerful attitude of renunciation. By at least the Ninth Century, B.C., their genius for renunciation had inspired a wide-spread and well-known monastic reality which had taken root throughout the Land of Palestine. However, much previous to the Ninth Century, the spirit of renunciation, which is also the spirit of faith, had already inspired among the Hebrew peoples a religion of great power and glory. It was a theistic religion which was literate since well before the First Millenium, B.C., and was kept alive by the very spirit of renunciation