

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

which originally inspired it -- "Leave your father's house" -- and by certain great men and women who were imbued with this spirit to an especially pure degree. In all of this, and in what followed, we must read what is commonly called the Hand of God.

Toward the start of the First Millenium, this Hebrew religion and the monastic reality which supported it -- and, in a real sense, was it -- mixed with the political ascension of a particular tribe (Judah) and this amalgam issued, not with unalloyed happiness, in a focusing of the ancient religion on a particular plot of real estate, the Temple of Solomon. Much of the unhappiness was due to the fact that not all the adherents of the ancient religion concurred in this investment. More unhappiness occurred from the fact that the investment was not unsullied, not single-pointed. However, for the time being, it was considered a fait accompli that the visible aspect of the phylogenetic sheaf that was the ancient religion of Hebraism was to run through Jerusalem and its Temple precinct. Jerusalem, we must remember, was, from the time of Solomon onward, a great city, a cosmopolitan, international, jet-setting pace-maker and trend-center in exactly the same way that we think of a great city like Bombay, Los Angeles and Moscow.

However, out in the country and in the monasteries, in the monastic reality which was the spirit of renunciation, a different set of perceptions and expectations was brewing. Here the ancient principles of religion were mulled over and fostered, perhaps not perfectly, but well enough for the need. Periodically, still more great men and women were raised up by this monastic reality in the out-back, and some of them surface in literary

history as writing Prophets. What was going on out-back with these people? Well, they were feeding on a deep experience of God and had developed a deep appreciation of the modes and manners of genuine religion and especially its core, renunciation.

Among other things, it is undoubtedly these people who preserved the ancient spiritual texts. The preservation of profound antiquities, like the Song of Miriam, is not accomplished by random word-of-mouth transfer. A regular, formal system for preserving such literature must be assumed to have existed, and that system could only have been monastic in nature. People concerned to make it to their hairdresser before the cocktail party which precedes the gala premier of Don Quixote are not going to be concerned with preserving ancient scripture, unless, perhaps, it can fetch a coin at Christie's. But this is not a strong enough motivation on which to hang the assembly of whole sacred canon. Monasticism is behind the formulation of the canon. Not else. The same reality formulated the New Testament canon, from start to finish.

Out in the country a sense of religious or spiritual priorities tended to preside in the hearts of many men and women. Here the vision was inward instead of outward. Here the analysis was spiritual instead of financial. Where the Priest claimed that one had to bring an unspotted lamb, the monk claimed that one had to bring an unspotted heart. Where the Priest demanded a ritual purification by washing, the monk demanded an actual purification by repentance. Where the Priest wanted more funds, the monk wanted more faith. The one looked outside, the other, inside. The ruler wanted a new army, but the Prophet told him he would get a new heart.

The people wanted good times, but they were told to expect Justice. And so it went. Out of the cities came the cry for more land, more money, more food, more investments, more tribute, and out of the monastic reality came the answer: you need more love.

As the pleas of the Prophets became more insistent, as the Temple worship became more hypocritical, the attitude of irreligion became more firmly entrenched until finally, as a brittle bastion of irresponsibility, it was overwhelmed by, of all things, a pagan potency it had defied to the end. When the end came and the Temple was dismantled, who was allowed to remain in the Promised Land? Why, Jeremiah, the representative of the ancient religion and its supporting monasticism, the spirit of renunciation! Jeremiah, the lowly, was allowed to stay in the Land, he and the other lowly ones who had been considered of no account. "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." The spirit of renunciation had, in no uncertain terms, forecast defeat and advised surrender as the prudent policy of Almighty Providence.

The counsel of the ancient religion did in fact prevail. At no point did God leave the Hebrews without wise and true guidance. But, look what happened. The whole scene is repeated all over again in a fraction of the time but now with more wide-spread and lasting results.

Once again the carcasses smolder on the High Altar. Once again the Temple is debased into an OTC money market. Once again the priestly and the ruling castes coexist in an uneasy junta. Once again the hypocrites of religiosity appear to meet the letter while abridging the spirit of true

religion. But now there are new elements as well. A foreign power pins the civil government to the people's back with the bayonet. Bitter factions rend the domestic tranquility. And a number of established monastic communities, coenobites, exist around the countryside, cherishing millenarian expectations and waiting, not for inward renewal, which does not have to be waited for, but to throw off the Roman authority so they can pounce on their Jewish opponents. The present mix is far more exotic and certainly more volatile than the one of half a millenium before. And, underneath it all, practically unseen, the same old monastic reality of ancient Israel is still churning along, forgotten in the main, but not entirely out of sight and unknown.

Suddenly, from out of this ancient monastic reality pops a figure, terrible and fearless, resuscitating the same scoriating diction heard many, long centuries before. Some people come to him to listen because they know the antecedents and some of the meaning of such scurvy fellows. His name is John, and he is baptising people in one of the earth's great depressions so that they may be saved by inward repentance from the disaster that is frowning upon them. John is a loner, although he has disciples who live with or follow him. He has not built any monastic compound as at Qumran. He may or may not write any literature. His life is brief and seems to have been spent mainly in severe ascetical practices and, toward the end, in a brief and meteoric preaching career for which he was paid the handsome compliment of having his head served up on a silver platter.

