

# **The Life of Christ**

**Giuseppe Ricciotti**

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GIUSEPPE RICCIOTTI

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## Author's Preface

THE first vague notion of writing this book came to me many years ago in extraordinary circumstances. I had been carried to a field hospital set up in a wood of fir trees in a valley among the Alps. For some time, I hovered between life and death, and I was much closer to the latter than the former. Night and day the valley shuddered with the crash of grenades, the wounded were screaming around me, I could hear the death rattle of the dying, and the stench of gangrene sickening the air seemed a foretaste of the cemetery. As I lay awaiting my fate, it suddenly came to me that if I should live, I might write a life of Christ; his Gospel, in fact, was on the straw mattress beside me, and its pages, with splotches of blood crossing the Greek letters like rubrics, seemed a symbolic pattern of life and death.

When I was well and back in normal life again, instead of being attracted by the idea of writing a life of Christ I was terrified, and the more I thought of it, the more afraid of it I was. But not only did the thought never leave me, it became a kind of spiritual necessity. And as we instinctively do with frightening necessities, I began to walk around it, as it were, as if to fool myself. I began to publish studies on Hebrew and Syriac texts; I produced a History of Israel, and then *The Wars of the Jews* of Flavius Josephus. But the real citadel was still there unassailed among them despite all my circuitous activity; I did not touch it because I was afraid of it. The persuasion of friends and the urging of persons of authority made no impression on me; I invariably answered that my strength faltered before a life of Jesus Christ.

Later, however, I unexpectedly gave in. But that was because after so many years the agony of that little field hospital began all over again and in much worsened circumstances. When I realized that the tempest of another war was gathering over humanity and that Europe was again to be drenched with blood, then it seemed to me that not only my own body but all mankind, all of so-called civilized humanity, lay dying with a Gospel splotched with blood beside it.

This image became so compelling that I was forced to obey. Since blood was again flowing over the world, then the Gospel must return to it again too. And so, the present volume was written while Europe was the prey of war, that is, of the thing which is the most complete denial of the Gospel.

I have burdened the reader with these confidences only to tell him in what state of mind I have written this book. In my opinion, this information is most important for a proper evaluation of any biography of Jesus. The reader who has the patience to read the last chapter of the Introduction will easily be persuaded that all lives of Christ —by Strauss, Renan, Loisy, and so many others — have taken on a particular coloring from the respective states of mind of their authors. And this is true of the present work also — I honestly admit it — since I have written it with the desire to emerge from the present and lose myself in the past, to leave the blood behind me and absorb myself in the Gospel.

But for this very reason it has been my wish to write an exclusively historical and documentary work. I have studied the ancient fact and not the modern theory, the solidity of the documents and not the flimsiness of any interpretation presently the fashion. I have even dared to imitate the famous “dispassionateness” of the canonical Evangelists, who have neither an exclamation of joy when Jesus is born nor a word of lament when he dies. It has been my intention, then, to write a critical work.

I know very well that those for whom scientific criticism is destructive only and must have a no as its ultimate conclusion will consider I have no right to the use of the word “critical.” But it is by no means proved that these very able men are right, and much less that their destructive intent has been really successful with regard to the documents they have undertaken to study. The last chapter of the Introduction to this work will easily convince the unprejudiced and impartial reader on this point. After all, these destructive critics are now almost passe; naturally, after having held sway for a number of years they refuse to abdicate and remain tenaciously attached to their methods. But as happened in the case of Old Testament criticism, the deliberately destructive criticism of the New Testament is now on the wane, and in a short time it will be the unenviable prerogative of the “oldsters. Today, because of recent discoveries of documents and for other reasons, wise criticism tries to be constructive and it wants its ultimate conclusion to be a yes. This is unquestionably a difficult task, and the reluctance I at first felt about writing this book was due principally to the difficulty involved in being constructive and critical at the same time.

For the sake of clarity, and to avoid sending the reader to other books, I have had to sum up in the Introduction some parts of the second volume of my History of Israel, which dealt with matters the subject obliged me to treat

again here. The reader is not to look in this work for a number of other things which, too long as it is, it could not and was not obliged to treat, as, for example, the matter of bibliography. For the New Testament this is almost a study in itself and would require a separate volume. Only by way of exception have I here and there quoted a specific work, while the authors cited in the last chapter of the Introduction — and there are too many of them — are sufficient for a general picture.

I am heartily grateful to the Very Reverend Mariano Cordovani, O.P., Magister S. Palatii, who so kindly reviewed the manuscript for me and made many valuable suggestions.

Giuseppe Ricciotti

University of Rome January, 1941

## Translator's Note

THE present translation has been edited and all quotations, including those from Hebrew, Greek, and other texts, have been checked by the Rev. Patrick W. Skehan, professor of Semitic languages. Catholic University of America, Washington, D. C., and it has been read for accuracy of the rendering from the Italian by the Right Reverend Monsignor Francesco Lardone, director of ecclesiastical studies of the same university, to both of whom the Translator is deeply grateful.

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October 4, 1946

## Format Editor's Note

We have taken the scanned version of the book from [https://archive.org/details/thelifeofchrist\\_201911](https://archive.org/details/thelifeofchrist_201911) in 2021, and formatted it as a Word document. Typos were corrected, some words were updated to more modern American spelling, and occasionally punctuation was slightly modified.

We have included photographs at the end of the document. Most photographs were replaced with modern versions showing the same or similar content. If no similar content was found and the quality of the scanned image was not too poor, it was kept. In a few rare cases, the photographs were omitted.

If you still find typos or errors in the book, please report them to [helpdesk@where-you-are.net](mailto:helpdesk@where-you-are.net).

## Acknowledgments

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# Critical Introduction

## CHAPTER I: Jesus' Country

1. THE region where Jesus lived is substantially that strip of Mediterranean coast which joins southern Syria to Egypt. Throughout the centuries this region has had various names and different boundaries. Today it is called Palestine, as it was by Herodotus, and its boundaries are in part natural and in part conventional.

Palestine is flanked by natural borders, the Mediterranean on the west and the Syrio-Arabian desert on the east. On the north and south her natural boundaries are not so well defined, although in the north a clear enough division is marked by the Lebanon mountain range. This descends parallel to the Mediterranean and is bordered on the interior by the Anti-Lebanon range, from which Mount Hermon rises like a vanguard. The pass between Hermon and Lebanon may be considered the northern boundary of Palestine. The southern boundary is represented in general by Idumaea and the desert regions which extend directly below Beersheba and the Dead Sea. These are the two boundaries, northern and southern, frequently referred to in the Old Testament phrase, "from Dan to Beersheba," to denote that part of Palestine inhabited by the Hebrews. (cf. Figure 1 and Figure 2)

This strip of Mediterranean coast lies between 31'20" degrees north latitude and 34'20" and 36' degrees east longitude. Its length, from the southern slopes of Mt. Lebanon (Nahr el-Qasimiyye) to Beersheba, measures one hundred and fifty-three miles; its width, from the Mediterranean to the River Jordan, varies from a minimum of twenty-three miles in the north to a maximum of about ninety-three miles below the Red Sea. The area west of the Jordan is just over 6000 square miles; that east of the Jordan (in the modern political unit of Transjordan) covers some 3660 square miles. The total area of Palestine, therefore, is 9700 square miles, that is, slightly larger than that of the state of Vermont (9609 sq. mi.). The striking disparity between its negligible size and its moral importance caused St. Jerome to exclaim: "We hesitate to describe the extent of the Promised Land, lest we should seem to be furnishing pagans with an opportunity for mockery" (Epist., 129, 4).

2. The entire region is divided into the two parts mentioned above by the deep depression through which flows the River Jordan. This rift is a geological phenomenon unique on the globe. It stretches south from Mount Taurus between Lebanon and the Anti-Lebanon range, keeps sinking deeper and deeper as it advances through Palestine, reaches its lowest level in the Dead



Sea, and, continuing east of the peninsula of Sinai, finally joins the Red Sea. Above Dan this rift is still 1696 feet above the level of the Mediterranean, but the surface of Lake Huleh, about six miles further on, is only six feet above sea level and that of Lake Tiberias, another ten miles to the south, is 682 feet below sea level, while its bed is 148 feet lower still. Finally, the water level at the entrance to the Dead Sea is 1292 feet below the Mediterranean, while its bed lies 1300 feet lower. This is, therefore, the deepest continental depression known on the globe.

Through the length of this singular trench runs the only important river in Palestine, the Jordan, which takes its rise on Mt. Hermon. After forming the lakes of Huleh and Tiberias, it flows on into the Dead Sea, where it ends without ever reaching the ocean. Tacitus describes this fact in his usual succinct style: "This Jordan never reaches the sea, but flows unchecked through two successive lakes [Huleh and Tiberias], to be absorbed in a third [the Dead Sea]" (Hist., V, 6).

The length of the Jordan from the confluence of its various sources to Lake Huleh is about 25 miles. The lake itself is from nine to fifteen feet deep and almost four miles wide. From Lake Huleh the Jordan makes a swift descent of about ten miles to form Lake Tiberias, called Gennesaret in ancient times. The latter, almost oval in shape, measures about seven and one-half miles across at its widest point and is thirteen miles long. From Lake Tiberias the Jordan proceeds about 68 miles to the Dead Sea; actually, its course is more than double this distance because the river bed is so tortuous. At first the average width of the river is about 80 feet, its depth from six to nine feet, and its banks are covered with wild and luxuriant vegetation. But about six miles from the Dead Sea, the vegetation grows scantier, the water becomes brackish, and the stream wider (231 feet) and shallower.

3. The Mediterranean coast, from the southern slopes of Lebanon to the promontory of Mt. Carmel, has a width of from one and one half to approximately four miles, and east of it rise the highlands of the interior. Except for Tyre in the north, which in ancient times was an island, this strip of coast line has only two mediocre natural harbors. Acre (Ptolemais) and Haifa, both in the neighborhood of Carmel. Haifa has recently been enlarged by the English. The lower part of the coast, from Carmel to below Gaza, is uniform and straight, its southern expanse attaining a width of twelve- and one-half miles. Covered with the sands of the Nile, this shore was for the ancients a *litus importuosum* since it has no harbors except the very inferior one at Jaffa.

Only Herod the Great's tenacity and wealth enabled him to build the excellent harbor at Caesarea, fully described by Flavius Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, I, 408-415), which today is an imposing heap of ruins. The shore from Carmel to Jaffa was the plain of Sharon, celebrated in the Bible for its loveliness. The stretch of coast south of Jaffa was, properly speaking, Philistia, the country of the Pelishtim (Philistines). This name was later extended to all of Palestine. The region west of the Jordan is divided geologically into two parts by the valley of Esdraelon which, from north of Carmel, proceeds diagonally toward the southeast. The territory to the north of this valley is Galilee, which is mountainous in the north and a little less so to the south. This was Jesus' native land and the cradle of Christianity, but in ancient Hebrew history it had little importance because the Hebrew population there was rather thin and too far away from the important centers of national life, which lay to the south. Below the valley of Esdraelon extend first Samaria and then Judea; both are hilly, falling off on the eastern side through stretches of desert land. All three regions — Galilee, Samaria, and Judea—are described by Flavius Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, III, 35-58) just as they were about the time of Jesus.

4. At that time, however, while Judea with its capital at Jerusalem formed the true citadel of Judaism, Samaria, to the north, presented an acute ethnical and religious contrast. The Samaritans were, in fact, descendants of foreign settlers who had been imported into that region by the Assyrians toward the end of the eighth century B.C., and had been gradually fused with the Israelite peasants left there. Their religion was at first substantially idolatrous with a mere flavoring of Yahwism; it was later purified of gross idolatries, and by the end of the fourth century B.C. the Samaritans had their own temple on Mount Garizim. For them, naturally, the center of Yahweh's legitimate worship was Garizim, as opposed to the Jewish temple in Jerusalem, and they considered that they were the only true descendants of the ancient Hebrew patriarchs, that they alone held the deposit of patriarchal religious faith. This caused constant and rabid hostilities between Jews and Samaritans, nourished by the fact that travel between Galilee to the north and Judea to the south had to cross Samaria. This enmity, widely attested by the ancient documents, is not dead even today among the poor remnants of the Samaritans still living at the foot of Mount Garizim.

The Transjordan region, generally hilly and in ancient times well irrigated and rich in forest lands, was never occupied completely by the Hebrews.

Before the advent of Hellenism, there had been numerous Aramaic settlements there, especially in the northern part; then Hellenic colonies firmly established the Greek element, represented for the most part, at the time of Jesus, by what was called the Decapolis.

This was a group of Hellenistic or Hellenized cities, perhaps united in a kind of federation. Their number varied in different periods but was approximately ten, hence the conventional name of the group. Of these cities, only Scythopolis was west of the Jordan; all the others were in Transjordan, and the most famous among them were Damascus to the north, Hippos on the eastern bank of Lake Tiberias, Gadara, Gerasa, Pella, Philadelphia, etc. Some of these cities had been subjugated by the Hasmonean Alexander Janneus, but Pompey freed them again about 63 B.C. Each of them was surrounded by a more or less large expanse of autonomous territory, and so they formed little isles of Hellenism in a territory largely inhabited by Jews and subject to Jewish monarchs.

5. Palestine is a subtropical region and has, practically speaking, only two seasons: the winter, or rainy season from November to April; and the dry, or summer season from May to October. Rains in summer are extremely rare while the average fall of winter rains almost everywhere exceeds 23 inches.

The temperature varies with the region. In the closed and sunken valley of the Jordan, it is always higher than elsewhere and sometimes approaches 122 degrees F. Along the Mediterranean coast the average temperature in winter is 54 degrees F., in the spring 64 degrees F., in summer 77 degrees F., and in the autumn 72 degrees F. In the hilly regions of the interior, it is somewhat lower.

Jerusalem, which is about 2428 feet above sea level, has an average annual temperature of about 61 degrees F.; the average in January is about 50 degrees F. and in August about 78 degrees F. The highest known temperatures there rarely reach 104 degrees F., but it is not rare for the lowest to fall below the freezing point.

Nazareth, which is about 484 feet above sea level, has an average temperature of 64 degrees F. throughout the year. The average in January is about 52 degrees F., and in August about 80 degrees F. The highest temperatures noted there often rise above 104 degrees F. but rarely fall below freezing.

Snowfalls are rare and light and occur for the most part in January; frost at night is also rare.

Frequent in spring and autumn are the hot winds of the east, the *sherqiyye* or *sirocco*, and the southeast, the khamsin or simoon; these winds, with their highly damaging effects on health and agriculture, were pictured by the Assyrians as horrible monsters. There do not seem to be any great differences between the climate of Palestine in ancient times and that of today. There are many differences, however, and all for the worse, in the fertility of the soil. The reasons for this decline lie in the general neglect of agriculture and the systematic process of deforestation that went on under the centuries-long Mohammedan domination. Here and there, however, traces of Palestine's ancient fertility still remain in and around Capharnaum, for example, and along the northwest shore of Lake Tiberias, the region which Flavius Josephus describes with so much and such merited admiration (*Wars of the Jews*, III, 516-521). In other places also, wherever farming and reforestation proceed scientifically, there reappears the old exuberance of the Promised Land of ancient times, described so lyrically as flowing with milk and honey.

## CHAPTER II: Herod the Great

6. JESUS, who was killed on the charge that he had proclaimed himself king of the Jews, was born under a king of the Jews who was by birth neither a king nor a Jew.

Herod the Great,<sup>1</sup> whose subject Jesus was, was not of Jewish blood. His mother Kypros was an Arab, his father Antipater an Idumaeon, and neither of them was of royal lineage. Thus, one of his near contemporaries rightly called Herod 4 an ordinary private citizen and an Idumaeon, that is a half-Jew” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV, 403). The little that did seem Jewish about him was nothing but a veneer which had been applied to his ancestors by violence. The Idumaeans, who had settled south of Judea, had remained pagan until about 110 B.C. when John Hyrcanus Judaized them by force, compelling them to accept circumcision. But though the Idumaeans were officially incorporated into the Jewish nation, the genuine Jews considered them an illegitimate people and despised them as a “turbulent and disorderly race, always prone to insurrection and joyful in tumults” (*Wars of the Jews*, IV, 231). For that matter, the behavior of the Idumaeans toward the citizens of Jerusalem during the war against Rome was so cruel that it could have been inspired only by an inveterate hatred.

The very name of Herod (from 'Hrwtdhz, “descendant of heroes”) shows how little of the Jewish spirit his father had absorbed when he gave his circumcised son a name out of Greek mythology. And the son, in truth, realized in more ways than one the omen his father invoked for him in the name. Herod was truly of heroic proportions in assiduous activity and tenacity, in sumptuous magnificence, and especially in cruelty and brutality. But all these “heroics” were rooted deep in a boundless ambition, in a real frenzy for power, which was the fundamental motive behind all his actions.

7. Though he came up from nothing and encountered enormous obstacles, he succeeded in building himself a throne at Jerusalem; in fact, he set it up on the ruins of another throne, the one the Machabees, the heroes of Jewish religion and nationalism, had built for their descendants, the Hasmoneans. This Jewish throne, already tottering from the intrigues of the Idumaeon Antipater, was pulled down once and for all by the craftiness and energy of his son, Herod. And the latter owed the success of his triumph over the Hasmoneans, the Jewish people, Cleopatra, and the numerous other

difficulties set in his way by chance and his station in life to the moral and material support he received from Rome.

Herod was always devotedly loyal to Rome because even in the East she was the strongest power; and among Rome's representatives he was always the devoted partisan of the strongest. His pragmatic politics were not concerned with abstract ideologies but with his own practical advantage, and this was identified with the strongest state and the strongest men in that state. At first, he took sides with Caesar, but without being a Caesarist, so much so that when the dictator was killed, he immediately sided with his murderer Cassius, but without being a republican. From Cassius he went over to the latter's enemy, Antony, and when he too was defeated, cast his lot with Antony's rival Octavian. But Herod never abandoned Octavian, because the latter became the all-powerful Augustus, that is, the undisputed representative of all-powerful Rome. Herod's Romanophile politics and the reason for his success may be summed up in just this: Rome meant for him the throne of Jerusalem, and so he stood always on the side of Rome and with the strongest of the Romans, not because Rome mattered to him at all but because his throne did.

At Rome, in the autumn of 40 B.C. and in the consulship of Domitius Calvinus and Asinius Pollio, he was proclaimed king, at least in name, by grace of Antony and Octavian. His first official act after that proclamation was to ascend the Capitoline Hill between Antony and Octavian to offer the sacrifice of thanksgiving to Jupiter Capitolinus according to Roman usage. This act betrays the true piety of the Idumaeen king of the Jews and is almost a foreshadowing of his subsequent policy toward religion throughout all his long reign. He must have gone up to the temple of Jupiter in Rome with the very same sentiments with which he later went up to the temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem; for him, personally, one God was as good as another. Deeply skeptical, he considered religion at the most a social phenomenon which politics must take into consideration.

8. And, astute politician that he was, he almost never offended the religious sensibilities of the Jews; in fact, he acquired great merit in their eyes because he completely rebuilt the Temple of Jerusalem and made it one of the most famous edifices in the Roman Empire §46). This undertaking, however, was motivated either by a desire to allay somewhat the resentment which his subjects felt toward him, or by that passion for large and sumptuous constructions which was then characteristic of those in power throughout the

Empire. Certain it is that any true feeling of Jewish piety was utterly foreign to his enterprise; and this is apparent also from the fact that he was at the same time erecting pagan temples in honor of Dea Roma and Divus Augustus in Samaria, Caesarea, Paneas, and elsewhere. Nor did he show any greater respect for the most revered persons in the Jewish religious system: he elected high priests at will, and he threw them out of office with the same dispatch that he lopped the heads off the influential Sanhedrists, Pharisees, and doctors of the Law whenever those heads gave evidence of thinking differently from the despotic monarch.