In John the ancient diction is heard again in clear, concise warnings:
seek God within, leave off the without or you shall be thrown into hell-fire.

Now, this is not the sort of communication that ancient man, much less modern man, wishes to hear between his steak and the Wall Street Journal. We might think it a trifle rude, not to mention uppity, to assault one whose whole existence is convinced of the importance of his toast and jelly with the observation that he is filling his belly with the entrails of his soul, or, on the obverse, that he is feeding his soul with the offal of his intestines. We might think, in charity, that one who spoke so just might possibly be coming on a little too strong.

But apparently, John, who undoubtedly reflected upon these considerations, was not bothered by them, or at least did not allow them to hesitate him in the face of his cultured despisers. For, he does not seem to have repented him either his message or his choice of words when it became apparent that either one, and especially both, would likely result in his leaving this transitory life in precipitant haste.

In John the Baptist, the ancient religion and its seminal monastic reality is very much alive and vigorous some 2000 years into its development (the Church is just now approaching the antiquity of the ancient religion of Hebraism). He is even called after that quintessential Prophet, Elijah. Nor is he its only representative in First Century Palestine. Simeon, Anna, Nathanael -- these, too, are rigorous representatives of the Ancient Way, the Way of the Heart, the Interior Castle. In these people, and in those who followed Jesus' lead, the old monastic reality resided as an ember waiting to be fanned into a flame, the Fire of Love. In the case of Simenn, the Flame was ready to consume him in mergence with the Godhead.

Enter another character, a cousin of John, of the same family as his. John knew well his significance. He was of the same spiritual family as John, that is, of the ancient religion which had got lost in the silks of Samaria and was again lost in the jacuzzis of Jerusalem. It was not, however, lost in the hearts of some few men and women, and it was about to be resuscitated, reinvigorated, reestablished in the hearts of many men and women.

Other aspirants and even nature herself were aware of the fact and significance of the birth of this cousin of John. Aspirants from "the East" had read the event in their astrological charts. Simeon and Anna had precognition of it. An unusual light in the night sky of his nativity signaled the Parousia (intense presence) of Divinity.

Mary and Joseph appear to have heard of his importance but not to have understood it. They were extremely poor in worldly means and appear to have been unprepared for child-birth and for what came later. For, from the lack of evidence for their rearing of the child and from the one positive witness to their parenting -- neglectfulness of their young charge, leaving him in Jerusalem -- it would appear that they practically abandoned him at an early age. Indeed, it is remarkable that so little evidence of his adolescence exists -- but one story and that of parental neglect. Inasmuch as the parents were very poor and the child was to all appearances a kind of bastard, the parents would not feel any great compulsion to care for the child and, in fact, did not do so. The dearth of evidence relating the child's domestic experience -- normally a key element in the chronicle of great men -- reflects the fact that he had

little enough of it. He was, basically, an orphaned bastard.

This line of thought would account for the intensity of the child's later turning inward toward God as Father -- something rather new for Hebrew religion -- for, in fact, He had no earthly one. Much has been written, especially by Luke, to gloss over the desolation of this child's childhood.

This cousin of John was, of course, Jesus. His birth was in some sense miraculous in that His conception was not by human means. The parents were traveling and had put up for the night in a cow-shed -- such was their poverty -- when the labor-pains commenced. Joseph went out into the road to get some help, but then he heard the wail of the baby. The birth had occurred. It was 3:45am, Sunday, December 24, 1 BC. A strange and beautiful light shown in the night sky, rather like a halo. Nature had noticed and was paying homage.

Did the child know its nature and significance at this point in its life? No, it did not. Some others did, but the child itself did not. Among those who did know his significance were some Tibetan Buddhists, dressed as nobles in oriental splendor, probably as a disguise to assure safe passage. In any case, the Middle and Far Eastern peoples were much more in inter-communication at that time than we generally give them credit for being. Rome was a most cosmopolitan master and the Jews were world travelers. To put things in perspective, it may help to remember that St. Augustine was a coal-black African and this fact does not seem to have bothered anyone in the Roman milieu. Travelers from the East would

hardly be noteworthy in First Century Palestine, even in Bethlehem, which lay ^{near} on a major north-south trunk line. In any case, this Tibetan visit was an honor later repaid by its honoree.

The birth of Jesus at Bethlehem, or, what is more likely, its environs, appears not to have been well-known, perhaps not even until after His Resurrection. For, one of the arguments advanced against His claim to be the Messiah was that He was a known Nazarene whereas the sacred texts declared that the Messiah would take birth in Bethlehem, in the line of David the King.

Of Jesus adolescent years the texts are silent except for one statement, that He "grew in wisdom . . .," and one incident, the parental abandonment of Him at Jerusalem. Here we must rely on the Tibetan Buddhist document. It states that Jesus (called Isa) resided for some time at the monastery in Tibet and that He was a great soul and destined to rekindle true religion in the land of the Jews. Apparently, Jesus underwent the Buddhist novitiate and resided at the monastery for some 12 years. He also traveled somewhat extensively in India, Persia and Russia, visiting holy shrines, studying and meditating inwardly. He had gotten to India in the same manner that Jonah had gotten into the Whale: by running away from God and after the world. In India, the Whale, He got turned around and, ultimately, sent back on His Mission.

He was very poor throughout His life. He rarely had anything to eat and wore almost no clothes because He was so poor. However, He was an avid student of the spiritual texts and masters and was keenly intent upon

the salvation of His own soul. Therein lay His greatness and therein lay the reason for the reverence and affection paid Him by the Buddhist text. In fact, the text refers to Him as a Master, a term which has a somewhat technical meaning in Vedic culture: one who has the ability to lead people into salvation or perpetual Bliss, one who can give both power and direction for completing the spiritual pilgrimage successfully. A Master is not a Divine Personage. He or She is an aspirant who has realized their own Divinity. History is full of such people, Jesus among them. It is significant that St. Francis uses this same appellation, Master, for Jesus -- an otherwise rare occurrence in the Christian tradition.

This Jesus, an aspirant of high motivation and achievement, realizes in about His 25th year that He is the Messiah visualized by the ancient Prophets of Israel and the monastic reality which supported them. He experiences, after years of intense sadhana (spiritual exercise), that He does in fact have the Mission of reestablishing the ancient religion of Israel, the land of His birth. This information comes to Him inside, while He is well outside Palestine, on pilgrimage. He did not before know that He had this Mission. But, once He sees that He does, He sees also that He has had this Mission since before birth -- as Jeremiah did cognize his Call -- even though He has just now, near the end of His life, realized it. In this we must see the Hand of God.

God intended Jesus as the Messiah for the ancient religion, as the one who would surely and truly interpret the sacred texts correctly. God gave Him birth for this very reason. But Jesus was unaware of His destiny until He had undergone intense sadhana, spiritual exercise, and that amidst

Vedic culture. Jesus is a Semite who has gotten some spiritual enlightenment from man's most ancient and affluent culture, Sanathana Dharma. Even the Buddhist influence shows up centuries after His Career in some of the great Rose Windows of Medieval Europe, and especially Chartres. The Roses of Chartres Cathedral, which are recensions of Buddhist Mandalas, are connected with some of the successors of the great St. Bernard: Alchemists and Freemasons (Knights Templar), whose roots wend back into Persia and, ultimately, India. By both direction and indirection the fundamentals of Western civilization trace from Vedic culture. Even the Hebrews were released from Exile by a Persian (Aryan), Cyrus, who was a disciple of (Abraham himself was of Persian (Aryan, Vedic) stock.) Zoroaster, a Vedic, Aryan Sage. } And the Guru or Teacher of Western civilization, Jesus of Nazareth, is Himself a spiritual son of India.

Now, look what happens. God sends an aspirant with every possible social strike against Him to show a people with every possible social strike against them -- "Not-My-People" had bastardized the lot of them -- how to live happily, by living for God, by being honest and truthful. The Messiah God sends is a man among men, an aspirant among aspirants, a servant of the God-ward yearning and Himself an outcast, having credentials nil and manner of living repulsive -- and known as an orphaned bastard, son of a lowly carpenter, a nobody, a physical as well as a spiritual Franciscan. This fellow is sent to repair the world! Perhaps God needs to rethink the criteria of His personnel classifications.

Not only so, but even during His ministry in Palestine, which, remember, succeeds a long sojourn at points East and amounts to no more than a brief flurry at the end of a short life, that is, hardly long enough for the

common man to get a feeling that this is a good, solid citizen, this fellow is still engaged in His own spiritual pilgrimage, moving in His own experience ever closer to a feeling of unity with the Godhead. He is wild and wooly enough when His ministry begins, but by the time He ends it, He has undergone three complete spiritual metamorphoses and is speaking and acting differently at each stage of His own spiritual journey. God, in other words, sends not a Messiah in full knowledge of being from the start, but One Who, to use Kierkegaard's fine phrase, is becoming the Christ-ian, the Messiah, all along. Needless to say, this is an unexpected gesture for your typical Pharisee, not to mention your typical modern Christian, whether a descendant, spiritually speaking, of Cluny or Citeaux.

But for the student of these affairs, it is a most important point. When reading the Gospels, we must, at any given point in the text, pay as much attention to the religious experience Jesus is undergoing at that moment as to His words and deeds. In fact, His religious experience is the key to interpreting His ministry aright, just as the religious experience of His Prototype, Jeremiah, is the key to his words and deeds. Only by cognizing as best we can Jesus' own experience at a given point in His ministry can we answer that most perplexing question, which, in the vernacular, comes out something like, "Where is this guy coming from, anyhow?" Needless to say, one who cannot answer that question for his own person is not going to be able to answer it for the Person of Jesus. Which explains exactly why our preachers preach from Peanuts, Time Magazine, Ladies Home Journal, Sartre, The New York Times, Camus, Masters and Johnson -- anything but the Bible.