Herod never entered into purely religious questions, nor did he wish to do so; but he followed them attentively from without either because of their possible repercussions in the political field, or sometimes because of a vague feeling of superstition, then common throughout the Empire and all the more natural in one who had been educated on the fringe of Judaism. Thus, with the condescension typical of the skeptic who yields to social conventions, he did not refuse to observe such prescriptions of a religious nature as were not too burdensome to him. For example, in rebuilding the Temple he had the complicated regulations of the Hebrew Law obeyed to the letter, and, though it had been built at his expense, he never entered the innermost parts of the edifice because he was not a priest and therefore did not have the right to enter them. Besides, on almost all the coins he issued there are no images of living persons, out of respect for the Jewish law which forbade them. He even went so far as not to consent to the marriage between his sister Salome and the Arabian Syllus because the latter refused to be circumcised.

But these and other seeming expressions of Jewish piety were merely concessions made from purely practical considerations; they were not the result of inner conviction or devotion. Herod's court in Jerusalem was in reality a pagan court, which far surpassed many other Oriental courts in corruption and obscene frivolities. Its magnificence was maintained by the treasures of David's tomb in Jerusalem, among other things, and this Herod himself secretly entered by night in order to direct the business of plundering it, so slight was the veneration he felt for the venerable founder of the kingdom of Jerusalem.

The Jewish people, for the most part under the influence of the traditionalist Pharisees, could in no way relish such a sovereign, who was by birth an Idumaean and in practice a pagan. In addition, he had a very heavy hand in the matter of taxes, which went to pay for the sumptuousness of his

scandalous building program and the showy splendor of his depraved court. Herod knew very well that his subjects hated him and that they promptly rejoiced whenever some misfortune befell the royal household. But for this lack of affection from his subjects he substituted the consciousness of his own power, and he answered every manifestation of popular resentment by sharpening his sword.

9. And here we see Herod's true character, both as a man and as a ruler. His madness for power, which was, as we have said, the incentive behind all his actions, was wonderfully nourished by his unspeakable cruelty, in which he particularly realized the "heroism" announced in his name. Strictly accurate is the description of him given us by Josephus, who calls him "a cruel man toward all without distinction, dominated by his rage" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII, 191). Hence it is easy to imagine to what excesses of brutality such a man could transcend obsessed as he was by the thought of conspiracies and threats against his throne. Without the least exaggeration it can be said that Herod is one of the bloodiest men in all history, as we may well conclude from the following incomplete assortment of his exploits.

In 37 B.C., as soon as he had succeeded in conquering Jerusalem with the help of Roman legions, Herod put to death 45 adherents of his rival, the Hasmonean Antigonus, and many members of the Sanhedrin.

In 35 B.C., his brother-in-law Aristobulus, whom he himself had but recently appointed high priest (though only a boy of sixteen) and who was the brother of his favorite wife Mariamne, was drowned by his order in a pool in Jericho.

In 34 B.C., he had Joseph killed, who was both his uncle and his brother-in-law, having married Herod's sister Salome.

In 29 B.C., he committed his most tragic crime, one that recalls in many ways Othello's wife murder. He killed the Hasmonean Mariamne, his wife, with whom he was hopelessly in love, simply on the strength of calumnies contrived in court against her. As soon as the sentence was executed, Herod went almost mad with grief and ordered the palace servants to call his dead wife loudly by name as if she were still alive.

A few months later he also killed his mother-in-law, Alexandra, the dead Mariamne's mother.

Around 25 B.C., his brother-in-law Kostobar, the new husband of his sister Salome, was killed by Herod's order, and so were several members of the Hasmonean party.



His beloved Mariamne had given Herod several children, and these were his favorites because of his memory of their mother. Two of them, Alexander and Aristobulus, he sent to be educated in Rome where they were accorded a kindly welcome in the court of Augustus. But when they returned to Jerusalem, Herod killed them too, although Augustus did everything he could to save them. It was probably on this occasion that the witty emperor expressed (certainly in Greek) the opinion recorded by Macrobius (*Saturnal.*, II, 4, 11), that it was better to be Herod's pig (uz) than his son (io). For since he had been Judaized, he could not eat pork and therefore would not kill the pig, but he could and did kill his own sons.<sup>2</sup>

Along with Alexander and Aristobulus, Herod had the mob kill three hundred officials accused of siding with the two young men.

In 4 B.C., only five days before his death, he had another son killed, Antipater his first born, whom he had designated heir to the throne. He was so pleased with Antipater's death that although his physical condition was hopeless, he seemed to rally and improve.

As the end drew near, he decided to close his life with an act which was indeed a worthy summary of it. He foresaw that his death would occasion the liveliest jubilation among his subjects but he wanted very much to be escorted to his tomb with a profusion of tears. For that reason, perhaps, he summoned many illustrious Jews from all parts of his kingdom to Jericho, where he lay ill, and when they arrived, he had them confined in the circus, anxiously charging his servants to slaughter them there immediately after his death. Thus, the desired tears were guaranteed for his funeral, at least from the families of the murdered men. Some modern scholars have suspected the truth of this information, but the perfect consistency between the habitual "heroic" cruelty the man had shown throughout his life and this extraordinary "heroism" at the moment of his death would lead us to accept it as authentic.

Besides, only a short time before in near-by Bethlehem, the same Herod had ordered the slaughter of a number of infants under two years of age in whom he saw a menace to his throne (§256). This fact, which is also perfectly consistent with the man's character, is recounted only by St. Matthew (2:16), while Herod's biographer, Flavius Josephus, makes no mention of it. His silence, however, is easily explained: even if the biographer had found (which is not at all certain) some data in his sources concerning the massacre at Bethlehem, would he be likely to tarry over a heap of obscure victims, children

of poor shepherd folk, when the whole long life of his subject was strewn with much higher mounds of slain who were much more illustrious victims? Actually, the accounts of St. Matthew and Flavius Josephus supplement each other in so far as the several incidents are concerned, while they agree perfectly in the picture they present of Herod's character.

10. Lastly, we must consider Herod's exact political position with regard to Rome, or more accurately, his position with regard to Augustus, since after the battle of Actium (September 2, 31 B.C.) Rome and the empire were substantially Augustus. With regard to Rome, Herod's status was, juridically speaking, that of a "friendly and allied" king; practically speaking, with regard to Augustus, he was nothing but a lowly subordinate and a servile client. This attitude on his part was very agreeable to the emperor, a meticulous administrator who depended on the devoted co-operation of others; and it was a mode of behavior that was well repaid, for in the course of years it earned Herod various increases in territory and other favors from the arbiter of the empire.

Herod's kingdom was exempt from tribute to the empire and was not obliged to quarter Roman garrisons. The king enjoyed full rights of administration in judiciary and financial matters within his territory, and he also had his own army, composed for the most part of non-Jewish mercenaries, that is, Syrians, Thracians, Germans, and Gauls. The emperor could always use this army, however, when he needed it. In his relations with other states outside the empire, Herod was obliged to take his cue from Rome, and particularly was he not to wage war on anyone without the permission of the emperor. Still more limited was he from the point of view of dynasty. He possessed his throne only by virtue of a grant *ad personam* made to him by Augustus at Rhodes a few months after the victory of Actium, but he had no right to provide for its disposition after his own death, to assign it to any descendant, without the explicit approval of the emperor. Thus circumscribed, Herod was substantially a *fiduciary ad nutum* of Augustus, who could intervene in the affairs of his kingdom however and whenever he pleased. And, in fact, we find that around 7-6 B.C. Herod asked his subjects to swear the oath of allegiance to the Roman emperor; this request certainly followed upon orders received from Rome, for in those very years the same thing was being done in other provinces of the empire.

Herod did not fail to flatter his Roman master in a number of ways, naming after him or his relatives the cities created by his passion for building, like

Caesarea, Sebaste, and Aggrippeion, keeping him minutely informed of his own family affairs, and even awaiting the emperor's permission before murdering his own sons (Alexander, Aristobulus, Antipater). Augustus, for his part, generally treated Herod well but always with condescension and without being at all taken in by the adulation he offered him. With regard to Herod's political dependence particularly, the emperor was always unyielding, and the following episode shows the absolute lordship he meant to exercise over Herod and his kingdom.

About 8 B.C. Herod, annoyed by certain Bedouin forays along his frontiers, conducted a brief campaign against the Nabateans, who were the opposition when it continues: "But his citizens hated him; and they sent a delegation after him to say: We do not wish this man to be king over us" (*ibid.*, 19:14 — cf. §499).

Faced with this choice of contenders, the shrewd Augustus came to a decision that seemed contrary to Rome's direct advantage while it aimed at reconciling the claims of the rival princes. He completely rejected the request of the fifty Jewish delegates who were proposing annexation to the empire. On Archelaus he conferred the government of the territories assigned to him by his father without, however, granting him the title of king. For the moment he appointed him tetrarch only, allowing him to hope that he would later be proclaimed king if he rendered a good account of himself. To the other two heirs, Antipas and Philip, Augustus granted the respective territories assigned to them in the will along with the title of tetrarch. All this took place in the same year as Herod's death, 4 B.C.

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11. Subsequent events proved Augustus' view correct and his decision wise. Archelaus stood the test only a short time. His cruel and tyrannical

government did not earn him the expected title of king but complete loss of power. In A.D. 6 a new delegation, composed this time of Jews and Samaritans both, went to Rome to lay before the emperor their charges against the tetrarch. Augustus summoned the accused before him to plead his case, but not satisfied with his answers, he simply carried out his old plan, namely, he exiled Archelaus to Vienne in Gaul and annexed his territories to the empire.

The tetrarch Antipas, or Herod Antipas, lasted longer, but only to meet in the end the same fate as his brother Archelaus. He was about seventeen years old when he ascended to power in 4 B.C. and he kept his office until A.D. 40. He had probably been educated in Rome, and of all Herod's sons he best reflected his father's character so far as his domineering manner and love of display were concerned. Yet he had neither his father's industriousness nor his creative energy. Like his father, he, regard to Rome, or more accurately, his position with regard to Augustus, since after the battle of Actium (September 2, 31 B.C.) Rome and the empire were substantially Augustus. With regard to Rome, Herod's status was, juridically speaking, that of a "friendly and allied" king; practically speaking, with regard to Augustus, he was nothing but a lowly subordinate and a servile client. This attitude on his part was very agreeable to the emperor, a meticulous administrator who depended on the devoted cooperation of others; and it was a mode of behavior that was well repaid, for in the course of years it earned Herod various increases in territory and other favors from the arbiter of the empire.

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About 8 B.C. Herod, annoyed by certain Bedouin forays along his frontiers, conducted a brief campaign against the Nabateans, who were helping the raiders. Herod began the campaign with the approval of Sentius Saturninus, the Roman legate in Syria, but he did not inform Augustus in Rome beforehand or obtain the authorization he needed in order to make war. From a military point of view the episode was of minimum importance, but the irregularity in procedure was sufficient to kindle the most violent indignation on the part of Augustus when he had news of it. He wrote Herod a very stern letter, telling him among other things that "if in the past he had treated him as a friend, he would now treat him as a subject" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVI, 290). Nor was the emperor's indignation a temporary thing, for the delegation Herod sent in anxious haste to Rome to clear his name was not even received on the Palatine. Only later, after he had sent other missions to Rome, and because of a new and favorable set of circumstances, did Herod, who thought himself ruined, regain the favor of Augustus and settle back on his throne in peace once more.

12. After an illness lasting several months and attended by the cruelest suffering, Herod the Great died in Jericho at about seventy years of age, thirty-seven years after he had been proclaimed king in Rome. It was the year 750 a.u.c. and 4 B.C. The exact date is uncertain, but it was at the end of March or the beginning of April. His remains were transferred with solemn pomp to Herodium, the modern Jebel Fureidis ("mount of Paradise"), a hill on which Herod had built his tomb some time previously.

From the top of this hill, scarcely four miles distant to the northwest, could be seen the town of Bethlehem where Jesus had been born, two years before.

## CHAPTER III: Herod's Successors

### ARCHELAUS, ANTIPAS, PHILIP

13. AFTER Herod's death, the last of his three wills remained to be carried out. This provided for succession to the throne as follows: Archelaus, son of Herod and the Samaritan Malthace, was named heir to the throne with direct dominion over Judea, Samaria, and Idumaea; Antipas, Herod's other son by Malthace, was named tetrarch of Galilee and Perea; lastly, Philip, son of Herod and Cleopatra of Jerusalem, was named tetrarch of the northern regions, Trachonitis, Gaulanitis, Batanea, Auranitis (and Iturea).

The will, however, had first to be approved by Augustus. In addition, various persons were opposed to it and first among them was Antipas, who in the preceding will had been named, not tetrarch, but actual heir to the throne. Also opposed to it were many prominent Jews who were tired of the vexations inflicted by the dead Herod and foresaw worse to come at the hands of successors who were his kinsmen; hence they preferred to come under the direct rule of Rome.

First Archelaus and soon afterward his brother and rival, Antipas, set out for Rome, each to plead his own cause. Each of them, but Archelaus especially, hoped to win the necessary investiture from Augustus and return from far-off Rome with the actual power of king. It is to this curious journey to secure a kingdom that the famous gospel parable seems to refer: "A certain nobleman went into a far country, to obtain for himself a kingdom and then return" (*Luke* 19:12ff.).<sup>3</sup> But the Jews, who were generally hostile to the Herodian dynasty, were not idle either. When the several uprisings which successively broke out in Jerusalem had been quelled by Roman troops, they sent to Rome a delegation of fifty members to ask that the Herodian monarchy be suppressed and its territories incorporated into the province of Syria so that they might live in peace and in accordance with traditional Jewish customs under Rome's protection. The parable seems to be alluding also to this delegation of the opposition when it continues: "But his citizens hated him; and they sent a delegation after him to say: We do not wish this man to be king over us" (*ibid.*, 19:14 — cf. §499).

Faced with this choice of contenders, the shrewd Augustus came to a decision that seemed contrary to Rome's direct advantage while it aimed at reconciling the claims of the rival princes. He completely rejected the request of the fifty Jewish delegates who were proposing annexation to the empire.

On Archelaus he conferred the government of the territories assigned to him by his father without, however, granting him the title of king. For the moment he appointed him tetrarch only, allowing him to hope that he would later be proclaimed king if he rendered a good account of himself. To the other two heirs, Antipas and Philip, Augustus granted the respective territories assigned to them in the will along with the title of tetrarch. All this took place in the same year as Herod's death, 4 B.C.

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14. Subsequent events proved Augustus' view correct and his decision wise. Archelaus stood the test only a short time. His cruel and tyrannical government did not earn him the expected title of king but complete loss of power. In A.D. 6 a new delegation, composed this time of Jews and Samaritans both, went to Rome to lay before the emperor their charges against the tetrarch. Augustus summoned the accused before him to plead his case, but not satisfied with his answers, he simply carried out his old plan, namely, he exiled Archelaus to Vienne in Gaul and annexed his territories to the empire.

15. The tetrarch Antipas, or Herod Antipas, lasted longer, but only to meet in the end the same fate as his brother Archelaus. He was about seventeen years old when he ascended to power in 4 B.C. and he kept his office until A.D. 40. He had probably been educated in Rome, and of all Herod's sons he best reflected his father's character so far as his domineering manner and love of display were concerned. Yet he had neither his father's industriousness nor his creative energy. Like his father, he, too, flattered the emperor by dedicating to him or to members of his family the various constructions he erected in his own territories. In southern Perea, opposite Jericho, he completely rebuilt an old city, which he named after Augustus' wife Livia (later also called Julia, and so was the city). In Galilee he built an entire new city on the western shore of Lake Gennesaret and named it Tiberias after the new emperor. He also



strengthened and beautified Sepphoris in Galilee, near Nazareth, and gave it an official name commemorative of the Roman emperors, perhaps Caesarea, which later became Diocaesarea.

Antipas had little luck with Augustus, but he had a great deal with Tiberius, for when he discovered the suspicious and apprehensive new emperor's weakness, it seems he began to play the spy for him among the Roman magistrates in the Orient and faithfully sent information on to Rome. Of course, the magistrates had a cordial hatred for the informer (§26, §583), but to him the far-off Tiberius was much more-important than any of the near-by officials. This situation could continue as long as Tiberius remained emperor, but the end of Tiberius naturally marked the end of Antipas also.

The one who really dug Antipas' grave was a woman, the famous Herodias. Shortly before A.D. 28 Antipas went to Rome, probably in some connection with his office as secret informer. There he was the guest of a half-brother of his (also Herod's son) whom Josephus calls Herod while St. Mark (6:17) calls him Philip. This Herod Philip, living as a private citizen in Rome, was married to Herodias, who was also his niece for she was the daughter of Aristobulus, the son whom Herod the Great had killed. She was a most ambitious woman and could not resign herself to the retired and quiet life she was obliged to lead with her husband, Herod Philip. The arrival of the visitor Antipas confirmed an earlier plan of theirs, for this highly prominent man, who enjoyed the confidence of Tiberius, had already shown a decided tenderness for the lady. To be sure, there were several serious impediments to a definite union between them. In the first place, the visitor was no longer a boy; he must have been close to fifty, and besides he had a lawful wife, the daughter of Aretas IV, king of the Nabateans. Then the lady herself was married — for better or for worse, according to Jewish law — to one of her uncles, and there was no interpretation or cavil that would permit her to marry another uncle while her first husband was still living. But his passion and her ambition swept away all obstacles and they agreed that he would repudiate his wife as soon as he returned to his own territories. Then Herodias would abandon her old husband to fly to the new, who would be waiting for her on his throne with open arms. But Antipas' lawful wife got wind in Palestine of the arrangements made in Rome, and to avoid the humiliation of being repudiated, she managed to have her husband send her on some pretext or other to the sumptuous fortress of Machaerus, situated on the border between his territories and her father's. From there she fled to her father. With one

obstacle thus out of the way, Herodias came to Antipas from Rome, dragging after her the daughter she had had by her first husband, a certain Salome, who was only a little girl but who had learned in Rome to dance quite well.

17. From then on King Aretas thought of nothing but revenging the outrage offered his daughter, while Antipas' subjects did nothing but grumble indignant protests against this shameless violation of their national and religious laws. But though vigorous and widespread, the grumbling was secret only, for no one dared to brave the overweening arrogance of the ruler and especially the jealous rage of his adulterous and incestuous concubine. Only one person had the courage to do so and that was St. John the Baptist, whose authority among the people was Very great (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 116 ff.) and whom even Antipas regarded with a certain superstitious reverence. John was imprisoned in the Machaerus. This measure was taken either because of his outspoken rebuke of the court scandal, as we learn from the Gospels, or because of his prestige with the people which had aroused the suspicions of the court, as we learn from Josephus. But this does not exclude the possibility that the jealous Pharisees also had something to do with it (§292).

John remained in prison about ten months. This prolonged stay could not have been very agreeable to Herodias, who would have preferred to be rid immediately of her austere and unyielding censor.

Now that he had him in chains, however, Antipas was not disposed to stain his hands with John's blood, either because of the awe he personally felt for him or because of his fear that the populace might rise in rebellion against him at the news that the man they so venerated had been killed in this unjust and cowardly manner. But Herodias kept watching for the opportunity to accomplish her desire, and finally it came. Her little dancing daughter obtained for her the head of the prisoner, and when the adulterous mother was able to seize that head in her hands and finger it, she considered herself revenged and triumphant (§355).

Instead, this was the beginning of her downfall, for King Aretas was also watching his opportunity for revenge. In A.D. 36 a boundary dispute between the two monarchs led to war and Antipas was thoroughly defeated. Then the arrogant tetrarch humbly begged the distant Tiberius to help him, and the emperor, who greatly appreciated his spy in Galilee, ordered Vitellius, the Roman legate in Syria, to proceed against Aretas and to send the

presumptuous Arab to Rome, "alive and in bonds, or to kill him, and send him his head" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 115).

But Aretas was not John and Vitellius was not disposed to play the part of the dancing daughter. Vitellius, who had his own old grudges against Antipas for the reports he sent to Rome, set out on the expedition only halfheartedly and sought every excuse he could to drag it out. Fortune favored him, for when he arrived in Jerusalem with his army, he was met with the news that Tiberius had died (March 16, A.D. 37). Naturally that meant the end of his expedition; Aretas was not molested and Antipas' defeat went unavenged.

18. The final downfall of the tetrarch came two years later and was directly caused by Herodias. The feverish woman went mad with envy when in A.D. 38 her brother, Herod Agrippa I, appeared in Palestine. Until a few months before he had been a debt-ridden adventurer who was also familiar with the feel of Roman chains; but after the election of his friend Gaius Caligula, he had acquired an astonishing fortune in Rome. Besides showering all kinds of favors on him, Caligula had also made him a king, granting him the territories which bounded Antipas' lands on the north. And now the powerful friend of the new emperor was coming to take possession of his domains. When she saw him risen to such heights, Herodias could not help but compare him with her Antipas, who, after so many years of busy servile activity on behalf of distant Rome, still had the lowly rank of simple tetrarch, appreciated so little that his enemies could defeat him while Rome neglected to come to his aid. Undoubtedly to win such fortune as Agrippa had, it was necessary to present oneself as he had done in the capital of the empire and there fight and busy oneself personally for one's own interests. Once convinced of this, the frantic woman insisted until she persuaded the reluctant Antipas to go to Rome to obtain the title of king and other eventual favors.

Accompanied by Herodias, Antipas appeared before Caligula at Baia. But Agrippa, suspicious of the two travelers, sent one of his freedmen after them with letters which, it seems, calumniated Antipas. When he unexpectedly found himself facing a charge of treason instead of the hoped-for proclamation of his kingship, Antipas was unable to give any clear account of himself. Caligula, therefore, judged him guilty, exiled him to Lyons in Gaul and assigned the territories of his tetrarchate to his accuser Agrippa. Herodias, whose ambition had caused the catastrophe, voluntarily followed the deposed tetrarch into exile, although, since she was the sister of his friend Agrippa,

Caligula had left her complete liberty and the full enjoyment of her possessions. This happened between A.D. 39 and 40.

19. The third of Herod the Great's immediate heirs, the tetrarch Philip, does not figure directly in the story of Jesus. He governed his territories until his death, A.D. in 34, and he seems to have been a mild and even-tempered prince. But at one time he too must have suffered a slight softening of the brain, for in his old age he married the dancer Salome, daughter of Herodias, who was his grandniece and at least thirty years his junior.

He completely rebuilt Paneas, near the headwaters of the Jordan, and named it Caesarea in honor of Augustus; but it was commonly called Caesarea Philippi to distinguish it from the Caesarea on the seacoast which had been built by Herod the Great. The older name of Paneas (today Banias) derived from a grotto near the headwaters which was consecrated to the god Pan. But in his total reconstruction of the city, Philip built near the grotto a magnificent marble temple which was dedicated to Augustus. Rising impressively from the top of a majestic rock, it was the first thing to attract the gaze of those approaching the city (§396).

On the northern shore of Lake Gennesaret, a little east of where the Jordan enters it, Philip completely rebuilt the town of Bethsaida also, and named it Julia in honor of Augustus' daughter.

## CHAPTER IV: The Roman Procurators

### PONTIUS PILATE

20. WHEN the tetrarch Archelaus was deposed and exiled, Augustus annexed to the empire the territories of his tetrarchate, namely Judea, Samaria, and Idumaea. Now that a convenient opportunity had presented itself, he thus satisfied the desire of the Jewish delegation that had gone especially to Rome ten years before to ask him to annex Palestine (§13).

When a region entered under the direct jurisdiction of Rome, it was either made into a province or incorporated into one of the already existing provinces. In 27 B.C. Augustus had divided the provinces between himself and the senate. Those on the frontier, which were less secure and heavily garrisoned, he kept himself, and those in the interior, which were quiet and had only small garrisons, he left to the senate. Hence the distinction between senatorial and imperial provinces. The former were governed as before by proconsuls (*legati pro console*) appointed usually for one year. Augustus acted as general proconsul for all the imperial provinces, but he governed them through his *legati Augusti pro praetore*, whom he appointed himself. The *legatus* of the province (hgemwn) was always of senatorial rank. To some provinces, however, which required particularly delicate handling (like Egypt) Augustus did not send a *legatus* but a *praefectus*. To other regions, either recently annexed or presenting their own special difficulties, he sent a procurator, who was of equestrian rank. Originally, the office of procurator (epitropoz) had been a fiscal one and existed in the senatorial provinces as well; practically speaking, and especially after Augustus, the title of procurator supplanted that of *praefectus* in the more recently annexed provinces (with the exception of Egypt).

Archelaus' territories were annexed to Syria, which lay to the north of them and was among the most important of the imperial provinces because of its geographical position. It was not a complete annexation, however; that is, a procurator of equestrian rank was sent into the new territories to be their immediate and ordinary governor, but his office was superintended by the *legatus* to Syria, who could intervene in the procurator's territories in more serious or important matters. Hence the arrangement was rather a subordination of powers. The fact that the Jews were notoriously hard to govern had induced the prudent Augustus to arrange this scale of authority, so

that the superior jurisdiction of the near-by legate might function as an aid and corrective for the ordinary jurisdiction of the procurator.

21. The Roman procurator of Judea usually lived in Caesarea-by-the- sea, the sumptuous city recently built by Herod the Great and the only one having a harbor. Tacitus (Hist., II, 79) rightly called it the political capital of Judea. The procurator often went to Jerusalem, the national and religious capital, especially for the feasts (e.g., the Pasch), since that city was a better center for surveillance. The palaces of Herod at Caesarea and Jerusalem respectively served as *praetoria*, as the procurator's residence was called, but in Jerusalem he also used the strong and comfortable fortress Antonia north of the Temple (§49) for conducting public business. The military garrison of Jerusalem was quartered in the Antonia.

The procurator was the military commander of the region, but he did not have any Roman legions under him; these were composed of *cives romani* and were stationed in the province of Syria. His soldiers were auxiliary troops recruited usually from among the Samaritans, Syrians, and Greeks, since the Jews still enjoyed the old privilege of exemption from military service. These troops were generally divided into "cohorts" of infantry and "wings" of cavalry. Five "cohorts" and one "wing," it seems, composed the garrison of Judea, a force totaling a little more than three thousand men. One cohort was always stationed in Jerusalem.

As head of the government the procurator had charge of levying taxes and collecting the various revenues. The taxes, real estate, personal or income, for which the region was liable as a tributary to Augustus, were paid into the *fiscus* or imperial treasury (the taxes from the senatorial provinces went into the *aerarium*, or treasury of the senate). To collect these taxes the procurator used government agents who were in turn assisted by the local authorities. The revenues included various types of taxes such as customs, tolls, the rental from public buildings, etc. Their collection was farmed out, as in the rest of the empire, to rich contractors — the *publicani* or *telwnai* — who paid the procurator a fixed sum which they then set out to recover by collecting appropriate taxes. The agents subordinate to these general tax-farmers were the *exactores* or *portitores*.

It is not necessary to mention how much the people hated all of them, *publicani* and *exactores* alike, or how much oppression and extortion resulted from the system, especially if the tax-farmers subleased their contracts as they

often did. The whole weight of this complicated trafficking ultimately bore down upon the taxpayer.

22. As administrator of justice, the procurator had his own tribunal, in which he exercised the *jus gladii*, the power to pronounce the death sentence. Those who enjoyed Roman citizenship could appeal from his court to that of the emperor in Rome, but no one else had any right of appeal. For ordinary cases, however, there were still the local tribunals of the nation, and they continued to function freely in Judea. First among them was that of the Sanhedrin in Jerusalem (§57. ff.). It had also retained its legislative authority (over members of the nation) in matters of religion and to a certain extent in civic matters and taxation, but it had been deprived of the right to pass a death sentence (§59).

Under the procurators, the old national order of Judaism had been substantially preserved. The real head of the nation remained always the high priest. Actually, his election and removal from office depended on the procurator and the legate to Syria, but they consulted with the most important sacerdotal families until, in A.D. 50, they yielded these rights also to the princes of the Herodian dynasty. After Judea's annexation to the empire the procurator stood at the high priest's elbow to superintend his politics and represent the imperial exchequer.

In religious matters, the Roman authorities, true to their ancient tradition, never deviated from the canon of absolute respect not only toward the institutions of the nation, but often toward its prejudices and eccentricities as well. Sometimes, it is true, individual magistrates were responsible for more or less serious exceptions to this rule, but they soon atoned for their imprudences by other actions thoroughly to the contrary. The Romans even tried in certain instances to take part in the traditional customs in order to show their sympathy as well as respect for them. The imperial family in Rome, for example, more than once sent offerings for the Temple in Jerusalem, and Augustus asked that an ox and two lambs be sacrificed daily "for Caesar and for the Roman people (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, II, 197), he himself standing the expense so far as we know (cf. Philo, Legat. ad Caium, 23, 40).

23. Many were the privileges Rome granted the Jews or allowed them to keep. Out of respect for the Sabbath rest, they were exempt from military service and could not be called into court on that day. Out of respect for the Jewish law which forbade images of all living beings, the Roman soldiers

entering the garrison in Jerusalem had orders not to take with them the ensigns bearing the image of the emperor. For the same reason Roman money coined in Judea (usually of bronze) did not bear the emperor's image but simply his name together with symbols acceptable to Judaism. Gold and silver coins bearing the objectionable image were to be found in Judea, it is true, but they had been issued elsewhere.

The worship of the emperor was not imposed on Judea either, although in the other provinces of the empire it was a fundamental rule of government. The only one who tried to abuse this privilege was the lunatic emperor Caligula when, in A.D. 40, he took it into his head to erect his own statue in the Temple of Jerusalem, but his project failed, thanks to the firmness of the Jews and the prudence of Petronius, the legate to Syria.

Finally, Judea as governed by the Roman procurators was in no way worse off than Judea governed by Herod the Great or even by some of his Hasmonean predecessors. Naturally much depended on the particular good sense and integrity of the individual procurators; and here, it is true, we find numerous and serious deficiencies especially in the years immediately preceding the war and catastrophe of A.D. 70 when, to govern an increasingly intolerant and frenzied people, Rome sent out increasingly venal and brutal procurators.

24. Of the first procurators of Judea we know little or nothing which has any direct bearing on the story of Jesus. The first was Coponius, who came into office in A.D. 6, that is, as soon as Archelaus was deposed. Upon his arrival he and the legate to Syria, Sulpicius Quirinius, had the census taken (§183 ff.) in the newly annexed territory, for Roman policy considered a regular census of persons and property the necessary basis of future administration. Despite serious difficulties the census was completed. Coponius remained in office three years (A.D. 6-9) and so did his successors, Marcus Ambivius (or Ambibulus, A.D. 9-12) and Annius Rufus (A.D. 12-15), who was the last appointed by Augustus.

The first procurator appointed by Tiberius was Valerius Gratus (A.D. 15-26). From the beginning he apparently had trouble finding a high priest who would cooperate with him since he immediately deposed the one he found in office, that is, Ananus (Annas), and in four years provided him with four successors, Ishmael, Eleazar, Simon, and Joseph called Qayapha (Caiphas). With the latter



it seems he did get along. Valerius Gratus was succeeded by Pontius Pilate in A.D. 26.

25. Philo (*Legat. ad Caium*, 38), Flavius Josephus, and the Gospels all mention Pilate, and the very least all three sources tell us is that he was a cantankerous and stubborn man. King Herod Agrippa I, who knew several things about him from personal experience, describes him as venal, violent, extortionate, coercive, and tyrannical in government (in Philo, *ibid.*). It may be that the Jewish king's accusations are exaggerated, but in any case, it is certain that Pilate was not a successful procurator even where Rome's best interests were concerned. He had a cordial contempt for his subjects and did nothing to win their hearts; instead, he let slip no opportunity to provoke and offend them. He not only hated them but he felt a compelling need to show them his hatred. If it had depended on him alone, he 'Would have gladly sent all of them to work in the mines or at convict labor. But the emperor of Rome stood in his way, and so did the legate to Syria, who superintended everything and made his reports to Rome, and so the equestrian Pontius Pilate had to restrain himself and set some limit on the expression of his ill will. Even this servile fear of the emperor, however, was counteracted by the fact that as early as A.D. 19 Tiberius, having driven the Jews out of Rome, seemed to have embarked on a period of hostility toward Judaism in general, and it was precisely during this period that Pilate was sent to govern Judea. Hence, he might well believe, especially at first, that his hatred for the people he governed was an opportune form of adulation since it imitated the example set by the emperor in Italy.

26. It was probably in the beginning of his procuratorship that Pilate, coupling his adulation of the emperor with his contempt for the Jews, ordered the soldiers who were going from Caesarea to garrison Jerusalem to carry with them into the city for the first time the standards bearing the emperor's image. He shrewdly commanded them to do this by night, however, in order not to provoke any resistance and to present the city with the accomplished fact. The next day many Jews rushed to Caesarea, completely dismayed by so great a profanation, and for five consecutive days and nights they stayed there beseeching the procurator to remove the ensigns from the holy city. Pilate refused. In fact, on the sixth day, thoroughly annoyed by their insistence, he had his troops surround them at the public audience and threatened to kill them if they did not go home immediately. But here those magnificent traditionalists conquered the cynical Roman. When they saw they were

surrounded by soldiers, they threw themselves to the ground, bared their necks and declared they were ready to be slain rather than renounce their principles. Pilate, who had not quite expected this turn of affairs, gave in and had the standards removed.

Later there was the question of the aqueduct. To furnish Jerusalem with an adequate water supply, since it needed it greatly<sup>5</sup> especially for the Temple, Pilate decided to build an aqueduct that would carry water from the great reservoirs situated southeast of Bethlehem (the modern "Solomons Pools") and he appropriated several funds of the Temple treasury to finance the undertaking. This use of consecrated money naturally provoked riots and demonstrations. Pilate then scattered among the rioters many of his own soldiers disguised as Jews, and at a given moment they whipped out the clubs they had hidden on their persons and proceeded to belabor the mob, leaving many dead and injured in the street.

Next the belligerent procurator again tried something similar to the episode of the military standards. He hung certain gilt shields bearing the emperor's name on the outside of Herod's palace in Jerusalem. The incident — recounted only by Philo — has been considered a variation of the preceding affair of the ensigns, but the suspicion does not seem well founded both because of Pilate's vindictive nature and because this new attempt must have taken place much later than the other. This time the delegation sent to Pilate, which included also four sons of Herod the Great, did not succeed in having the shields removed. Then the Jews appealed to Tiberius himself, and the emperor sent orders to transfer the disputed shields to the temple of Augustus in Caesarea. Tiberius' compliance would suggest that this incident took place after the death of Sejanus (A.D. 31), who had been his all-powerful minister and a great enemy of the Jews.

Completely incidental is the information in the Gospels (*Luke* 13:1) that Pilate had certain Galileans (and therefore subjects of Herod Antipas) killed while they were offering sacrifices in the Temple of Jerusalem. We possess no details concerning the matter. We may, however, suspect that the hostility between Pilate and Antipas, attested by the Gospels (*Luke* 23:12), was partially motivated by this slaughter of Antipas' subjects. Another reason for it was probably the part Antipas played as spy for Tiberius among the Roman magistrates (§15).

27. In the end Pilate fell victim to his own method of governing. In A.D. 35 a false prophet, who had acquired a great reputation in Samaria, promised to show his followers the sacred vessels of Moses' time, which were believed to be hidden in Mount Garizim near Samaria. But on the appointed day Pilate ordered his soldiers to occupy the summit of the Mount. He wanted in fact to prevent the people from gathering, not so much because he attached any importance to the empty promise of the false prophet, but rather because he knew that the Samaritans were tired of the vexations he inflicted on them as procurator and he suspected them of the intention to revolt. When a numerous multitude had gathered anyway, the soldiers attacked them. Many Samaritans were killed and many more taken prisoner, and the most prominent of these Pilate put to death. The Samaritan community formally accused him of this insane massacre before Vitellius, who was legate to Syria and endowed with full powers in the Orient. Because the Samaritans were noted for their loyalty to Rome, he hastily accepted their charge, deposed Pilate without further ado, and sent him to Rome to answer for his actions before the emperor. It was the end of the year A.D. 36.

When Pilate arrived in Rome, he found that Tiberius had died (March 16, A.D. 37). Just what end finally overtook the man who condemned Jesus to death, history does not know. Folklore and legend have undertaken to fill the gap, however, attributing to him marvelous adventures in this world and the next, and consigning him sometimes to the bottom of hell and sometimes to paradise as an actual saint.

## CHAPTER V: Sadducees, Pharisees, Scribes, and Other Jewish Groups

28. AT THE time of Jesus, the Sadducees and the Pharisees constituted the two principal factions of the Jewish people. They were not "sects," however, in the strict sense of the word, for they were not distinct from the moral structure of the nation; nor were they religious confraternities like the Essenes (§44) although their fundamental principles were religious. Neither was their outstanding characteristic any given political position as in the case of the Herodians (§45) although they were extremely important even in the political and social field. Rather they represented two currents of thought or tendencies which, though completely opposed to each other, were both based on sacred principles of the Jewish nation. If we examine them together, the very contrast between them will help to define them more precisely.

It is generally believed that the Pharisees were the conservatives and the Sadducees the liberals, more given to innovations. This may have been true in actual practice, but from the juridical-religious point of view the designation should be reversed, for the Sadducees claimed that they were the ones who had preserved the true moral heritage of Judaism and they rejected as innovations the particular tenets of the Pharisees.

In reality the two currents stemmed from the different attitudes the various classes in the nation assumed toward Hellenism when it began to conflict with Judaism, that is, from the time of the Machabees (167 B.C.) on.

29. The revolt of the Machabees, directed against the Hellenizing policy of the Seleucid kings, was supported particularly by people of the lower classes, heartily averse to all foreign institutions, who called themselves the Hasidim (in Hebrew, "pious"). On the other hand, within the nation itself there were a number of other Jews, dazzled by the splendor of this foreign culture, who viewed Hellenism with a favorable eye, and these belonged principally to the wealthy and the sacerdotal classes. When the national-religious insurrection triumphed, the aristocrats within the Jewish nation who favored Hellenism disappeared or kept silent. Shortly afterward, however, when the national dynasty of the Hasmoneans, descendants of the Machabees, had been established, the two currents emerged once more although their relative positions had somewhat changed; that is, the very Hasmonean sovereigns who owed their throne to the plebeian Hasidim began to oppose them and to draw for support on the sacerdotal and aristocratic classes instead.