When Jesus opens His ministry at Nazareth, the townspeople, who knew Him years before and had not seen Him for as long, were astonished. What a change had come over Him! His words and His presence were now elegant with Divinity. They recognized Him as a son of Mary and Joseph, one of several offspring, both brothers and sisters, of that couple who were still poor, still on the fringe of society, still in Nazareth. Aghast at His diction, His learning, His halo of authority, they said, "Where did he get all of this?" Apparently He did not tell them, or, they knew vaguely. In any case, the whole New Testament records not a bit of where He got it, except one clue -- Three Men from the East. There He got it and got it good. He had been for over twelve years on spiritual pilgrimage for saving His own soul. He had been soaking in the nutrient, the splendorous Love that is Mother India.

When, as self-conscious Messiah but still gaining in understanding of that Role, He reenters Palestine to fulfill His Mission, He appears not as a King, not as a Theologian and not as a Recluse but as a Servant, as the Scriptures had foretold. In three or so quick and incautious years He engages to demonstrate to one and all what true religion is all about.

There is an implicit and an explicit element of His ministry. The implicit element is that He is entirely without ego. He has already submerged His ego in the contemplation of God's Glory. People feel this fact and regard Him, because of it, as having immense authority. Another quality they see in Him is enchanting Beauty, the Beauty of Character. People saw the same quality in St. Francis and for the same reason: he was entirely without ego, which is the source and substance of ugliness. The Beauty of Jesus'

Character, which emerged in ever fuller, surging waves of Divinity, attracted many women to Him. This Beauty emerged because ego, the cause of ugliness, He had none of. Lack of ego was the power He had for drawing black hearts and common men to Himself. This is not ordinarily understood. We think of Beauty and Power as things we put on or over what we already are. Actually, they are qualities of the Divine Light which resides within, ever full, ever effulgent, but gets masked or veiled by thick clouds of ego. Remove the ego, as Jesus did, and the Light within shines forth in all of its Native Splendor.

We may also remark that the egolessness of Jesus was the qualification He possessed for having certain Divine Powers conferred upon Him. These Divine Powers, which He could use, produced the much maligned and misunderstood miracles. He did not use these Powers for His own benefit because the Great Ones never do that and never will.

These Divine Powers are conferred on men and women throughout history who have the same qualification—egolessness. They are responsible for the miracles we see being done by Saints and Sages of all times and climes. They are conferred for specific purposes which are suited to the place, the time and the circumstance. The miracles done by Jesus are among the number of these. There is nothing special or remarkable about them at all. They are Divine Calling Cards suited to the context. They do not prove or disprove the Divinity of Jesus. They are not at all the substance or point of His ministry. They happen because they happen. No one, high or low, can add any more explanation to their origin or purpose than that. They are, in fact, entirely unremarkable. They are just concretizations

of the surging Love which Jesus had for those He was among.

Now, the explicit element of His ministry was this Love. As St. John points out, and St. Paul also, it was His Love that produced the spiritual renaissance in the ancient religion He came to resuscitate. Love breathed life into despairing men and women. Love raised the drooping heart. Love firmed up the faltering step. Love cured the paralytics. Love impeached the hypocrites. Love cleansed the Temples -- the hearts -- of those who had faith in Him. Love was the authority He possessed for fulfilling and surmounting the Law. Law is Love. Love fired the Apostles to carry the Good News of Love and Liberty to the ends of the earth. It was the same Love that surges from every spiritual teacher of every religion known to man. It was the same Love Pope Innocent III envisioned personified as an Umbrian peasant, embracing and righting the walls of St. John Lateran. With this Love did Jesus stride through Palestine, igniting the Land as surely as did Hanuman ignite Lanka.

And the result was the same. The husk was burned, the kernel remained. Once again the Land was put under the ban by a pagan potency. Once again, the poor, the meek, the lowly came into possession of it. And, once again, but now even more so, the ersatz leaders and speculators were thrown to the wind as chaff. This time there would be no return, no rebuilding of the Temple. The lesson had been delivered and it had been, finally, understood: Love one another. That is all there is to true religion. Whatever else you think you just have to have, you must, one way or another, sooner or later, with ease or with difficulty, learn to do without.

Jesus' method of teaching this lesson was to exemplify it. It is often thought that Jesus sacrificed Himself on the Cross for saving mankind. Well, this is not true. The crucifixion was no sacrifice at all. To think that it is is, again, to look at externals. He was betrayed by a friend and bound in chains. He was a prisoner. He had no choice in the matter. The Sanhedrin forced the issue and He was merely powerless to resist. One cannot call that a sacrifice because He was not in control of events.