The reason for the change is clear. The Hellenic world was pressing in so closely on the reconstituted Jewish state that the governing Hasmoneans could not in actual practice avoid all political relations with it, nor could they prevent its pagan culture from seeping in varied and numerous ways into their own territories. To the Hasidim these dealings with and infiltrations! of Hellenic culture seemed political defeat and above all religious apostasy; hence they were gradually alienated from the Hasmoneans they once had favored and became their enemies.

Once they joined the opposition, they called themselves “the Separated,” in Hebrew *Perushim*, in Aramaic *Perishayya*, whence Pharisees. Their adversaries, the majority of whom were of sacerdotal rank, called themselves Sadducees from the name of *Sadoq*, the ancient founder of an illustrious sacerdotal family.

30. But from whom or what did the Pharisees consider themselves “separated”? The criterion of the separation was above all a national and religious one and only as a consequence civil and political. In other words, they kept aloof from all that was not Jewish and which, for that very reason, was also irreligious and impure, since Judaism, religion, and legal purity were, practically speaking, inseparable concepts. But here arose their conflict with the Sadducees, which turned out to be a doctrinal one as well, namely, what was the true fundamental norm of Judaism? What was the supreme and absolute law which was to govern the chosen nation?

The Sadducees answered that it was the Torah, that is, the “Law” par excellence, the “written Law” which Moses had given the nation as its one and fundamental law. The Pharisees, on the other hand, replied that the Torah, the “written Law,” was only a part and not even the principal part of their national religious constitution; there existed in addition the more extensive “oral Law,” composed of the innumerable precepts of tradition” (*paradosiz*).

An immense amount of material went to form this oral Law. Besides narrative and other elements (*haggadah*), it included a whole elaborate system of precepts (*halakah*) which covered the most varied activities of civil and religious life, from complicated rules for the liturgical sacrifices to precepts for washing dishes before meals, from the detailed procedure of the public courts to the question whether or not it was lawful to eat fruit that had dropped from a tree on the Sabbath.

This whole unwieldy mass of traditional beliefs and customs almost never had any true connection with the written Torah; but the Pharisees frequently discovered some such connection by subjecting the text of the Torah to arbitrary interpretation. And when they did not resort to this expedient, they appealed to their own basic and cherished principle that God on Sinai had given Moses the written Law, containing only six hundred and thirteen precepts, and besides that the oral Law, which was much more extensive and no less binding.

31. As a matter of fact, this oral Law was the more binding. We find that with the passing of time, as the doctors of the Law, or Scribes, gradually worked the vast subject matter of tradition into a system, it came to assume a practical, if not theoretical, importance greater than that of the written Torah. In the Talmud, which is substantially a codification of Jewish tradition, there are sayings like these: "Greater weight have the words of the Scribes than the words of the Torah"; or, in other words, "it is a worse thing to oppose the words of the Scribes than the words of the Torah" (*Sanhedrin*, XI, 3); in fact, "the words of the Torah contain things which are prohibited and things which are permitted, important precepts and unimportant precepts; but the words of the Scribes are all important" (*Berakoth*, pal., I, 3 b).

Once having established this principle as basic, it is clear that the Pharisees were within their rights and could make as many laws as they pleased, drawing all their decisions from their oral Law. But it was precisely this principle which the Sadducees rejected. They recognized no law but the written Law, the Torah, and refused absolutely to accept the oral Law and the "tradition" of the Pharisees. These things, the Sadducees said, were all innovations, all distortions of the simple, pristine Hebrew spirit. They, the Sadducees, were the faithful guardians of that spirit, the true "conservatives," and therefore they opposed the arbitrary and self-interested sophisms put forth by these modernist Pharisees.

The Sadducees' answer was unquestionably a clever one, especially since with their seeming conservatism they legally avoided the heavy burdens (*Matt.* 23:4) imposed by the Pharisees while at the same time the door was left open for an understanding with Hellenism and Graeco- Roman culture. Hence the Sadducees drew their support from the nobility and governing classes, which were necessarily obliged to maintain relations with the non-Jewish world. The Pharisees, on the other hand, drew their support from the people, who were hostile to all that was foreign and deeply attached to those

traditional customs from which the Pharisees derived their oral Law. Hence the paradox: the Sadducees were conservative about the Law but laxist in practice, while the Pharisees seemed innovators so far as the written Torah was concerned but their innovations were meant to be a safeguard and protection of the old.

32. The two currents of thought, Pharisee and Sadducee, appear sharply defined and in conflict as early as the time of the first Hasmonean, John Hyrcanus (134-104 B.C.), son of Simon, the last of the Machabees but nevertheless openly hostile to the Pharisees. With Alexander Janneus this hostility became furious enmity and developed into a war between the king and the Pharisees, which lasted six years and took a toll of fifty thousand victims (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, 376). In the reign of Salome Alexandra (76-67 B.C.), however, the Pharisees enjoyed their golden age, for the queen 'let the Pharisees do all things and commanded also that the people obey them ... she therefore had the name of queen, but the Pharisees hadj the power" (*ibid.*, 408). There followed, of course, the intemperances of victory. The defeated Sadducees, who had been until then the majority party in the council of the great Sanhedrin, were now reduced to a slender minority. Former adversaries of the Pharisees were put to death or took the road to exile. Things went so far that "the whole country was at peace excepting the Pharisees" (*ibid.*, 410), and from this time on Judaism bore ever more and more the imprint of the Pharisaic doctrines.

We have somewhat of a reaction from the Sadducees when they support Aristobulus II against his rival and brother, Hyrcanus II, who was favored by the Pharisees. But after that the populace in general became the almost exclusive dominion of the Pharisees, who counted some followers also among the lower clergy. Thus, in the last years before A.D. 70 the authority of the Sadducees was restricted to the Temple and to the great sacerdotal or wealthy families centering about it.

33. After the catastrophe of A.D. 70 the Sadducees disappeared from history, and later Judaism, completely dominated by the Pharisees, naturally preserved the worst possible record of them. This is the judgment passed at the end of the first century A.D. on the great priestly families which had been the most famous in the years immediately preceding the disaster:

"Woe to me from the house of Boethus,  
woe to me from their goad!

Woe to me from the house of Cantharos,  
    woe to me from their quills!<sup>4</sup>  
Woe to me from the house of Annas,  
    woe to me from their hiss.<sup>5</sup>  
Woe to me from the house of Ishmael, son of Phiabi,  
    woe to me from their fist!  
High priests are they,  
    and treasurers their sons,  
Magistrates of the Temple are their fathers-in-law,  
    and their slaves come with clubs to beat us!"

(Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6)

This document (Tosephta, *Menahoth*, XIII, 21; Pesahim, 57 a, Bar.) is not the only one of its kind among the rabbinic writings. Flavius Josephus also records acts of violence and plunder committed by the high priests against the lower clergy (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 179-181).

34. As for the doctrines of the two groups, this is the account the same Josephus, their earliest historian, gives of them: "the Pharisees are those who are esteemed most skillful in the exact interpretation of their laws and constitute the principal sect. These ascribe all to Fate (eimarmemh) and to God, and [yet allow that] to do what is right or the contrary is principally in the power of men, although Fate does co-operate in every action; [they say that] all souls are incorruptible; . . . but the souls of bad men are subject to eternal punishment. But the Sadducees are those that compose the second order, and take away Fate entirely, and they suppose that God is not only not involved in the doing of evil, but does not even witness it; and they say that to do what is good or what is evil is at mens own choice, and that the one or the other belongs so to everyone, that each may act as he pleases. They also take away belief in the immortal duration of the soul, in punishments in the nether world, and in rewards. Moreover, the Pharisees are friendly to one another, and promote concord in the community. But the behavior of the Sadducees even toward each other is rather rude; and their dealings with their own kind are as discourteous as if they had to do with aliens" (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 162-166).<sup>6</sup>

The results of the principal difference between Sadducees and Pharisees are evident in these two sets of doctrines. The former accepted only the written Law, and since they did not find in it any clearly formulated doctrine



concerning the resurrection and the afterlife, they rejected both these tenets. According to Acts 23:8, they did not accept the existence of angels or of spirits. As for the Fate (*eimarmemh*) which the Sadducees also denied according to Josephus, it is rather to be understood as Providence or Divine Grace. Practically speaking, the Sadducean tenets resembled Epicurean philosophy and Pelagian theology. The “rudeness” attributed to them by the historian must have been the outgrowth of their aristocratic arrogance. It is also said that in passing judgment in the courts, they were most severe (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XK, 199, cf. XIII, 249, 297), while the Pharisees inclined to leniency.

35. The Pharisees drew from “tradition” the doctrines which the Sadducees rejected. And since the study of the Law, especially of the oral Law, was the most binding obligation and the noblest pursuit for every Jew, they dedicated themselves to it completely. It was said among other things that “the study of the Torah is greater than building the Temple” (*Megillah*, 16 b), that it is greater, in fact, than “honoring one’s father and mother” (*ibid.*); that “man must not leave the house of study [of the Law] and draw back from the words of the Torah even at the hour of death” (*Shabbath*, 83 b); besides, “the Torah is greater than the priesthood or royalty, because for royalty there are thirty requisites and for the priesthood twenty-four, but the Torah is won with forty-eight” — and there follows an enumeration of the forty-eight requisites (*Pirke Aboth*, VI, 5-6). Nor are we to believe that these norms existed on paper only, for we have numerous examples of Pharisees who disregarded all other occupations to dedicate their whole lives to the study of the Law, though they perhaps worked a few hours daily at some private trade in order to earn a living. These students of the Law were very conscious of their greatness. In fact, the Law was the armory from which every norm for public and private, religious and civil life was to be drawn. Hence, they, the custodians of this armory, were more important than the “priesthood and royalty.” In a nation in which the people as a whole accepted the theocratic ideal without reservation such reasoning was perfectly logical. And that is why the Pharisees were aware that their strength depended not on the aristocracy, the high-priesthood, or the court, but on the great body of common people.

36. The Pharisaic study of the Law hinged principally on three main questions, namely, the Sabbath rest (§70), payment of the tithe, and ritual purity (§72); but numerous other questions also were the object of long study and research. Their method was to acquire first a knowledge of the maxims

and opinions already deduced from tradition, and second to study their extensive application and subsequent development. The Talmud, which fixed in writing what for centuries the doctors of the Law had been handing down from memory, is in large part nothing but a collection of such maxims (§87).

Evident in such a method was the danger of formalism and casuistry, crammed with subtleties but devoid of life, and generally the Pharisees fell into the danger. If we project ourselves back into the atmosphere of the time, then our surprise is not too great at finding a treatise of the Talmud taking its name from the *Nests* of birds, another from *Utensils*, another from the *Stalks* of plants, and others from less clean or seemly subjects (§72). We are more apt to ask instead what spiritual framework supported this vast legal machinery which seems to be hanging in mid-air.

Actually, the framework was there; it was the residue still left in the heart of the nation from the preaching of the ancient prophets. Characterized by the most noble morality and profound piety, this teaching had reverberated over the people across the centuries, and even now its echoes reached them through the sacred Scriptures read in the synagogues. But too little attention was paid to its spiritual significance and too much legal bric-a-brac was being carved from the matter of its application. The stream of divine inspiration ended in the stagnant pool of human casuistry: the “broken cisterns that can hold no water” were being preferred to the “stream of living water,” as Jeremias had said so long ago (2:13); and he had cried out in reproach (8:8):

“How do you say: We are wise,  
and the law of the Lord is with us?  
Indeed the lying pen of the scribes  
hath wrought falsehood.”

37. It would be untrue and unjust to say that the whole elaboration of the Law accomplished by the Pharisees was false, but it certainly contained much that was trivial. There were some truly precious pearls, the heritage of the spiritual teaching of the prophets, to be found in that sea of useless and pedantic commentary; but the disparity was far too great between the breadth of the sea and the scarcity of the pearls, between the top-heavy legal machinery and the slender spiritual framework on which it rose. The useful was drowned in so much that was useless. Undoubtedly sublime, for instance, is the maxim attributed to the famous Hillel, who preceded Jesus by a few years and who, when a pagan asked him to teach him the whole Law in the

short time, he could remain standing on one foot, answered: "What is unwelcome to you, do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Law; the rest is merely commentary. Go and learn" (Shabbath, 31 a). But the fact remains that the "commentary," here rightly put in second place, actually took first place and caused the Law itself to be forgotten.<sup>7</sup>

Still worse, the commentary sometimes contradicted the Law. We know that Jesus on one occasion rebuked the Pharisees, saying, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God for your tradition?" (*Matt.* 15:3-6; *Mark* 7:9.) Then proceeding from that particular case to their general custom, he added, "and many other such like things (*paromoia toiauta*) you do" (*Mark* 7:13). Proof of these transgressions is readily found in the ancient rabbinic writings, but it is significant that precisely with regard to the study of the Law there should exist a maxim such as this: "A pagan who studies the Torah is worthy of death" (*Sanhedrin*, 59 a), a maxim derived from neither the spirit nor the letter of the Law, but rather from that jealous nationalism which the Pharisees had come to regard as part of their "tradition."

38. Even with respect to the actual conduct of the Pharisees it is impossible to give any judgment that would be valid for all of them. Besides truly outstanding masters like Hillel, Gamaliel the Elder (*Acts* 5:34 ff.), who taught St. Paul (*ibid.*, 22:3), and others, there were not a few sincere and honest teachers even among the more obscure. On the Christian side, we find Jesus on friendly terms with Pharisees like Simon, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea; and even St. Paul, while declaring the Hebrew Law abolished, affirms that he is "a Hebrew of the Hebrews; according to the law, a Pharisee...." (*Phil.* 3:5). On the other hand, the sternest invectives Jesus uttered are directed against the Pharisees and not the Sadducees, just as among the former he found the most tenacious opposition to his mission. Chapter 23 of Matthew is all a formal accusation made by Jesus against the Pharisees, and his charges are specific and detailed (§518).

But though it is not surprising that Jesus should speak thus, it is historically significant to find rabbis making similar accusations against them. The Talmud lists seven different types of Pharisee under the following specific epithets: the "Sichem-Pharisee," who is a Pharisee because of the material advantages involved (the name refers to the episode of Sichem narrated in *Gen.* 34); the "*niqpi*-Pharisee," that is, the "pussyfoot" Pharisee who, with the labored artificiality of his hunched and shuffling gait, makes a great show of his

humility; the “bleeding-Pharisee,” who frequently causes himself bloody injuries by running into walls with closed eyes in avoiding the sight of women; the “pestle-Pharisee,” who walks all bent over so that he looks like the pestle in the mortar; the “what-is-my-duty-that-I-may-do-it Pharisee,” that is, one who no longer shows himself ready to perform all his duties but rather declares that he can do no more since he is already extremely busy; the “Pharisee-for-love,” who is motivated not by love of God but love of money and good business; the “Pharisee-through-fear,” whose actions are inspired by the fear of God, that is, by true religious feeling (*Sotah*, 22 b. Bar.). Of the seven types, therefore, only the last merits praise, and certainly each type had numerous representatives.

However, pointed the sarcasm in this catalogue may be, it is not violent. But as early as about A.D. 10, that is, even before Christ’s invectives, an anonymous Pharisee wrote the following diatribe, which is certainly no less vehement than the words of Jesus: “There will rise over them [the Israelites] perverse and impious men, who will proclaim themselves just. They will provoke the scorn of their friends because they will be men of lies, living for their personal pleasure, dissemblers in all their doings, loving banquets at every hour of the day, gluttonous . . . devouring the goods of the poor, while they declare they are acting from compassion . . . quarrelsome, deceitful, hiding that they may not be recognized, impious, filled with crime and iniquity, repeating from morning till evening: ‘Revelry and wealth are our desire ... to eat and drink . . . and to live as princes!’ Their hands and their hearts will know impurities, their mouths will speak arrogant things, yet they will say: ‘Do not touch me, lest you make me impure!’” (Assumption of Moses, VII, 3-10.) It is quite probable that this disillusioned Pharisee paints his picture in blacker colors than are warranted; but the bitterness of soul which makes him do so must have been inspired by actual fact.

In any case, Jesus’ invectives were directed against the actual behavior of the Pharisees rather than their teachings, at least in general. In this sense, his words are clear: “The scribes and the Pharisees have sitten on the chair of Moses. All things therefore whatsoever they shall say to you, observe and do, but according to their works do ye not” (*Matt.* 23:2-3).

39. As for their number, a passage in Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, 383) would seem to indicate that at the time of Alexander Janneus there were approximately eight thousand of them. Under Herod the Great, about a century later, we find reference made to “more than six thousand

(*ibid.*, XVII, 42), which must have included all the Pharisees of the period. But it is probable that these figures are not quite accurate, as frequently happens in Josephus, and should therefore be somewhat augmented.

The Pharisees came from various social classes and to a small extent even from the lower clergy, but they were closely united by their great aim, which was to observe legal purity and keep “separate” (§29) from all that was impure. They called themselves *haberim*, that is, “associates,” and the group was a *haberuth*, or “association.” Whether rich or poor, they were obliged to be most strict in observing to the very last detail the three principal sets of precepts, that is, those concerning the Sabbath rest, the rules for legal purity, and the laws governing public worship (tithes, etc.). Whoever had sufficient education to discuss legal questions was a *hakam*, that is, a “scholar,” while one who did not was an ordinary citizen called *hedjot* (from the Greek *idiwthz*).

40. The Pharisees called all the other Jews “people of the land” (*‘am ha’ares*), which was a term of disparagement; but even more disparaging was the practical attitude they maintained toward these fellow countrymen of theirs.

On this point, too, both Christian and Jewish sources agree. In the Gospel of St. John (7:49), the Pharisees exclaim, “But this multitude, that knoweth not the Law are accursed!” (*eparatoi*) The word “multitude” here means the non-Pharisees or “people of the land,” who are “ignorant of the Law” and completely “accursed.” Jewish documents confirm the curse. It is the great Hillel himself who says that “no rustic (*bur*) fears sin, and the people of the land are not pious” (*Pirqa Aboth*, II, 5), “rustic” and “people of the land” here being synonymous. A true Pharisee, therefore, was not to have any contact whatever with the “people of the land,” but show himself “Pharisee,” that is, “separated” from them. That is why one rabbi proclaimed: “To participate in an assembly of the people of the land brings death” (*ibid.*, III, 10); the celebrated Judah the Holy cried in remorse, Alas! I have given bread to one of the people of the land!” (*Baba Bathra*, 8 a); and Rabbi Eleazar adjudged, “It is lawful to stab one of the people of the land even on a Day of Atonement which falls on the Sabbath” (*Pesahim*, 49 b). Many other passages forbid the Pharisees to sell fruit to one of the people of the land, to offer him hospitality or accept any from him, to become his kin through marriage, etc. (*Demai*, II, 3; etc.) Needless to say, even a wealthy or aristocratic Jew or a member of the high-priesthood could be in the Pharisees’ eyes a “rustic,” one of the “people

of the land.” The standard of judgment was the practice and knowledge of the Law according to Pharisaic principles, and membership in the chosen class of the “separated.”

Only rarely did non-Pharisees answer this class pride with scorn or hostility. The common people, especially in the cities and the women among them particularly, were wholeheartedly on the side of the Pharisees and cherished a boundless respect for them. It was possible to say that the Pharisees “have so much power over the multitude, that even if they say something which is contrary to the king or to the high priest they are immediately believed” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIII, 288). Such popular support was the true strength of these aristocrats of dogma.

41. There remains to be considered the exact concept in the word Scribe and its relation to Pharisee. The Gospels frequently pair the two, and rightly so in view of the actual conditions of the time. But in theory not all the Scribes were Pharisees, as in practice not every Pharisee was a Scribe because he might not have the necessary education, that is, he might not be a *hakam* (§39).

Scribe denoted par excellence the man of the Law, whether priest or layman, Pharisee or Sadducee. But in actual fact at the time of Jesus only very few Scribes were priests and Sadducees, while the overwhelming majority were laymen of Pharisaic beliefs. That is why the Gospels couple them.

As early as the Babylonian exile — that is, even before Sadducees and Pharisees had appeared as two distinct schools of thought — when the Jews found themselves deprived of all their material and spiritual goods, some among them completely dedicated their lives and work to the Law, the one good they still possessed, in order to preserve it with all care, transmit it with complete accuracy, and examine and apply it with scrupulous study. Such a man was par excellence “the man of the book” (*sepher*) not only because he was its most diligent copyist (*sopher*, grammateuz, ierogrammateuz), but especially because he was a teacher in the broadest sense of the term. He was, therefore, one skilled in the Law, and the title of honor, Rab, Rabbi (“great,” “my great one”) was reserved for him.

The authority of the Scribes was very great as early as 200 B.C., if we may judge from the lyric encomium of Ben Sira (Eccles. 38-39); but it became even greater as time went on until it constituted a real throne of glory rising opposite the throne of the priesthood. In fact, at the time of Jesus, while the

priesthood had kept its liturgical duties and its rank in the hierarchy of Jewish theocracy, it had lost all influence so far as the spiritual formation of the multitude was concerned. The true “spiritual father” of the people, their catechist and moral guide, was no longer the priest, but the Scribe. As the priests took less and less interest in the Law, the laity supplemented them in the spiritual direction of Judaism. As the priesthood gradually became identified with the Sadducees, the lay doctor of the law became increasingly Pharisaic. Thus, at length the sphere of the priesthood was restricted to the Temple liturgy and political intrigue while the Scribe sat as teacher in the schools of the Law, preached as the representative of Moses in the synagogues, and moved as a model of holiness through the streets and homes of the reverent multitude.

Any descendant of Abraham could become a Scribe but the road to that distinction was a long one. One often began in boyhood, learning — as St. Paul did (*Acts* 22:3) — “at the feet” of some well-known master (who taught sitting down while his pupils squatted at his feet). It was not likely that the student would finish his course and be able to teach in his turn before he was forty years of age; and in all this time, since he was almost always poor, he worked at a manual trade in order to earn a living (§167). But when once this love for the knowledge of the Law had entered into the heart of a man, he was indifferent to all kinds of privation, to prolonged vigils, laborious training, and exhausting mnemonic exercises if only he might possess the Law. He who possessed this treasure was richer than the wealthiest of men, more glorious than a king or the high priest, as we noted in speaking of the Pharisees (§35).

42. The Zealots and *Sicarii* derived most probably from the Pharisees. Josephus, who is a little too prone to find similarities between the Jewish and the Graeco-Roman world, presents the Zealot tendency as a “fourth philosophy” (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 9), the other three being represented by the Essenes, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees. But in reality, the Zealots not only did not represent a “philosophy,” they did not even constitute a fourth current of Jewish thought because substantially they were Pharisees. The same Flavius Josephus states shortly afterward that the Zealots “in all other things are in agreement with the opinion of the Pharisees, except that they have a most ardent love of liberty and admit no head or lord but God alone; they pay no heed whatever to suffering the most extraordinary deaths and the punishments of relatives and friends in order not to recognize any man as their lord” (*ibid.*, 23). Evident in their attitude was a fidelity to the

national-theocratic principle, which was a fundamental one in Pharisaic teaching. The difference lay in the fact that most Pharisees did not apply this principle to political matters while the Zealots did so with complete rigor, carrying it right out to its ultimate consequences.

Hence, they were called “Zealots,” those who were “zealous” in fulfilling the national-religious law. The term had already been used by the father of the Machabees, Mathathias, who on his deathbed admonished his sons: “Now therefore, O my sons, be ye zealous for the Law and give your lives for the covenant of your fathers” (I *Mach.* 2:50). In fact, the five sons of the dying man all met death in the national-religious cause, and from the triumph of this same cause emerged the Hasidim, the ancestors of the Pharisees (§29). Now the Zealots revived the program of the father j of the Machabees. They wanted to be thorough Pharisees in every way, even politically.

43. It was actually a political incident which produced the Zealots. When in A.D. 6 Sulpicius Quirinius began the census of Judea, but lately annexed to the Roman Empire (§24), the people saw in the measure a tangible proof that the chosen nation of Yahweh was being sacrilegiously subjected to the domination of impure foreigners. Nevertheless, the greater part of them submitted to it, being persuaded to do so even by some of the outstanding priests. The majority of the Pharisees also complied. But Judas of Gamala, called the Galilean, offered resistance. Together with a prominent Pharisee, named Sadduc, “he induced his countrymen to revolt, saying that they were cowards ... if they would, after God, endure mortal men as their lords” (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 118;). The rebellion was put down by the Romans, and about thirty years later the Pharisee Gamaliel referred to it as a famous incident (*Acts* 5:37).

The Zealots did not yield ground after this first defeat, however. Though they scattered and hid from the Roman authorities, they kept alive the smoldering spirit of implacable opposition to the political yoke of the foreigner which later burst into flame in the final rebellion of the Jews. In the meanwhile, the difference between them and the ordinary Pharisees became more and more pronounced, for the latter maintained a passive and compliant attitude toward the Roman authorities.

Later, in fact, the Zealots went still further along the road of active revolt. When experience showed them that no mass insurrection could possibly prevail, they disguised their real intentions and resorted to conspiracies



against private individuals and surprise attacks on specific places in order to do away with at least some individual representatives of foreign domination since they could not destroy it entirely, while they themselves remained in the shadows. The weapon they used most in their various enterprises was the short dagger which the Romans called *sica*; hence these Zealots were called *Sicarii*.

If, then, the Zealots were the intransigent Pharisees even politically, the *Sicarii* in their turn may be considered the vanguard of shock troops in the attack launched by the Zealots. If we picture the great body of ordinary Judaism in the center, then drawn up on the right we find first the traditionalist Pharisees, then the intransigent Zealots, and finally the bellicose *Sicarii*. The Zealots and *Sicarii* were mainly responsible for the insurrection of 66-70, but they were also its victims, for they disappeared from history when the Romans wiped out the last centers of resistance and especially when they destroyed the Masada fortress, the tragic end of which Flavius Josephus describes with detailed archeological accuracy (*Wars of the Jews*, VII, 252 ff.). On the other hand, the Pharisees, their spiritual fathers, survived the bitter trial. After this, Judaism was reorganized about the principles of the rabbinic schools and became truly the work of the Pharisaic doctors; and thus, it has remained until today.

Among the disciples of Jesus, the Apostle Simon is called "Zealous" (*Luke* 6:15; *Acts* 1:13) and also the "Cananean" (*Matt.* 10:4; *Mark* 3:18). This second name does not derive from the name of the ancient inhabitants of Palestine, the Canaanites; it is the Aramaic *qan' ana*, given a Greek form *kananaioz*, and it means "zealous," a Zealot.

In the New Testament, *Acts* 21:38, mentions the *Sicarii*, but only in an incidental manner (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, II, 261-263; *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 169-172).

44. There is no mention at all of the Essenes in either the Old or the New Testament, but Flavius Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 119-161) speaks of them at length, and so do Philo, Pliny, and others. The Essenes formed a true religious community and were already in existence about the second half of the second century B.C. in various places throughout Palestine, but their most important center was the oasis of En-gaddi on the western shore of the Dead Sea. There were about four thousand of them in all.

The principal rules governing this society, which was very much like the monastic orders of Christianity, are as follows: Anyone seeking admission had to undergo a one-year novitiate, at the end of which he was baptized. There followed two more years of probation, and then he took the solemn oaths which made him finally and definitely a full member in the society. There was a great difference in degree of dignity and legal purity between the professed members and the novices, so that if a novice accidentally touched a member, the latter contracted a certain impurity from which he had to be cleansed.

Material possessions were held entirely in common and were managed by especially appointed stewards. All the Essenes worked, especially at farming, and their earnings went into the common treasury. Trade, the manufacture of weapons, and slavery were forbidden. Normally the Essenes were celibates. Only Flavius Josephus mentions a particular group among them who married under special conditions (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 160-161), but this is not an absolutely certain fact. In any case they could have been only a limited exception to the general rule. According to Pliny, the Essenes are a *gens... in qua nemo nascitur* (*Natur. hist.*, V, 17). Because there were none born to the community, children were also admitted as subjects for proselytism and as probable candidates for the society.

The Essenes' day was divided between work and prayer. The first thing in the morning was a community prayer directed toward the sun. Their meals, taken in common, had something of a liturgical character about them, for they were held in an especially appointed place after the members had performed certain ablutions and donned sacred garments. Specific prayers were said before and after meals. Even their foods, which were of the simplest variety, were prepared by priests according to particular rules. Throughout the day they observed a habitual silence.

Their observance of the Sabbath was singularly strict, so much so that on that day they refrained from any bodily functions whatever, and this represented for them an increased respect for legal purity as well. They had the utmost veneration for Moses and whoever blasphemed his name was punished by death. On the Sabbath there was community reading and explanation of his Law, but besides the books of Moses the society used other, secret books which were also studied on the Sabbath. On the other hand, they did not fulfill all the precepts of Moses because they sent offerings of various kinds to the Temple in Jerusalem but never blood-sacrifices of animals. Except for the oath of admission to the society, all oaths were strictly forbidden. It

was said in fact, "whatever they say is firmer than an oath; but they avoid swearing, for they consider that it is worse than perjury; for they say that he who cannot be believed without [swearing by] God is already condemned" (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 135).

The customs and teachings of the Essenes were without doubt derived principally from their Hebrew heritage, but it is probable that foreign elements had filtered in, as, for example, the belief in the pre-existence of the soul, which is attributed to them but is unknown in Hebraism, and also the practice of celibacy, which was never held in esteem by the Jews. But the exact source of these non-Hebrew elements is uncertain despite many conjectures offered in their regard.

It seems that the Essenes had very little influence on the rest of contemporary Judaism, from which they were segregated even physically by the numerous regulations governing their daily lives. They must have seemed a *hortus conclusus* which one was quick to admire, but only from the outside. Besides those who permanently joined the society, however, there were others who, moved by some vague ascetic longing, followed their way of life for a time, as Josephus tells us he did in his early youth (*Life*, 10-12).

Ordinarily, the Essenes took no interest in political questions and were obedient to the lawful authorities. In the great insurrection against Rome, however, some were carried away by their enthusiasm and did take up arms and a John Essenus is mentioned as a commander among the rebel Jews (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 567; III, 11, 19). They suffered the most excruciating torture at the hands of the Roman conquerors (*ibid.*, II, 152-153) but they refused nonetheless to violate the vows of their society.

After this period, they completely disappear from history.

45. The "Herodians" are also mentioned in the Gospels (*Mark* 3:6; 12:13; *Matt.* 22:16). They did not, however, represent any true or distinct political party and much less any religious group or current of thought. Rather they must have been Jews who openly supported the Herodian dynasty in general, and its most authoritative representative, the tetrarch Herod Antipas (§15 ff.) in particular. They were not, properly speaking, members of his court, however. They could not have been very numerous nor could they have had much prestige among the people.

## CHAPTER VI

### The Temple and the Priesthood

46. EVEN under Roman domination Judaism kept its theocratic-national system and Jerusalem continued to be its spiritual center. There, in fact, was the only legitimate Temple to Yahweh, the God of the nation, and in that Temple officiated the sacerdotal hierarchy which was at the peak of its theocratic organization.

Jewish nationality implied Jewish religion. The Jewish religion required the Temple in Jerusalem, and the Temple required the priesthood. Not only all of Palestine but also all the regions, near and far, through which the Diaspora had scattered the nation of Yahweh, looked to Jerusalem and the high priest as the holiest of all places and the man nearest to God.

The Temple frequented by Jesus was that built by Herod the Great. Hence it was actually the third Temple. The first, built by Solomon, had been destroyed by Nabuchodonosor when he captured Jerusalem in 586 B.C. The second, rebuilt after the Babylonian exile, was dedicated in 515 B.C. and remained in use until after the time of Herod, who completely demolished it to build the third. The rabbis called Herod's Temple the "second Temple" also, however, considering it spiritually one with the Temple built by the Jews returned from exile.

Herod began work on the Temple in the eighteenth year of his reign, that is, in 20-19 B.C. Even before that, to convince the people of the seriousness of his intentions, he had accumulated vast quantities of material, hired ten thousand laborers to work on the exterior, and had one thousand priests learn masonry so that they might build the inner sections which, according to Hebrew Law, lay people were not permitted to enter. The construction of the inner Temple, which constituted the true "sanctuary," took a year and a half; the outer Temple, including the spacious cloisters, eight years. In all this time the services were never suspended because as each part of the inner Temple was torn down it was immediately rebuilt. Nine and a half years after the work had been begun, Herod solemnly dedicated the reconstructed Temple on the anniversary of his ascent to the throne. But as is usual with large constructions, the actual finishing went on through many years to come (cf. *John* 2:20) and it was not fully completed until the procuratorship of Albinus (A.D. 62-64), that is, only a short while before the Romans razed it to the ground.

47. The “sanctuary” of Herod’s Temple was exactly like that of Solomon’s except that it was higher, but the outer structures surrounding it were much more extensive. The ancient Temple had risen on the city’s eastern hill, the top of which was now almost doubled in area by constructions erected up its slopes. On the site thus obtained were built three porticoes or courts, which rose on successively higher planes, proceeding inward. The first or outside portico was open to everyone and was therefore called the Court of the Gentiles since pagans might frequent it; but at a certain point within there was a stone balustrade with Greek and Latin inscriptions reminding them that they were forbidden to proceed further under pain of death (one of the Greek inscriptions was found in 1871). Beyond this balustrade and up a short flight of steps was the “inner court,” surrounded by very thick walls and divided into two parts; the outer section was called the Women’s Court because the Israelite women might enter that far within the Temple; the inner division was called the Court of Israel and this only the men could enter. Another flight of steps led to the Court of Priests in which stood the altar of sacrifice under the open sky, and finally, at the top of still another stairway, rose the true “sanctuary.” (Figure 7)

The “sanctuary” had a vestibule and was divided within into two chambers. The first was called the “Holy Place” and contained the golden altar for incense, the table for the Showbread and the seven-branched candlestick of gold. The second was called the “Holy of Holies” because - it was considered the dwelling place of the God of Israel and therefore the most holy place on all the earth. There, in Solomon’s Temple, had been kept the Ark of the Covenant, but since this had been destroyed, the “Holy of Holies” in the new Temple remained a mysteriously dark and empty room. Pompey the Great, who entered it in 63 B.C., found “no image of the god within, his place vacant, and the sanctuary empty” (Tacitus, Hist., V, 9). Only the high priest entered the “Holy of Holies” and on only one day in the year, the Day of Atonement (§77). According to a rabbinic tradition (*Yoma*, V, 2), he placed the thurible on a stone three inches high which marked the place where the Ark had stood in ancient times.

48. The Court of the Gentiles was enclosed on the east and south by two famous porticoes. The one on the east, which overlooked the Cedron, was commonly called Solomons Porch (*John* 10:23; *Acts* 3:11; 5:12) but there was no archeological basis for this. The southern colonnade, commonly called the Royal Porch, extended from the valley of the Cedron on the east to the

Tyropoean Valley on the west. This was a truly remarkable construction, worthy to stand beside the most famous porticoes of Athens and Rome, but it was completely Greek in style and had nothing Hebrew about it. It was composed of one hundred and sixty-two huge columns with most exquisite Corinthian capitals, arranged in four rows to form a triple nave.

The Court of the Gentiles was the great meeting place for all who lived in Jerusalem or were passing through the city. The pagans went there to transact business just as they would have gone to the forum in their own cities. The Jews frequented it to hear the famous doctors of the Law teaching there surrounded by their disciples or disputing some question among themselves; and finally, everyone was drawn to it by the thousand and one curiosities typical of so crowded a place and the news of all kinds that could be gathered there.

During the Hebrew feasts especially, the Court of the Gentiles became a public market place. To the pilgrims from Palestine or abroad, the hawkers installed under the porticoes or in the great open square sold oxen, sheep, and everything else necessary for the temple sacrifices, while the money-changers behind their improvised counters were ready to exchange the various types of Palestinian coinage for the foreign money of the faithful returned from elsewhere. Only after passing through this inferno of stench and noise did one reach the place of expiation, where only the Israelite might enter and cleanse himself of his sins before God, in silence and in prayer.

49. At the northwest corner of the Temple and joined to it rose the Fortress Antonia, which had also been completely rebuilt by Herod on the site of a former tower. Its grandiose strength was put to the test in the war against Rome when Titus found it a tremendous obstacle in his conquest of the Temple and the city. Flavius Josephus concludes his minute description of it with this important archeological information: "But on the corner where it joined to the two porticoes of the Temple, it had passages down to them both, through which the guard (for a Roman garrison always occupied this tower) went several ways among the cloisters with their arms, on the Jewish festivals, in order to watch the people, that they might not attempt any innovations; for the Temple was a fortress that guarded the city, as was the tower of Antonia a guard to the Temple; and in the tower were the guards for all three [places: city, Temple, and Antonia]" (*Wars of the Jews*, V, 243-245). (See [Figure 8](#))

For these practical reasons as well as for its nearness to the Temple, the Roman procurator — as we have already mentioned (§21)—often used the Antonia to conduct public business, especially when it was necessary for him to deal with large groups of people. The royal palace of Herod, more aristocratic and further away from the Temple, was not so well suited for such circumstances.

50. The Levitical priesthood, with the high priest at its head, presided over the Temple. Because of the theocratic organization of Judaism, the high priest was also head of the whole Jewish nation; in him were joined the supreme religious and civil authority. This was true in theory, but in practice, especially at the time of Jesus, the actual power of the high priest was not that great.

The Hasmoneans, descendants of the Machabees, had been high priests and also kings, thus reviving once more Israel's ancient ideal though they were not of the house of David. But after the Hasmoneans lost the throne, the high priests were almost always chosen from among certain sacerdotal families which were particularly influential and formed a privileged and aristocratic group within the sacerdotal class. The high priest was chosen for life and in ancient times it had been the exception when he was deposed, but from the time of Herod the Great, the exception became the rule and a high priest rarely died in office. From the beginning of the reign of Herod the Great to the death of Jesus, about sixty-five years, there were approximately fifteen high priests, several of whom held office only a year or less. The former high priests, along with the other members of their privileged families, formed the group to which the Gospels and Flavius Josephus refer as "the chief priests."

While the dignity of the high-priesthood was diminished by this insecurity of tenure, it was still further impaired by the way the above-mentioned families trafficked in that office and the other posts in the Temple which were the most lucrative. It seems that money was usually involved in the appointment of a high priest, and a rabbinic saying directly attributes the instability of the office to its venality: "When the high priests hired out their office for money, their days were shortened (*Levit. Rabba*, XXI, 9; cf. *Yoma* pal., I, 38 c).

51. Once elected, the high priest was the chief minister of public worship and head of all the services in the Temple. He had to celebrate personally only the ceremony of the Day of Atonement (§77), but he sometimes officiated on other solemn feast days also, such as the Pasch.