What Jesus sacrificed was His own personal comfort and reputation. What Jesus sacrificed was His own ego. What Jesus sacrificed were all the downward-dragging impulses and desires that ordinary men take for their meat and potatoes. Hatred of the Pharisees he sacrificed. Lust for women he sacrificed. Envy of the rich and comfortable He sacrificed. Anger at obstacles He sacrificed. Pride in His accomplishments and splendor He sacrificed. Fear of others He sacrificed. He said very truly that He could call down angels to obliterate the passion of His crucifixion. But He did not do that. That was His sacrifice.

He gave up or sacrificed all of the animal traits that adhere in human nature -- fear, envy, etc. This He did of His own accord, as in possession of what He had control over -- His own Nature. That constitutes a sacrifice because He could do it or not. The crucifixion was something over which He had no control and so in no way can it be regarded as a sacrifice of anything by anyone. He was bound and hung like an animal. The Romans were quite good and practiced at this stuff.

Jesus exemplified in His own life the inner meaning of the Temple sacrifices.

The animals -- sheep, cows, birds -- and harvests -- grain, oil -- symbolize the lower or animal nature that adheres in man, left over from his evolution from stone, plant and animal. Man has reached the human stage but he has these elements of his previous sojourning as vestiges within him. Until he clears them out completely, he does not qualify for the title of Human Being. He has this human body for the very purpose of eliminating these vestigial animal traits -- what we call vices -- and growing onward even beyond Humanhood into Divinity Itself. The human body is the only instrument in all Creation which can be used to visualize Truth, God. It is the only instrument which can be employed to experience Bliss. That is the measure of its worth -- somewhat in excess of the toys for tots of science.

The Temple sacrifices are not more than external symbols of this inward sacrifice of animal traits that adhere in us. And that is why the Prophet can declare that God rejects and hates the Temple sacrifices and wants the real, inward sacrifice of ego and vice that is accomplished by repentance, renunciation and the practice of Love.

The real Temple is the heart of man. The building at Jerusalem that bore the name is forever obsolete. It will never be rebuilt. The lesson has been learned. Jesus came to show men the way to purify the heart (the Temple) of the ^(vices) (animal tendencies) that infest it. And the Way is Love.

The Love which Jesus had for those He was among converted the plain, simple-hearted people and tried the monks and leaders. We will examine these groups individually and discuss their reactions to Jesus, for, to

do so reveals some of the significance of His ministry and the spiritual renaissance it produced.

The plain, simple-hearted people of First Century Palestine were in much the same condition that such people have been in most of the time, everywhere. They were traduced. They were stolen from. They were demeaned. They were suppressed. When some are living in luxury, some others must pay for it, for, those given to luxury will, most certainly, not pay for it themselves. The cost, in worldly terms, is always passed on to those who have no recourse but to pay it, and that is the plain, simple-hearted people who are usually made poor thereby. Poverty and Luxury are twin evils that must occur together for one of them to be present. Someone has to foot the bill for the rich man, and that someone, as this world goes, has to be the poor man. There is no alternative.

The poor of Jesus' time had a harder go of it than the poor of Western countries do today. In many respects, Western societies have in recent years and, periodically, in former times also seen fit to establish some of the ancient religious laws and attitudes regarding proper care and treatment of the poor. No morally keen person is going to say that enough has been done, but no intelligent and knowledgeable person will deny that much of genuine worth has already been accomplished. But for the poor of First Century Palestine not much at all had been done and even less was contemplated. Passions rent the body politic and there were sharp lines between the well-off and the paupers. This social background is clear to even a casual reader of the New Testament: "Lord, I am thankful that I am not like" There was little in the way of graciousness, less in the

way of kindness and none at all in the way of sympathy. We take these qualities as norms and regard those without them as unworthy of our company. But they were rare indeed in First Century Palestine.

Jesus had a job cut out for Him not less awesome, really, than the task Mohammed faced: How to soften stoney hearts? How to brighten cheerless faces? How to strengthen weary limbs? How to deflate vicious pride? He did all of this, however, and He did it by example. One of the unique things about Jesus is that He is not a writer. Mohammed, Zoroaster, Buddha and Vyasa all wrote reams. But not Jesus. He was a speaker and, preeminently, a doer. In this also is St. Francis very much His successor, although St. Francis wrote a little. Dr. Paul Lehman, Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Theological Seminary, always spoke of doing theology.

Jesus went about showing people what He meant by doing it. He dined with the worst breed. He preached and healed whenever and however He wanted to. He washed the feet of His disciples. He visited the sick and the lonely. He drove the account executives from the Temple. He rebuked the lunatics on their own turf. And He let people feel the presence and power of one who has no ego left. His life was His message. He did not just say it. He did it, day in and day out for three or so remarkable years.