With regard to civil matters the high priest functioned principally as head of the Sanhedrin (§58), the presidency of which was automatically his. But here especially his actual power dwindled after the disappearance of the Hasmoneans. Their successor, Herod the Great, pointed out with his sword the road the head of the Sanhedrin was to follow. The Roman procurators were less brutal about it but they carefully watched his actions and reviewed his most important decisions to remind him, among other things, that while he wore the miter of the priest, this was no royal crown. In fact, even the high priest's vestments were kept in the Antonia under a provision that dated from Herod the Great or perhaps earlier and was retained by the Roman procurators. They were taken out only on the principal feast days and immediately returned to the fortress. But in A.D. 36, after Pontius Pilate was deposed, the Romans renounced this right, which was hateful to the religious sensibilities of the Jews.

The fact that they were always Sadducees was another reason why the moral prestige, if not actually the official authority, of the high priests was at a very low ebb at the time of Jesus. Not only was this aristocratic faction cordially disliked by the people, but its doctrinal tendencies were explicitly opposed by the democratic Pharisees and therefore by the Scribes, the majority of whom were also Pharisees. Now, the high priest should have sat on the chair of Moses as supreme moderator and interpreter of the theocratic Law, and this principle had been expressly approved even by the pagan Julius Caesar (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XIV, 195). But in reality "the Scribes and the Pharisees have sitten on the chair of Moses (Matt, 23:2); in other words, they set up another chair in opposition to that of the high priest, diverting the multitude from him and leaving him only his self-interested Sadducees.

52. The high priests who figure directly in the story of Jesus are two, Annas and Caiphas.

The name, Annas, given in Greek form as Ananus by Flavius Josephus, was an abbreviation of the Hebrew *Hananyah*, or Ananias. Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 198) pictures him as a 'most happy man' for two reasons: he himself had been high priest for a very long time, and then he had been succeeded in office by five of his sons. Josephus might have mentioned that his son-in-law Joseph, called Caiphas, also succeeded him, which brings out even more clearly the actual monopoly of the high-priesthood exercised by the influential families mentioned before (§33, §50). According to Flavius Josephus, Annas was appointed by Quirinius immediately after the tetrarch



Archelaus was deposed, that is, in A.D. 6. But it is not improbable that the historian is in error here (as often elsewhere) and that Annas became high priest even earlier, for he was certainly removed from the office by Valerius Gratus in A.D. 15 and this would mean that he held it for only nine years, which is not “a very long time,” as Josephus himself puts it. Whatever the case, Annas still had very great authority even after he was removed from office, for he secretly or openly controlled the pontificates of his five sons and his son-in-law. His sons held office in the following order, though it is not certain whether Annas was still alive during the term of his youngest son, who bore his name: Eleazar, A.D. 18-36; Jonathan, A.D. 36-41; Theophilus, A.D. 41-43; Matthias, A.D. 43-50; Ananus (Annas), A.D. 50-62. The latter was killed in A.D. 67 by the anti-Roman insurrectionists.

Jonathan's immediate predecessor was Annas' son-in-law, Joseph, called *Qayapha* (Caiphas). The meaning of the second name is uncertain. He was appointed in A.D. 18 by Valerius Gratus, the same procurator who had deposed his father-in-law, and he remained in office until A.D. 36. He was high priest, therefore, when Jesus was condemned and executed although on that occasion Annas was the one who wielded the actual authority.

53. In the Temple, under the supreme jurisdiction of the high priest, officiated the descendants of the tribe of Levi, who were still divided into the two ancient categories of priests and simple Levites. The priests performed the ordinary liturgical functions, both those of the official public ceremonial and those required by the individual piety of the faithful. The simple Levites helped the priests in preparing for and carrying out the ritual, and had a general responsibility for the menial duties in the Temple. (See [Figure 9](#))

The Levites who were not priests, therefore, formed the lower clergy, and outside of the Temple they had no particular importance in the social and cultural life of the nation. According to ancient laws their income was derived from the tithes, and so they were not very prosperous economically both because the tithes were often uncertain and because the Levites received only that part which the priests deigned to give them after making their own little forays into these resources as we noted before (§33).

54. The priests were divided into twenty-four classes or groups which served each a week in turn in the Temple. Each group was headed by a priest for whom it was named, and his assistants were assigned by lot (*Luke 1:5-9*) to their particular duties. Most of the priests lived in Jerusalem itself or in the

immediate surroundings, but some resided in rather distant towns, to which they returned after their week of service in Jerusalem. This was true also of the ordinary Levites (cf. *Luke* 1:23; 10:31-32).

The priest's duties pertained to the ritual. The necessary requirements for a sacrificial animal, the precise amount of a given libation, the rites involved in preparing and making certain sacrifices, the precepts to be observed in specific functions, and in general all the written or traditional rules governing the whole matter of the liturgy — all this constituted the knowledge of which he was so proud. In that theocratic society, he was the one who, with scrupulous care and accuracy, slaughtered the animals, sprinkled the blood and burned the incense prescribed and requested by God himself. These were the duties of the priest's office and he was more deserving than any other member of society because with these offerings of blood and incense he placated God and secured his protection over the community. The prophets of old had indeed stressed in their preaching the part which the spirit must play in the observance of the sacrificial ritual, but actually it entered very little into the functions of the priesthood as it was exercised 'professionally' by the Hebrew priests.

The majority of priests remained aloof from the discussions in vogue among the Scribes and Pharisees. The holy 'professional' had the written Law which guaranteed his sacred privileges, and to seek beyond that would have been a waste of time. If some rare priest did take part in such discussions, it was merely to attack and refute the affirmations of those querulous plebeian Pharisees for whom he nourished nothing but the haughtiest contempt. This attitude of aristocratic superiority was even more characteristic of those priests who, after the high priest, held the most important offices in the Temple, such as that of "prefect (strathyoz) of the Temple" (*Acts* 4:1; 5:24-26), treasurer, and other honorable and lucrative posts. We have already mentioned the rabbinic source which stated that those offices were usually obtained for a price by members of the "families of the high priests" (§33, §50).

55. It would certainly be wrong to consider that this closed family intrigue perched on the peak of Jewish society worthily represented all those who stood lower in the social scale, or that the descendants of Levi were all, without exception, dull drudges of the ritual and devoid of true piety. Among the lower clergy, especially the Levites, and also among the priests from less prominent and less urbanized families, there must have been numerous

profoundly religious spirits who secretly meditated on the ancient benefits God had bestowed on Israel and anxiously awaited the fulfillment of his promises for the future. To cite a single example, in 166 B.C. one of these rural families of priests initiated the national resurgence of the Machabees which summoned Judaism to a new life by appealing to national-religious principles. In any case, the good sound Levite element was, as always, the least conspicuous, the least likely to be spoken of in the ordinary events of social life. The people's gaze was drawn to those showy and arrogant priests who held sway in the Temple and shared the administration of public affairs with the Roman procurator, with whom they had a clear enough understanding. In the eyes of the people, these bosses of finance and politics —if not of religion — were the real priesthood, the virtual descendants of Levi and Eli.

56. It was therefore natural that the common people should have no love for them. A rabbinic tradition says that on one occasion in the Temple the exasperated multitude shrieked: "Depart from here, depart from here, sons of Eli! You have befouled the house of our Lord God!" (Sukkah, pal., IV, 54 d.) The sons of Eli were the lawful priests of Yahweh, who were, however, not pleasing to the people; but were they pleasing to their God either?

In this connection, there is recorded an extraordinary incident which deserves to be mentioned because of the singular moment in history in which it presumably occurred and because it is similarly recounted both by the Jewish Flavius Josephus and the pagan Cornelius Tacitus. The Jewish historian tells us that sometime during the last few years before the downfall of the nation and the burning of the Temple, "at the feast which we call Pentecost, as the priests were going by night into the inner court of the Temple, as their custom was, to perform their sacred ministrations, they said that, in the first place, they felt a quaking and heard a great noise, and after that they heard a voice as of many saying: We are departing from this place" (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, 299). He who had his permanent dwelling in the Temple of Jerusalem and was departing at that moment was Yahweh, God of Israel, who here speaks in the first-person plural (as in *Gen.* 1:26 when he created man). The pagan historian also interprets the incident in this way, while the rest of his account agrees with that of the Jewish historian: The doors of the temple flew suddenly open and a superhuman voice was heard: 'The gods are departing,' while at the same time there was a great commotion of those departing" (*Hist.*, V, 13).

If we accept this as fact, we must conclude that since the sons of Heli had not abandoned the Temple at the cries of the exasperated people, God himself abandoned it, leaving the priests a Temple empty of its God. And then that Temple crashed to ruin forever.

## CHAPTER VIII: The Great Sanhedrin

57. AT THE time of Jesus, the greatest institution in Judaism next to the high-priesthood was the great Sanhedrin, the supreme national-religious body.

Though rabbinic tradition attributes its foundation to Moses, it really goes back no further than the second century B.C. when the Seleucid kings who ruled Palestine decreed for Jerusalem a form of local government already in existence in many Hellenistic cities; that is, they gave the council of the Ancients, which administered the city's affairs, the right to make civil and religious laws, subject to the supreme authority of the king. Since Jerusalem was the capital of Judaism, the decisions of this council had directive force for other Jewish centers in the Seleucid monarchy as well, although these still retained their own local councils, also called "sanhedrins" (cf. *Matt.* 10:17; *Mark* 13:9).

The great Sanhedrin, then, came into being as a limited form of autonomous government conceded to the Jews by foreign kings; hence it was inevitable that it should suffer a loss of actual authority when they were supplanted by a native monarchy or despotism. And that is exactly what happened, first under the nationalist Machabees and Hasmoneans when the great Sanhedrin enjoyed real power only in those periods in which the monarchy was weak, and later under the tyrannical Herod, who left it the mere shadow of authority.

On the other hand, the Sanhedrin acquired a great deal of power under the Roman procurators. The Romans applied in Palestine, too, their constant principle of permitting subjected peoples complete freedom in religious matters and a restricted autonomy in civil affairs, and they found it convenient to entrust the administration of this twofold liberty to the great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. In addition, this body was composed largely of the aristocracy, which in the provinces was much more acceptable to the Romans than the innovators who represented the common people.

58. The great Sanhedrin consisted of seventy-one members, including its president, the high priest. The members were divided into three groups.

The first was that of the "chief priests" and it comprised both those who had already held that office and the most important members of the families from which the high priests were chosen. It was, therefore, the group of the

sacerdotal aristocracy, faithful to Sadducean tenets, and it was the most influential at the time of Jesus.

The second was composed of the Ancients (*presbuteroi*), who represented the lay aristocracy, that is, those citizens who because of their wealth or for some other reason exerted a conspicuous influence on public life and could therefore make an effective contribution to the administration of civil affairs. They also were Sadducees.

The third group was that of the Scribes, or doctors of the Law, composed for the most part of laymen and Pharisees (§41) but numbering also some priests and Sadducees among its members. Compared with the other two static and aristocratic groups, it formed par excellence the popular and dynamic section of the Sanhedrin. Consequently, in the disaster of A.D. 70, the former were swept away in the popular reaction, and the Sanhedrin from then on was composed entirely of Scribes.

Theoretically its jurisdiction extended over all the Jewish world. Practically, at the time of Jesus, it was for Palestine the regular and effective authority, but in Jewish communities outside of Palestine its jurisdiction was rather the exception, and it was progressively weaker the smaller or the more distant the community concerned. The Jews who lived at any great distance appealed to the supreme national council only in extraordinary cases, usually when they could not obtain justice from their local councils or sanhedrins.

59. Any religious or civil case in any way connected with the Jewish Law could be judged by the Great Sanhedrin, but its power suffered limitations in various periods as we have just said.

Under the Roman procurators, the decisions of the Sanhedrin carried executive weight and the Jewish or Roman police could be called upon to enforce them. Rome had limited its executive power only in the matter of the death sentence, which the Sanhedrin could pronounce but which could not be executed without the express confirmation of the Roman magistrate.<sup>8</sup> In any case, to avoid capital punishment as much as possible was a solemn legal principle, which seems to have been faithfully followed, and evidently the death sentence was extremely rare. The rabbis declared that a Sanhedrin was too hotheaded and severe if it passed the death sentence once in every seven years, while Rabbi Tarphon and Rabbi Akiba asserted: "If we had been members of the Sanhedrin, no one would ever have been put to death" (*Makkoth*, 1, 10).

The Sanhedrin was convoked by the high priest and held its meetings in the chamber of hewn stone" (*lishkath haggazith*), situated at the southwest corner of the inner court which only Israelites might enter (§47). About A.D. 30 it supposedly moved to a place called the "shop" (*hanuth*), the exact site of which is unknown, and perhaps the information itself is incorrect. In special emergencies the Sanhedrin could be called to meet even in the house of its president, the high priest. There were no meetings on the Sabbath or on feast days.

60. Here is some of the data in the rabbinic writings concerning the procedure at the meetings and the rules governing trials.

"The Sanhedrin sat in a semicircle so that [its members] could see one another. The president sat in the center and the Ancients sat [according to seniority] on his right and on his left" (Tosephta, *Sanhedrin*, VIII, 1).

"Two clerks of the judges sat before them, one on the right and the other on the left, and they collected the votes of those who would acquit and of those who would convict Rabbi Judah said there were three; [besides the two] the third collected the votes, both of those who voted for acquittal, and of those who voted for conviction" (*Sanh.*, IV, 3).

"The tribunal of the chamber of hewn stone, although composed of seventy-one members, never had fewer [present] than twenty-three. If a member had to leave, he first looked about him; if there were twenty-three he went out; otherwise, he did not go out until there were twenty-three present. They sat in meeting from the perpetual holocaust' of the morning until the perpetual holocaust' of the evening [offered in the Temple at about nine in the morning and four in the afternoon]" (Tosephta, *Sanh.*, VII, 1).

Civil cases may be opened by the defense or by the prosecution; criminal cases may be opened only by the defense. In civil cases a majority of one in favor of the plaintiff or of the defendant is sufficient. In criminal cases a majority of one is sufficient for an acquittal, but for a conviction a majority of two is necessary. In civil cases the judges may review the sentence whether it is in favor of the plaintiff or defendant; in criminal cases, they may review the sentence to acquit but not to convict. In civil cases the judges may all [unanimously] plead in favor either of the plaintiff or the defendant; in criminal cases they may all plead for an acquittal but not for a conviction.<sup>9</sup> In civil cases the judge who pleads against the defendant may also plead against the plaintiff, and vice versa; in criminal cases the judge who has argued for

conviction may afterward argue for acquittal, but the judge who has argued for acquittal may not gainsay himself and argue for conviction. Civil cases are to be tried by day and settled at night; criminal cases are tried by day and are settled by day. Civil cases may be closed the same day by acquittal or conviction. Criminal cases may be closed the same day provided the sentence is not one of conviction; if the sentence is a conviction, the case is not closed until the following day. For this reason, criminal cases are not to be tried on the vigil of the Sabbath or of feast days. In civil cases and in questions of ritual purity and impurity, the judges express their opinions beginning with the oldest; in criminal cases, they begin from the side [where the youngest members were seated, so that they would not be influenced by the opinions of the older judges]" (*Sanh.*, IV, 1-2).

"Witnesses were examined on seven points: [The action took place] in what sabbatical cycle? In what year? In what month? On what day of the month? On what day of the week? At what hour? In what place? . . . [When the witnesses have been questioned, then the judges] listen also to the accused if he declares that he has something to say in his own defense and provided there is some basis for what he says. If the judges find him innocent, they free him; otherwise, they postpone their decision until the following day. The judges pair off, eat sparingly and drink no wine the entire day, and they discuss the case the whole night; the next morning they go early to the courtroom. Those voting for acquittal say: 'I was for acquittal and I remain in the same opinion.' Those voting for conviction say: 'I was for a conviction and I remain in the same opinion.' The judge who previously maintained that the accused was guilty may now maintain his innocence, but not vice versa. If they make a mistake in expressing their opinion [state the opposite of what they have stated before] the two clerks of the court correct them. If they find the accused innocent, they free him; otherwise, they decide by a vote. If twelve vote for acquittal and eleven for conviction, the accused is declared innocent. If twelve vote for conviction and eleven for acquittal; or if eleven vote for acquittal, eleven for conviction and one does not vote; or if twenty-two vote whether for acquittal or conviction and one does not vote, then the number of judges must be increased.<sup>10</sup> To what number? By twos until there are seventy-one in all (the full membership of the Sanhedrin). If thirty-six vote for acquittal and thirty-five for conviction, the accused is declared innocent; if thirty-six vote for conviction and thirty-five for acquittal, they continue to



discuss the case until one of those inclined to conviction changes his decision (*Sanhedrin* V, 1-5).

These and many other rules held in theory, and in any case, they were not put in writing until long after the time of Jesus. In his day we may well believe things were quite different in actual practice during turbulent times, or even in normal times when the judges were swayed by emotional considerations. For the former case we have the example of the mock trial of Zacharias, son of Baris (Baruch), in A.D. 67 before a sham tribunal of seventy members meeting in the Temple; the accused, though declared innocent, was killed in the Temple itself (*Wars of the Jews*, IV, 335-344). For normal times we have the example of Jesus' trial.

61. Besides the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, there existed minor sanhedrins in the different Jewish communities in Palestine and abroad. Every well-organized community must have had one. Its members were the most prominent Jews of the locality and its president the ruler of the synagogue.

This local sanhedrin administered the affairs of its own community but it did so in accordance with the general norms established by the great Sanhedrin in Jerusalem. It could also function as a tribunal to judge minor matters within its jurisdiction, and it could impose a fine or corporal punishment, up to thirty-nine stripes (cf. *2 Cor.* 11:24). Whoever refused to accept the decision of the local sanhedrin was excluded from the community for a period of time varying in length. The sentence of perpetual exclusion from the community, actually pronounced very rarely, was an official curse which set the condemned outside the pale of Judaism.

## CHAPTER VIII: The Synagogue

62. THE building today called “synagogue” was essentially a place of prayer and religious instruction. The pagans, throughout whose territories many synagogues had risen at the time of Jesus, quite rightly called it an “oratory” (proseuch).

Its function was most important in the history of Judaism. It was intended not to take the place of the one true Hebrew Temple, but to confirm and extend the latter’s influence while it remained standing and to compensate at least partially for its loss when it had been destroyed. Hence the synagogue was not a shrine erected in competition with the Temple but rather a kind of spiritual pronaos and subsidiary chapel.

The ritual of sacrifice to the God of Israel could not be performed lawfully except in the Temple of Jerusalem, and for the orthodox Israelites this remained always an inviolable rule. But the fact remained that that one Temple was too far away for many Hebrews in Palestine itself, and it became all the more remote and inaccessible when, with the Diaspora, the Jewish nation began to swarm out of Palestine and settle in various foreign lands. No doubt these far-off Jews could frequently direct their affectionate thoughts and precious offerings to their one true shrine, but only rarely could they visit it in person and feel its immediate spiritual influence. It was necessary, therefore, to spread that influence ever more widely among the Jews, both of Palestine and of the Diaspora, and in addition to find some compensation, compatible with the strictest orthodoxy, when the Temple itself was eventually destroyed. These are the factors which produced the synagogue.