And His message was the Brotherhood of all Men, the necessity to love one another. That message was heard rather clearly by many of the poor of the land and it was these people who laid palm branches and threw flowers in His path on that last entry into Jerusalem. These people, the poor, the plain, the simple-hearted, readily and enthusiastically enough

acclaimed Him Messiah. He had entered their hearts silently, effortlessly, without the least drum of fanfare because He had unreserved, unlimited love for them. They had as much for Him, and to their love must we attribute the founding of the Church and the collection of the proto-Evangelical literature -- simple folk, not scholars, but men and women who had love for this Man.

It is sometimes thought that the Qumran community, or one like it, could have served as a support and springboard for Jesus' ministry. Some have wondered whether Jesus was an Essene. Well, I am inclined to take the opposite view, namely, that Qumran and others like it were loci of intense antipathy toward the Nazarene and, in the event, agitated His destruction. The reason for this view is that the monks were waiting for a Warlord. And if there is anyone intolerant, worldly people find repulsive it is a renunciate.

Qumran and others like it, of which there were several, were millenarian outfits. They were akin to the modern Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentacostalist-derived groups, such as Oral Roberts, Calvary Chapel, Moral Majority etc. They talked loud and hot about the wickedness of the world, but they wanted very much to relish the comforts of their redoubts while dreaming of the real comforts of the Palace they anticipated would, one day, be theirs. They fancied themselves as the rulers-in-waiting but without sufficient weight in arms to stage a successful coup-de-main. They thought they had successfully reduced Scripture to a few key phrases, about which they entertained fanatical zeal, but all they really left behind was enough parchment to send a few hundred scholars on a wild-goose chase. The

Romans sized up Qumran and like communities without difficulty and merely erased them.

Among the cloistered monastic communities of First Century Palestine we are going to find a way of thinking and a pattern of expectation which could not possibly be more opposite to everything Jesus stood for, namely, true religion. Even the disciples of John the Baptist were inimical to Jesus at first. It was not at all clear to the monks that this fellow was the Messiah. And I feel one can safely surmise that the Essene party, in particular, opposed Jesus to the death. Nor did they, like St. Paul, repent them their position. This, I feel, is the reason they were roughly handled by History. Cloistered monasticism in First Century Palestine was as degenerate, though in a different way, as were the Temple and the Palace.

However, the feeling some have had that Jesus may have been connected with the Essenes or with a like community does contain a prescient if not precocious intuition. It is that He is connected with monasticism. This is an accurate intuition. Only the actual connection is misperceived. He is connected with the ancient monastic reality of ancient Israel, with the likes of Elijah, Jeremiah and Isaiah. There is about Him the same feeling one gets from these predecessors. It is the feeling of the undercurrent of renunciation, of detachment, a feeling entirely absent at Qumran and its latter-day descendants like Jehovah's Witnesses and Pentacostalist-derived groups. It is the whole, grand, vast and irrepressible gaiety and thrill that suffuses the saints and sages of every religion and, to a superlative degree, the Avatars of the Lord.

Now, even more hidden to our intuition, but nonetheless available to it, is Jesus' connection with monasticism as rendered in Vedic culture. When Jesus reenters Palestine after His spiritual pilgrimage in the East, He is beholden to no one in His native land. The monks do not claim Him as their pupil. Gamaliel and the Pharisees do not claim Him as theirs. His townsmen cannot be blamed for asking, "Where did he get all of this?"

Indeed, just where did He? He left in rags, a pauper, and He has returned in rags, still a pauper, but claiming to be the Messiah and acting with enough authority to convince some people that He, at least, thinks He is serious. So, where did He get it? Where did He get this authority, this Commanding Presence, this personal beauty, these miraculous powers, this incisive, sure-handed diction? No wonder His kinsmen want to hustle Him off to a psychiatrist. He is still, after all, a young man, still in His 20's, and He has not even been writing home to Mom and Dad from wherever it was He has been without having so much as the courtesy to say where. He did not even come home on weekends so Mom could do His laundry. It appears that He does not even have any laundry to do!

The fact is that no one in all of First Century Palestine claims Jesus as their own. When He starts His ministry, He may as well have come from Japan or Mexico, for all the familiarity people have with His spiritual antecedents. He is beholden to no one locally, not for anything, not anyhow. This is an important fact. For three years people are asking, "Where is this guy coming from, anyhow?" We are not the first to be so puzzled.

Well, He is coming from Vedic culture. He is a monk, alright. That is the central and verital intuition inside the thought that He may be an Essene, more or less. He is a monk. He has been a Buddhist monk. But He is now a trans-religious monk. He has superceded all the lines of demarcation which say, "You are a this and I am a that." He is, when He starts His ministry, Bonhoeffer's religionless Christian, par excellence. He is above and beyond all definitions. This makes Him a true son of Vedic culture. He has reached the heart of every religion, which is Love and Love alone, having no do's and don't's, no thises and thats, no we and they, no can and can't, no will and won't, not even any right and wrong. Therein consists His power. Jesus is beholden to none of the latter-day religious establishments that litter First Century Palestine. He is above and beyond them all because He is simpler than they are. He is Love Incarnate. And for that reason do the monks oppose Him. They show, by their posture toward Him, that they are not monks at all but voluptuaries.

The leaders of the society oppose Jesus with a blind fury. From Herod to Caiaphas and the neophyte Pharisee, the reaction is the same. Every impulse and instinct of these people tells them in clarion calls that this man is a positive pestilence. But for Gamaliel, their reaction is unthinking, unpremeditated. They do not pause to reflect. They only pause to react, and that in violence.

No dram of blame can be attached to these people. The old charge that Jews engaged in deicide is as silly as it is ignorant. In fact, this charge is of the same nature as the act it condemns. It is its own best censure.

The leaders of the society had been divinely drugged into an intellectual and moral stupor. Their reactions were visceral rather than virtual. The curse of hard-heartedness had been pronounced on their heads centuries previous to their fleeting, flimsy role in this Drama. Like Jesus, they had no choice about the part they were assigned to play. This is why both Jesus and Stephen are careful to attribute not the least amount of blame to them. Nor can we or anyone else.

This is an important point. Even when Christian exegetes will not go so far as to charge these leaders with deicide, they will often build them up as the bad guys of the story and use them as an easy whipping boy for stirring up the passions of their congregations. This procedure is common enough in both educated and uneducated circles. But it is as wrong-headed as it can be. Furthermore, it is in no way supported by Jesus or by the *third* martyr of this spiritual renaissance, St. Stephen. To take this Drama as reprobating the Pharisees and Jews and raising aloft the Christians, as the twin poles of evil and goodness, is to engage in the same sort of spiritual degeneracy that the condemned leaders reveled in and that Jesus came to remove. Those who take the Drama in these terms are afflicted with the same colossal ignorance which afflicted these ancient leaders.

The leaders are types of an attitude that can infect anyone, anytime, and does so with fierce and unhappy regularity. It is not an attitude of Jews or Greeks or Basques or Englishmen but an attitude that can and does turn countless people, regardless of their station in life, completely upside down, without warning, without waiting and almost without relief. Were we to describe its origin and nature we could not say more than that it

is the fundamental, primal potency of delusion or ignorance. The lion happens to pass a limpid lake. Therein he spys a gorgeous lion and becomes infuriated that there could be another so ferocious and majestic as he is. So he pounces promptly on the lion in the lake and dies drowning.

Now, who can explain the lion's reactions? Surely, they are based on not more or other than delusion. So it was with the ancient leaders. Who can blame them? They were acting not on the basis of Truth but on the basis of falsehood. They were not in control of themselves one wit. They were, in fact, in an epistemological -- say rather, thaumaturgical -- tumbler, themselves the unwitting dice. They played their part to perfection. And that is about all one can say of them. As with the monks, the Romans, eventually, just swept them into the dust bin. Their part played, they were retired from the stage.

The leaders were not amused with this up-shot genius from Nazareth. They took Him for a threat to the peace -- their piece. That the lowly people flocked to Him enraged them, for, the lowly people were supporting their luxurious life-style. Dickens encapsulated this phenomenon by putting in the French Count's mouth this language: "But if the peasants do not pay their rent, how shall I buy my perfume?" Precisely. The whole issue in First Century Palestine was money. Not theology. Money. The leaders could tolerate any number of wierd monks afloat in their communes out-back. But the Nazarene was drawing the fealty of the masses -- as the monks never did -- and He was telling them to be free, to think for themselves, not to regard any establishment as established unless it serve the cause of love and peace. He was no physical revolutionary, but He was encouraging and

efficiently prompting a spiritual involution that any voluptuary could plainly see cut clean across his supply lines. Judas Iscariot, an untamed cynic and greedy political revolutionary, was not the threat the Nazarene was. A spiritual ideal is infinitely more potent than a political one, as Gandhi ^(also) demonstrated.

The reason for every spiritual renaissance is this: men have been tilted upside down and backwards by delusion. As a result, they are busily engaged in satiating their senses with every possible worldly delight and mutilating their neighbors in order to do it. Whereas spiritual pleasures come in endless supply -- because they are always residing within, waiting to be discovered -- worldly pleasures comprise an economy of scarcity -- because they are always without, in possession of someone else. In order, therefore, to gratify a desire for worldly pleasure, one has to approach another and either pay them for it or steal it from them. If it is stolen, one is ensnared in a true economy of scarcity. If it is paid for, one is also sinking in an economy of scarcity because the money to pay for it has to come from somewhere and is not in limitless supply to begin with. The result of this reality is that most people, to gratify their desire for worldly pleasures, resort to stealing, one way or another, to do so. The theft may not be direct, but it will almost always be indirect. So it is said that the vast majority of rich people in this world are holding not their own possessions but, verily, pelf. Somewhere along the line, the things they have have been extracted from someone unwillingly, that is, stolen. Now, stealing is gorging dung, which is why so many rich people have a repulsive appearance.

What all of this does to society is, perhaps, more clearly visible to the victims than to the victors. Society is all but obliterated and becomes a den of ravenous beasts, each willing to eat the other before it gets eaten. In other words, men descend from the human to the animal existence. Jesus calls the leaders dogs. They are not amused.