Actually, it was originated among the Jews of the Babylonian exile when the Temple of Jerusalem had been demolished. At that time there could have been in existence no synagogues properly so called (as rabbinic tradition would have it), but when the exiles gathered, as they did, about Ezechiel and other famous persons, we can glimpse in their meetings a kind of nucleus of the future synagogue. Later, even after the Temple had been rebuilt, the Jews both in Palestine and abroad used to meet with increasing frequency in specific places or specifically designated buildings to say the prayers and provide the religious instruction for which it was impossible to go to the Temple in Jerusalem and for which any other common meeting place was

unsuitable. Thus, the synagogue became a distinct institution with a character of its own.

We have unquestionable archeological evidences of synagogue buildings dating from as early as the third century B.C., and for succeeding centuries they are innumerable both in Palestine and abroad. We can be certain that at the time of Jesus there was no town or village, however unimportant, without one. The rabbinic tradition that there were four hundred and eighty in Jerusalem and one within the very precincts of the Temple must be pure legend, yet it sprang, no doubt, from a good measure of truth. We know of about one hundred and fifty settlements with synagogues in various parts of the Roman Empire outside of Palestine. Rome alone has furnished evidence of thirteen Jewish communities of the first century A.D. each of which certainly had at least one synagogue, but on the whole, there must have been many more such Jewish communities than we find traces of today.

63. The synagogue consisted chiefly of one room, usually rectangular and so arranged that the faithful gathered therein would face toward Jerusalem and its Temple. Almost all the -synagogue ruins extant in Galilee, the country of Jesus, show, the entrance to have been on the southern side, that is, the side toward Jerusalem; hence the congregation faced the entrance. The room might be divided into naves by rows of columns, which occasionally supported a kind of balcony, reserved perhaps for the women (*matroneum*). Sometimes there was a court before the entrance with a large stone basin for the ablutions, and rooms built along the sides of the edifice were used as classrooms for children and hostels for pilgrims. The main room was sometimes adorned with paintings and mosaics, the subjects of which in earliest times were limited to inanimate things (palms, the seven-branched candlestick, the star with five or six points, etc.); later, figures of animals and men appeared (Moses, Daniel, etc.), contrary to the well-known prohibition against them which was observed at the time of Jesus.

The principal object within the room was the sacred cabinet or ark ('aron), where the scrolls of Holy Scripture were kept. It was set in a kind of miniature chapel and was covered by a veil. One or more lamps, it seems, were kept burning before it. The room also contained a pulpit, movable or stationary, which was used by the reader and then by the preacher. Stools occupied the rest of the room, and those in the first row, being the seats of honor, were unanimously coveted by the whole congregation. Sometimes, special seats were set apart for important personages, between the ark and the pulpit.

64. A synagogue ruler, chosen from among the ancients of the community, was in charge of the building and its contents and also presided at the meetings. He was assisted by a “minister (hazzan) or kind of sacristan who performed various manual duties. He blew the trumpet at the beginning and at the close of the Sabbath, for instance, took the scrolls of Holy Scripture from the ark and scourged anyone condemned by the local sanhedrin (§61), etc. Sometimes he also taught the children. (cf. [Figure 10](#))

65. The Jews gathered in the synagogue in the morning and in the afternoon of every Sabbath and other feast days, but in addition to these prescribed meetings they might also hold others, particularly on Mondays and Thursdays and on special occasions. In fact, the synagogue became in increasing degree the spiritual citadel of the people. There those national-religious principles which were to distinguish Israel from all other nations were kept constantly alive, the Sacred Scriptures were read, and those traditions were recalled and those prayers recited which have remained, even today, the principal spiritual heritage of Judaism. The synagogue cemented unity among the Jews of the same community, and among the communities of a particular region, and in fact of the whole world; and it was this unity which was Judaism’s greatest strength especially after the catastrophe of A.D. 70.

Ten persons were necessary for a regular gathering in the synagogue. To ensure that number, in much later times, ten Jews of the community received an allowance so that they could be free from other occupations to attend the synagogue even on days besides the Sabbath and feast days.

66. The services began with the recitation of the selection from the Scriptures called Shema (“Listen ...!”), the word with which it begins. It was made up of three passages from the Pentateuch, the first of which (*Deut.* 6:4-9) commands love of God, the second (*Deut.* 11:13-21), the observance of his commandments, and the third (*Num.* 15:37-41) prescribes that even the fringe of one’s garments call to mind the commandments of God. For the Israelite, the recitation of this text was a kind of first and fundamental religious act, an act of faith, in which he solemnly confessed that he believed in and loved the one true God. Similarly, when the Scribe asked him which was the first commandment of the Law, Jesus answered by quoting the beginning of the Shema (*Mark* 12:29). (cf. [Figure 11](#))

Next came the recitation of the *Shemone ‘esre* (“Eighteen”), a series of short prayers expressing adoration for, submission to, and hope in the God of

Israel. It is highly probable that this series of prayers was recited in the synagogues as early as the time of Jesus, but in that case, it must have been somewhat different and shorter than the official version (Babylonian) used today, which is really composed of nineteen prayers and is much later than the destruction of A.D. 70, to which it alludes. There is another and older version (Palestinian), found a few decades ago, but it cannot be attributed to the time of Jesus either because the twelfth prayer contains the imprecation against the Christians: "Let there be no hope for the apostates; do thou root up from our days the arrogant dominion [certainly the Roman Empire]! And let the Nazarenes [Christians] and the heretics perish immediately; let them be canceled from the book of life, and let them not be inscribed with the just. Blessed art thou, O Yahweh, who bendest the proud!" This explicit malediction on the Christians does not appear in the later (Babylonian) version which has instead a curse upon the proud and impious in general. St. Jerome (*In Isaiam*, 5, 18-19; 49, 7), however, is witness to the fact that the curse against the Christians was recited as late as the fourth century A.D. It was probably introduced into the prayers at the time of Rabbi Gamaliel II about A.D. 100 (cf. *Berakoth*, 28 b), but evidently it was not in the text presumably in use at the time of Jesus.

67. The *Shemone 'esre* was followed by the reading of the Scriptures. This began with the Torah (Pentateuch), which was divided into one hundred and fifty-four parts (sometimes more) so that the complete reading of it on consecutive Sabbaths took three years. Then came the reading of the books the Hebrew canon called the "Prophets" — i.e., from Joshua to the Minor Prophets — and here there was a certain liberty in the selection and length of the passages read.

The texts were read in the original Hebrew but since, at the time of Jesus, the spoken language was Aramaic and very few understood the Hebrew, each passage was translated as it was read. These translations, which had already assumed a typical and traditional character at the time of Jesus, were later put in writing and constituted the biblical *Targumim*.

Next came an instruction or sermon which explained and applied some passage in the day's reading and which anyone present could deliver. Usually, the ruler of the synagogue invited those he thought most competent to preach it, but whoever wanted to could volunteer without being asked. Actually, the speakers were generally well versed in the Scriptures and sacred traditions, that is, they were Scribes and Pharisees.

The services ended with the benediction of *Numbers* 6:22 ff. If there was a priest present, he recited it and the congregation responded Amen. Otherwise, it was recited as a prayer of entreaty by all those present.

## CHAPTER IX: Jewish Beliefs and Practices

68. OF ALL the prescriptions of the Jewish religion the two most important at the time of Jesus concerned the rite of circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath.

The violent persecution unleashed in Palestine by Antiochus IV Epiphanes had been aimed especially at these two pillars of Judaism, but though battered they had remained standing. In the ensuing period of religious peace and self-government, they had not only been reinforced but, in the natural reaction to the persecution, they were considered to have been fashioned in heaven itself. Shortly before 100 B.C., an exceedingly zealous Palestinian Jew, perhaps a Pharisee, the author of the apocryphal Book of Jubilees, was able to furnish the information that the angels in heaven observe both these precepts because they are circumcised (XV, 27) and they respect the Sabbath (II, 18). In fact, the Sabbath is observed in heaven by God himself (II, 19, 21). Succeeding rabbinic tradition went even further and affirmed that "in the world beyond, Abraham will sit at the entrance to Gehenna and he will permit no circumcised Jew to descend into it." When, however, some Israelite who has been a notorious villain appears before him, the patriarch of the Hebrews will miraculously erase the traces of his circumcision and only after that will he cast him into Gehenna (Genesis Rabba, XLVIII, 8). In short, one could not go to Gehenna if he were circumcised, and it seems the observance of the Sabbath earned the Israelite the same protection. Evidently these were private beliefs the prevalence of which varied both among the educated and the plebeian classes, but in any case, they are important indications of a definite mentality.

69. Circumcision was the distinguishing mark of membership in the chosen nation of Yahweh, the certificate of spiritual descent from Abraham and of the right to share in the benefits of the Covenant he had made with God (*Gen.* 17:10 ff.). In the opinion of an Israelite, therefore, the greatest ignominy of the pagans was the fact that they were uncircumcised, and this was the most humiliating epithet he could apply to them.

The child was circumcised on the eighth day after birth. Any Jew could perform the operation, but it was done preferably by the child's father and usually at home. On this occasion the infant was officially given his name.

70. The observance of the Sabbath was the object of the most detailed rabbinic prescriptions. We may deduce some idea of them from many

passages in the Talmud and especially from the two treatises *Shabbath* and *Erubin*, which are devoted almost exclusively to this subject.

If strictly applied, the Sabbath precept would have meant abstaining from any form of manual effort whatever, hence even from defending one's life when threatened by armed force (as some Jews did during the persecution of Antiochus Epiphanes, 1 *Mach.* 2:31-38), and also from all that might be necessary to satisfy the needs of the body (as the Essenes did, cf. *Wars of the Jews*, II, 147). But obviously the ordinary requirements of daily living were not compatible with such a rigorous observance of the precept, and this gave rise to the numerous rabbinic rules which tried to preserve it as much as possible in theory without being entirely impractical.

We find listed thirty-nine categories of actions, which, according to the rabbis, constitute a violation of the Sabbath (*Shabbath*, VII, 2), such as tying or untying a knot in a rope, putting out a lamp, sewing two stitches (literally two), writing two letters (of the alphabet), etc. Often, however, the rabbis themselves employed their casuistry to lighten the severity of the rules. Thus, with regard to the matter of untying a knot in a earners halter, for instance. Rabbi Meir opined that if the camel driver could untie it with one hand, then he did not violate the Sabbath. Similarly, it was forbidden to tie a rope to a bucket to lower it into a well; however, if the knot was not tied with rope but with a strip of cloth, then the Sabbath was not violated.

More lenient interpretations of the precepts multiplied in abundance, and they formed the object of a special treatise, *Erubin*. Here legal stratagem is used to make it lawful to move a given object from one's house or lands, though moving anything at all from one place to another, even a dry fig, was actually forbidden (*Shabbath*, VII, 3 ff.). The same treatise aims to increase the amount of walking permissible on the Sabbath, which was regularly limited to two thousand cubits or about nine hundred yards.

71. The Jewish Sabbath, according to the Hebrew calendar, began at sunset of our Friday and lasted until sunset of the following day. Friday afternoon was called the "vigil of the Sabbath" or "parasceve" (*paraskeuh*), that is, "preparation." This second term was due to the fact that everything necessary for the inactive Sabbath was prepared on that afternoon including food, since lighting a fire was one of the thirty-nine prohibited actions. ([Figure 12](#), [Figure 13](#), [Figure 14](#), [Figure 15](#))



Claims of a superior nature might break in upon the strictness of the Sabbath rest, but even here the minute casuistry of the rabbis continues unabated. Thus, circumcision was permitted but certain restrictions were placed on the accessory acts; it was lawful to prepare the sacrifice of the Pasch, but everything not strictly necessary to its preparation was to be omitted; the priest on duty in the Temple could perform the manual tasks required by the prescribed ritual, but if he cut his finger, he could treat it only within the Temple itself, not outside its precincts. As for medication in general, the rule had been established that the Sabbath rest could be broken to minister to one in danger of death (*Yoma*, VIII, 6), but as usual the rule was accompanied by various specifications. The Talmud permitted one to rinse a sore tooth with vinegar provided he swallowed the vinegar afterward for that would be equivalent to taking food, but he could not spit it out again because that would be taking medicine (Tosephta, *Shabbath*, XII, 9). Similarly, he could place an injured hand or foot in cold water (as in daily washing) but he could not move the hurt member about in the water (medicinal bathing) (*Shabbath*, XXII, 6).

Except for all this stifling legislation, the Jewish Sabbath was a day of spirituality and joy. The Talmud itself prescribed that the best foods were to be reserved for this day, though prepared on the vigil, and it was a day, too, for festive garments and ornaments. A good part of it was spent at religious services in the synagogue or at home, or in devotional reading, which was all the more favored by the forced inactivity of the Sabbath rest.

72. While circumcision concerned the Jew only once in his lifetime and the Sabbath only once a week, a complicated array of laws, from which he was never free, followed him into every action at every hour of his night and day. These were the precepts concerning purity and impurity.

For the Jew, the moral stain of sin implied a kind of physical stain also, just as physical contact with specific objects which were the result of sin or in some way reflected it impaired the spiritual integrity of the one who touched them, and produced a kind of moral stain. Cases of this kind were innumerable and furnished even more inexhaustible material for rabbinic legislation than did the Sabbath rest.

Of the six "orders" or parts into which the Mishna (the basic part of the Talmud, to which the rest is commentary) is divided, a whole order, *Toharoth* ("purities"), containing twelve treatises, is devoted to this subject. A glance at

the titles of these treatises will provide a general idea of their content: *Kelim*, “utensils,” on dishes, utensils, and various other domestic articles and their purity; *Ohaloth*, “tents,” on the purity of dwellings, especially while a dead person remained in the house; *Nega'im*, “plagues,” on the signs of leprosy; *Parah*, “cow,” on the red heifer (cf. *Num.* 19); *Toharoth*, “purities,” on impurities which cease at sunset; *Miqwa' oth*, “baths,” on the requirements for baths of immersion to be used in purifying ablutions; *Niddah*, “menstruation”; *Makshirin*, “what predisposes,” on the liquids which communicate impurities; *Zabin*, “flowing,” on men suffering sexual issues; *Tebul jom*, “immersed during the day,” on those who have undergone a purifying immersion but who are not pure until sunset; *Yadayim*, “hands,” on the purity of the hands; *Uqsin*, “stalks,” on the stems of fruit as carriers of impurity. Each of these twelve treatises, containing from three to thirty chapters, goes into such minute detail with regard to each case and its respective precepts that it is impossible to give even a sketchy summary of them.

Nor are we to believe that this great mass of regulations was merely hygienic in purpose or that it could be taken lightly. Quite the contrary, the spirit which prompted them was strictly religious and whoever did not observe them was violating holy precepts. In fact, we find rabbinic maxims like this: “He who eats bread without washing his hands is as one who frequents a harlot; ... he who neglects to wash his hands shall be uprooted from the world” (*Sotah*, 4 b). Elsewhere the question is asked, who is to be considered one of “the people of the land,” that is, one of those who, according to the great Hillel, did not fear sin and were not pious (§40), and the answer is one “who eats food while he is profane, not in a state of purity,” i.e., without washing his hands (*Berakhoth*, 47 b). Still other passages contain sentences of excommunication pronounced against those who neglected to wash their hands before meals (*Berakhoth*, 19 a; *Edujjoth*, V, 6).

When we remember that such precepts with their respective sanctions extended from the matter of washing the hands to the various types of pure and impure foods and the thousand other daily acts considered in the twelve treatises mentioned above, we have some idea of the extreme rigor with which rabbinic casuistry hemmed in all social life on the basis of a religious principle. The legalist Pharisees rested on that full flowering of maxims as on a bed of roses and they invited the pious Israelite to do likewise if he wished truly to observe the commandments of Yahweh; but the pious Israelite who

tried it found it a bed of thorns which constantly tore his anxious conscience without affording him any of the consolation of real devotion.

73. This was true of the great majority who did not go beyond sheer formalism. But there were chosen souls who, searching more deeply, did attain a spirituality like that which must have inspired the observance of legal purity already defined in the Old Testament. Thus, a teacher who lived a little later than Jesus, Johanan ben Zakkai (he died around A.D. 80) admonished his disciples: "It is not the dead who give impurity to your lives, nor does water render you pure, but it is the commandment of the King of kings; God has said: I have established a rule, I have imposed a commandment; no man has the right to transgress my commandment" (*Pesiqta*, 40 b). Unfortunately gems like these are extremely rare in the ocean of rabbinic casuistry.

74. In addition to the weekly Sabbath, there were annual feasts to be observed, principal among them the Pasch, Pentecost, and the Feast of Tabernacles. These three were called "feasts of pilgrimage" because for them every male Israelite who had reached a certain age (on which the rabbis were not agreed) was obliged to go to the Temple of Jerusalem.

The Pasch was celebrated in the month called *Nisan*, which corresponded roughly to the period between March fifteenth and April fifteenth of our calendar. The feast began on the evening of the fourteenth day of *Nisan* and was followed immediately by the "Feast of the Azymes," celebrated on the seven succeeding days (the fifteenth to the twenty-first *Nisan*); hence these eight days were called either the Pasch or the Azymes. From the tenth or the eleventh hour of the fourteenth *Nisan*, the last crumb of leavened bread disappeared from every Jewish house, since on the rest of that day and the seven days following the use of unleavened bread was absolutely obligatory. On the afternoon of the fourteenth, the Paschal victim, a lamb, was sacrificed in the inner court of the Temple by the head of the family or group making the offering. The blood of the victims was gathered up and given to the priests who sprinkled it at the altar of holocausts. Immediately after the sacrificial ceremony and still within the Temple court, the animal was skinned, certain of its entrails were removed, and then it was brought back to the family or group to which it belonged.

On that afternoon the courts of the Temple inevitably resembled a slaughterhouse streaming with blood. In fact, the multitude of Jews who flocked to the Temple from Palestine and the Diaspora was truly enormous,

and since the Temple Court could not accommodate at one time all those who had come to offer their lambs, it was necessary to arrange them in three relays. The first entered at about two in the afternoon, and between groups the entrance gates were closed. Flavius Josephus incidentally furnishes us with some exact statistics, gathered for the Roman authorities in the time of Nero, probably in the year A.D. 65, and these would indicate that on the one afternoon of that year 255,600 sacrificial victims were slaughtered (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, 424). A flock that large, even of lambs, was enough to produce a veritable lake of blood and redden all the walls and pavements of the Temple.

75. The sacrificial lamb was then brought home and roasted the same evening for the Paschal feast. This began after sunset and regularly lasted until midnight, sometimes longer. There were to be no less than ten and not more than twenty persons at each festive board, and they reclined on divans arranged in a circle about the table. It was prescribed that the ritual wine be passed at least four times during the meal; other wine could be taken before the third serving of the ritual wine but not between the third and fourth. We cannot be certain whether or not all the guests drank from one goblet of ample dimensions or whether each had his own. Perhaps both methods were permissible.

The meal began with the pouring of the first cup of ritual wine and the recitation of a prayer which invoked a blessing first upon the feast day and then upon the wine (or vice versa, as another rabbinic school would have it). Unleavened bread was served and wild herbs, along with a special sauce (*haroseth*) in which they were to be dipped. Then came the roast lamb. This was followed by the second cup of ritual wine, after which the head of the family, usually in response to a conventional question from the son of the house, made a little speech that explained the meaning of the feast and recalled the benefits bestowed by Yahweh upon his chosen nation and its deliverance from Egypt. Next came the recitation of the first part of the Hallel, a hymn composed by the Hebrew psalms 113-118 (112-117 of the Vulgate), and then the blessing with which the real banquet began, after, of course, the customary washing of the hands. This part of the meal was not governed by any particular ceremonies and the foods served were various. The third cup of ritual wine followed and then a prayer of thanksgiving. The second part of the Hallel was recited, and finally the fourth cup was passed.