Since men are not meant to live as dogs, God sends various types of genuine leaders to re-mark the path to blessedness. When there is a disturbance, He sends a Constable. When there is a demonstration, He sends a Lieutenant. When there is a riot, He sends a Police Chief. But when there is a mutiny, He comes Himself as the Inspector General. Jesus is a Police Chief. The Avatar of the Lord is the Inspector General. Since the Avatar is now on the earth, we may form an accurate estimate of God's assessment of mankind's situation today.

The spiritual renaissance is necessary because men have allowed themselves to be invested by their own lower natures. They have to be lifted up, their higher natures resuscitated. They have to be endowed with courage and joy for walking the pilgrim path, the path which leads to God. Faith, the engine, has to be restored to working power. Work, the tires, have to be inflated. Courage, the driver, has to be placed behind detachment, the wheel, and love, the lights, have to be switched on. Then the person, the car, can journey on to its Destination, Love lighting the way. It is a many-faceted task to produce a spiritual renaissance. But the essence of it is Love, pure, free abounding Love. That Love is Jesus of Nazareth and God.

Jesus did indeed crack open -- wide open -- the festering sore that was First Century Palestine. Love did triumph in the hearts of men ^(and women) and the sword cleaned up those whose implacability of spirit made them brittle in the day of battle. The doom which both Jesus and John forecast for Palestine did occur in 70 A.D. That irreligious society was cast to the wind, a warning and a sign of omnipotent God.

In its place there arose what looked like a new religion. In some sense it was. But in a deeper, truer sense it was what Jesus said, a fulfillment of the ancient religion of Israel. For centuries the Hebrews had visualized all men in-gathering at Jerusalem to worship the One God. Now that vision was to be an accomplished fact. But, it was a Jerusalem after the model of Jeremiah -- a new heart -- rather than after the model of Qumran -- a new dynasty. The vision was fulfilled inwardly, not outwardly, spiritually, not physically. Both the Law and the Prophets had been pointing inwardly since the beginning, but their witness, while public, seems to have been a big secret. Now the message had been put so plainly and understood so clearly that there was no longer any doubt. Most importantly, it was understood by the plain, simple people, those who, by dint of fate, were most immediately in possession of those qualities that entitle one to wisdom: simple living, simple-heartedness, single-mindedness. The Apostles were men of just this stamp. It was the qualification they possessed for doing God's work.

Let us end our construction at this point. I believe it will not be necessary here to elaborate more on the source and substance of the spiritual renaissance produced by Jesus. Our point has been that the whole operation

was entrusted to an aspirant no different from you and me. That He got His training in Vedic culture is not immediately germane to the point we are making. It is germane to our problem of locating the Jesus of History within the apparent dissonance of Christian and Islamic statements regarding His Nature. But it does not matter immediately for the point at issue here, which is that this fellow very much grew into the realization of His Mission as Messiah. This realization had not been with Him since birth and only appeared to, or better, in Him in about His 26th year, while He was in the East doing spiritual pilgrimage for saving His own soul. Thereafter, He continued to mature spiritually and finally reached the apex of achievement when He stated, from His own experience, "I and my Father are One."

We can say about the Messiah God actually sent, then, that He is the proto-typical aspirant. He starts out casting about. He gets some enlightenment and declares that He is God's Messenger. He gets more enlightenment and declares He is God's Son. Finally, He gets complete enlightenment and declares He is identical with the Father Who sent Him. These are not concepts He is spouting. They are His own inmost and genuinely felt experience. He has in His own person undergone the three stages of spiritual development that every aspirant must undergo, sooner or later. He is, as the Jews and Mohammedans have said all along, a man among men. You may take exception to His life, His words, His deeds, but you will not take exception to His facticity, His historicity, His being.

The question about Jesus is not believing in Him. It is believing in your Self. Jesus is saying through all this activity He does and prompts,

that He is you and you are Him and God is One. To believe in Jesus is just to believe in your Self. To doubt Jesus is to deprecate your Self. Jesus has, through the example of Love, reintroduced the principle of solidarity in human affairs. You are your brother's keeper because your brother is you. This is the Truth that Love reveals. Every spiritual guide and every religious renaissance is declaring just this fact. The Islamic statement that Jesus is a great aspirant and spiritual reformer, one among many, is absolutely true in every sense. This view of Him is also complete and self-sufficient. It needs no adding to.

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The next part of this adventure I feel circumspect about relating because I do not and can not understand it. No one of us does or can. What this means is that we are now faced with the necessity of approaching those trans-historical realms of Truth that no person in their right mind is going to treat discursively unless they first enter most prominently and potently the ultimate disclaimer, which is that these matters can be alluded to and indicated delicately, as with the Sword of Saladin, but they can in no way be defined. In other words, I feel somewhat in the hypothetical position of St. Thomas had he, after receiving the Vision of Christ which made him feel the Summa Theologica as so much straw, been asked to contemplate