This is the rite of the Jewish Pasch as it is outlined, though somewhat indefinitely, in rabbinic tradition (*Pesachim*, X, 1, ff.). We may consider that it

reflects at least in a general way the manner in which the Pharisees, and therefore also the great number of people who followed them, celebrated the Pasch at the time of Jesus.

76. The feast following that of the Pasch was called the Feast of the (seven) Weeks or Pentecost. This second term is Greek ("fiftieth" day) and like the first denotes the length of time between Pentecost and the Pasch. The feast itself lasted only one day, on which loaves of bread made from the newly harvested wheat were offered in the Temple along with other special sacrifices. This feast was not of a very popular character but it was nevertheless well attended by the Jews from the various regions of the Diaspora because it fell in a good season for sea travel and long journeys.

About six months after the Pasch came the Feast of the Tabernacles, which fell on the fifteenth day of the month Tishri, that is, at the end of September or the beginning of October, and lasted eight days. It was a very gay and popular feast, and since it recalled the sojourn in the desert and at the same time celebrated the end of the vintage and the harvest, the people built little booths of green branches like tabernacles in the squares and on the terraces and there they disported themselves, hence the name of the feast. In addition, they went to the Temple bearing a bunch of palm, myrtle, and willow (the *Lulab* or *Lolab* frequently pictured in the Jewish catacombs) in the right hand and a citrus fruit in the left. On the night of the first day, the Temple was magnificently illuminated, and in the morning of the first seven days, the priest poured upon the altar a little water which had been brought, in procession, from the spring of Siloe.

77. The tenth day of the same month, Tishri, was the Day of Atonement or Yom Kippur, a day of rest and strict fast, on which the high priest officiated in person. On this one day in the year, he entered the "Holy of Holies" (§47), and he performed the symbolic ceremony of the scapegoat (*Levit.* 16; *Heb.* 9:7).

There were two other feasts of a popular character also. That of the Dedication took place on the twenty-fifth *Kislew* (at the end of December) and lasted for eight days. It celebrated the reconsecration of the Temple by Judas Machabeus in 164 B.C. and was called also the "feast of light" because the Temple was brilliantly illuminated for the occasion. Through this feast rang the note of national triumph. The Feast of Purim ("lots"), which fell on the fourteenth and fifteenth Adar (February- March) commemorated the liberation of the Jews by lot at the time of Esther.

Fasting was obligatory for all Jews on the Day of Atonement only, but there was other public and private fasting as well. Many fasted voluntarily on the anniversary of past disasters, such as the destruction of Jerusalem by Nabuchodonosor in 586 B.C., and the Sanhedrin could prescribe public fasting during contemporary calamities, such as epidemics, droughts, and the like. There was also a great deal of fasting prompted by individual piety; the Pharisees especially were much concerned with fasting on Mondays and Thursdays.

78. The religious concepts of Judaism at the time of Jesus have been the object of extensive and accurate studies in recent times, which have quite rightly made use of various apocryphal and rabbinic writings usually neglected in the past. We find, however, that in those concepts the fundamental principles of the early Jewish religion had been for the most part preserved, but often modified and occasionally transformed; above all, they had undergone amplifications and developments no trace of which is to be found in the ancient writings of the Hebrews. Let us examine briefly some of the concepts which have the most direct bearing on the story of Jesus.

There was in his time a more highly developed belief in the world of spirits than in the period immediately following the Babylonian exile and much more so than in still earlier times. This was occasioned by contact, during and after the exile, with the Persians, whose Mazdean religion included a considerable angelology. The Jewish belief in spirits, however, remains always within the limits of strict orthodox monotheism, for it has nothing like Mazdean dualism, conceives all spirits as being subordinate to the one God, and does not extend to them the worship proper only to the Divinity.

There are innumerable spirits, and they are divided into two classes, good and evil. The former are the special ministers of God and the friends of man; the latter are subject to divine Power but are hostile to it and are the enemies of man. Though spiritual neither are completely immaterial; they are possessed of an ethereal, fluid substance which is luminous or opaque depending on the good or evil qualities of the individual spirit.

The apocryphal writings especially, which often reflect the most widespread popular beliefs, abound in information concerning the world of spirits. Some of the good ones are called "angels of the Presence" because they stand eternally in the presence of God; others are called "angels of the Ministry" because they are sent to perform various duties for man. Some are assigned

to guide the stars and the earth, others the various races and nations of human beings, or even single individuals. Some guide the souls of the dead in their passage to the next world and others are designated to torment the demons.

The good spirits are arranged in a kind of hierarchy. Besides the *Seraphim* and *Kerubim*, which are to be found in early Hebraism, there now appear the *Ophanim*, who "never sleep, standing guard before the throne of the divine majesty" (*Henoch*, 71, 7 ff.). There are seven special spirits always in the presence of the Divinity, four of whom are Michael, Raphael, Gabriel, and Uriel, who is often confused with Phanuel (cf. *Enoch*, 9, 1; 20, 1-8; 40, 9-10; etc.). Ordinarily Michael is the vindicator of the glory of God, Raphael the angel of bodily cures, Gabriel the angel of special revelations, and Uriel the one who knows hidden truths.

The Jews were uncertain to which of the six days of creation to assign the creation of the angels; some said the first day, others the second, and still others the fifth. There was the same uncertainty regarding the origin of the evil spirits; some believed them to be the spirits of the "giants" begotten of angels who allowed themselves to be seduced by the daughters of men (cf. *Gen.* 6:1 ff.), but there is more evidence of the other belief that they were former angels fallen from their state of glory. Their leader is a being at first commonly called the satan, that is, "the accuser," "the adversary," always with the definite article. Later, however, the title became a proper name and the article was dropped, Satan; other more recent titles for him are Belial (Beliar), Beelzebul (Beelzebub), Asmodeus, Mastema, and a few others of various origin.

The evil spirits wander about in the lowest strata of air or live in deserted places, among ruins, in tombs, and other impure spots, and sometimes even in houses occupied by men. Often, they take up their abode in a man's body and possess him. Within and without these dwellings, they work constantly, and preferably by night, to ensnare and harm men. They occasion or foster all physical and moral ills, causing sickness, accidents, madness, scandal, discord, and war. They tempt the just, guide the impious, promote idolatry, teach magic and, in short, systematically oppose the Law of the God of Israel.

79. No less highly developed than this angelology at the time of Jesus were the ideas of the Jews regarding the next world. Early Hebrew thought — judging from what has come down to us — was extremely vague on this

subject although isolated statements here and there would lead us to suspect that there was a richer patrimony of concepts regarding the world beyond than we have evidence of today. In any case, the fundamental ones in early times were the following:

The dwelling place of the dead was called Sheol (*she'ol*, always treated as feminine), imagined to be an immense cavern in the subterranean regions of the world. There the shades of the departed, the *Repha'im* ("weak," "languid") wandered through a land "that is dark and covered with the mist of death, a land of misery and darkness" (*Job* 10:21-22), though elsewhere they are spoken of as being still subject to human emotions and apt to communicate with the living if properly conjured up (*I Sam.* 28:8). No one who has descended into Sheol can ever return (*Job* 7:9-10; 10:21; but cf. the famous and disputed passage in 19:23-27). The earliest documents do not furnish any clear or unequivocal evidences of belief in a moral sanction of reward or punishment for the inhabitants of the land of the dead as a consequence of their earthly behavior.

80. These vague and uncertain concepts persisted for a long time even after the Babylonian exile, and we find them expressed again at the beginning of the second century B.C. by so learned a Scribe as Ben Sira (*Ecclus.*, Greek text, 17:27-28 [22-23]; 41:4 [6-7]). But during the exile there had already been planted the germs of a new leaven which was gradually to change the state of the question and require a solution better suited to the new times.

Ezekiel (18:1 ff.) had asserted the moral principle of individual retribution in contrast to the belief in collective-national retribution which had governed early Hebraism, and this new principle was bound to influence the question of the next world. Throughout the entire book of Job, an unknown and lonely individual of lofty intellect had struggled with the problem of the relations between moral goodness and earthly happiness; but his conclusion was more negative than positive, for since he found that there is not always an infallible correlation between them, he took refuge in an act of faith in the supreme justice of God. But the leaven was quietly at work and men began more and more to associate the question of moral retribution with the next world and to wonder whether the present life, so clouded by injustice, was not to be followed by another on which justice would shine in full splendor. In other words, would they not one day emerge from Sheol in a resurrection that would see all the wrongs of this world righted?



Alexandrian Judaism, in daily contact with Platonizing Hellenistic philosophy, found it less necessary to appeal to the resurrection of the dead. In the present life the corruptible body is like a heavy weight burdening the soul (*Wisd.* 9:15); hence, with death, the soul of the just man is freed from its prison house and returns to God, who bestows on it the reward it has earned (*Wisd.* 3:1 ff.). But Palestinian Judaism, unaware of Platonism and accustomed to viewing the composite human individual as a *quid unum*, needed a solution that would correspond perfectly and completely with this view and include the body as well as the soul. The resurrection of the dead had been affirmed in the past but in more or less poetic (*Isa.* 26:19) or symbolic (*Ezech.* 37:1-14) fashion. Later it is asserted explicitly (*Dan.* 12:1-3) and later still the Pharisees maintain against the Sadducees that it is useful to pray for the dead in the certain expectation of their resurrection (2 *Mach.* 12:43-46; cf. 7:9). At the time of Jesus belief in the resurrection was widespread among the Jews of Palestine with the sole exception of the Sadducees (§34) and we have specific documentation of it both in the various apocrypha composed from the second century B.C. on and in the rabbinic writings.<sup>11</sup> Details, however, varied; for example, it seems that many denied the wicked would rise again, believing instead that they would be annihilated.

The same apocrypha present even more numerous variations in the interminably minute descriptions they undertake to give regarding the topography and material equipment of the next world, both when they treat of the sections reserved for the> blessed and those arranged for the damned. But we have in compensation a really fantastic panorama of labyrinthine constructions erected by the collective imagination of entire generations. The most ancient notions of cosmology influenced these descriptions, naturally, and many elements in them continued to be passed on until we eventually find them included even in the *Divine Comedy*.

81. Palestinian Judaism taught that two great events were to precede this resurrection in the life beyond, namely, the advent of the Messiah and the drama of the end of the world. Very often these two happenings, seemingly distinct in themselves, were linked together, and they offered inexhaustible material for the apocalyptic literature that came to its full flowering in that period.

In the two centuries preceding and the one following the birth of Jesus, the great Elect (Hebrew, *Mashiah*, “anointed”; Greek, *cpistos*, “anointed”), who

the ancient prophets had promised would liberate and glorify Israel, was awaited with the most anxious longing, and his coming was associated with the actual conditions in which the nation found itself. This Messiah was to inaugurate an age of happiness in Israel which would be the just reward for the long humiliation it had suffered until then. Yahweh, by delivering his chosen nation through the Messiah and causing it to triumph over its enemies would bring about his own triumph. Israel's reign over all the pagan nations would be also the reign of the one true God over all the sons of men, the kingdom of God on earth. Hence all looked toward that great One to come and speculated on the time of his coming, on the manner in which he would accomplish his mission, on his exploits among the pagan nations, and even on the relationship between the messianic kingdom and their contemporary material world together with the laws which governed it.

At the time of Jesus, all agree that the Messiah will be a descendant of David, as ancient tradition has stated. He is often called the "Son of man," as in Daniel 7:13. Four great kingdoms have successively risen and fallen in the past, but the fifth, the kingdom of the Messiah, will endure for eternity (*Dan.* 2). Though, in the past, four rulers in the form of four great beasts have risen from the sea and though a horn of the fourth beast (Antiochus IV Epiphanes) has crushed the saints of the Most-High, all these forces hostile to God will be destroyed by One "like the Son of man," who in heaven receives all power from the "Ancient of days" and then descends upon earth to establish triumphantly his everlasting kingdom, in which the saints of the Most-High will reign supreme and receive homage from all kings (*Dan.* 7). The various apocryphal writings embellish these fundamental biblical themes, weaving many other elements in with them.

82. Particularly important is that part of the Book of Enoch called the "Parables" (chaps. 37-71), which was probably written about 80 B.C. The Messiah is the Elect of God with whom he abides. The title "Son of man" is pronounced before the Lord of angels (that is, the Messiah actually exists and is in the presence of God) before the sun and the stars are created. He will be the staff of the just, the light of nations; all the peoples will prostrate themselves before him (48, 2 ff.); "in him dwells the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of enlightenment, the spirit of knowledge and of strength, and the spirit of those who have fallen asleep in justice" (49, 3; cf. *Isa.* 11:2). He will judge all nations, punishing those who have oppressed the just; at his coming the dead

will rise again (51, 1 ff.; 62), heaven and earth will be transformed and the just, become heavenly angels, will abide with him throughout life everlasting.

A little later than *Enoch* are the so-called *Psalms of Solomon*, which contemplate the Messiah from a little less heavenly and a little earthlier point of view. These psalms, especially 17 and 18, pray God to send Israel its “king, the son of David,” that he may reign over it, crushing its unjust masters, purging Jerusalem of the pagans, and routing the nations. Then will he gather Israel under his rule, governing in peace and justice, and all the Gentiles will come from the ends of the earth to contemplate the glory of Jerusalem. He is “free from sin,” and “God will render him strength through the Holy Spirit.”

Similar concepts may be found in the *Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*, in IV *Esdras* (chap. 13), in the *Apocalypse of Baruch* (39, 7 ff.; 70, 2 ff.), etc.

83. These lucubrations contain the traditional messianic themes of the prophets, adapted now to different historical conditions and spiritual tendencies. The speculative author of *Enoch* uses them to give body to his mystico-eschatological creation; the Pharisaic author of the *Psalms of Solomon*, writing under the last decadent Hasmoneans, seeks in them a kind of national-religious revenge during the breaking up of the state and after Pompey's conquest of Jerusalem in 63 B.C. In fact, from that time on, the Messiah comes to be considered more and more a national avenger and political conqueror. When the Zealots (§42) fomented and led the paradoxical rebellion against Rome in 66-70, they were fortified not by any mere human hope but by their faith in the Messiah, the invincible leader who was suddenly to appear and drive out the Romans and sit gloriously upon the throne of Jerusalem. The mother of Jesus' two disciples must have been thinking of something similar when she sought to secure for her sons the two best posts in his kingdom, one on his right and the other on his left (*Matt.* 20:21). Philo of Alexandria (*De praemiis et poenis*, 15-20) seems to have shared, at least in part, this concept of a victorious political messiahs, without, however, matching the aberration of Flavius Josephus, who, in his servile devotion to the Romans, asserted that when the Hebrew Scriptures mentioned the future Messiah they were referring to the emperor Vespasian (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, 312-313).

Needless to say, both during and after the time of Jesus numerous imposters, mentioned now and then by Josephus, took advantage of the general feverish messianic hope and paraded before the eager populace as

envoys of God. Their attempts naturally ended either in tragedy beneath the Roman sword or in farce midst the jeers of their compatriots. But the multitude had such great faith in them that even when Jerusalem had been invaded by the Romans and the Temple was already in flames, these false messianic prophets still found disciples ready to believe in the imminent miraculous intervention of God (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, VI, 285-288).

Later, as nationalistic messianism became more widespread, it invaded also the field of eschatology, and, becoming as it did more or less completely fused with beliefs concerning the end of the world, it offered ample material for the apocalyptic literature of the time.

84. Apocalyptic writings are a specific type of literature which, as the name indicates (from *apokaluptw*, "I reveal hidden [divine] things"), claim to reveal future events, especially the ultimate fate of mankind in general and of Israel in particular. The apocalypse, therefore, presents many similarities to prophetic literature, but there are important differences to be noted also. Actually, it succeeded the prophetic type of writing, and it, too, aimed to assure men of the final victory of good over evil and of Israel over the pagan nations; but it developed in a different historical environment and had recourse to different devices.

Ancient prophecy aimed to correct contemporary conditions and prepare the way for the future; the apocalypse, on the other hand, was more radical and fundamentally more pessimistic. It declared the whole contemporary world must fall, that it must be renewed *ab imis*, that in a general palingenesis it was to give way to new heavens and a new earth which would see the ultimate triumph of good and of Israel. The prophets had called attention to the messianic age but they had done so to correct their own times, depicting it as Israel's reward provided she abandoned her folly. The apocalypse, however, spoke of it unconditionally as the absolute decree of God, and above all considered the epoch something completely independent of Israel's contemporary conduct. This complete lack of faith in the present and anxious reaching toward the future were born of the political disasters which had periodically befallen the nation since the time of the Seleucids and also of the growing internal decadence caused by the flood of Hellenism.

Evidently a world — or as they said, an age — so tenaciously wicked could not endure any longer. There had to come the *dies irae*, *dies ilia* (*Soph.* 1:15) which *solvet saeculum in favilla*, and this universal conflagration would

inaugurate the long-awaited palingenesis. As for the date of the latter, the apocalyptic writings, in direct opposition to the widespread anxious yearnings for its early fulfillment, often relegated the solemn event to a vague and distant future. Here again we have a combination of the pessimism produced by contemporary conditions and at the same time the confident hope that the ancient promises would come true.

85. The apocalypse was not a new invention but a marked development of forms already used to some extent in earlier writings.<sup>12</sup> It almost always attributed its revelations to venerated persons of antiquity (Enoch, Moses, Elias, etc.), making them prophesy apparently future events which were actually past for the real author. This was a kind of accreditation for the work, winning for it some measure of the authority that had disappeared with the prophets. The most common devices of the apocalypse are the vision and the symbol, which are often described as incomprehensible to the recipients of the revelations (in Zacharias, chap. 4 ff., an angel acts as interpreter), but which, for the author's contemporaries, are very clear allegories of past events. The eschatological descriptions are most minute and the "future age" is analyzed to the least detail. The apocalypse also contains a highly developed angelology, and good or wicked spirits appear as helpers or adversaries of God in his war upon evil, which eventually is to be defeated. The themes treated most frequently within the broad framework of messianic events are the struggle of the pagan nations against God and against Israel, the gathering of the twelve scattered tribes, the universal cataclysm, the triumph of the just in the kingdom of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead and the judgment of the whole human race, and the final state of the just and the impious.

86. For a clearer idea of the apocalypse, we add here a summary of the Ethiopic *Book of Enoch*, the oldest and most ample apocryphal apocalypse, to which several references have already been made. It is a compilation of various older writings in Hebrew or Aramaic, which appeared in Palestine during the first and second centuries B.C. The entire compilation was later translated into Greek, and about the fifth century from Greek into Ethiopic. It formed a kind of reference book for later apocalyptic writers (*The Book of Jubilees*, *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, etc.), the Christian Fathers referred to it with respect, and it also bears close relationship to a passage in the New Testament (cf. *Jude*, 14-15 with *Enoch*, 1, 9).

Chapters 1-5 serve as introduction. The protagonist, Enoch, describes the future judgment according to information which the angels have given him, charging him to communicate it to men; during the judgment punishments are assigned to the fallen angels and to impious men, and rewards are bestowed on the just.

In chapters 6-16 two hundred angels fall from grace by having relations with the daughters of men, to whom they reveal a great number of secrets pertaining to magic, medicine, etc.; for this they are punished.

In chapters 17-36 Enoch voyages through the celestial world and the nether world, guided by an angel who explains the mysteries to him. Among other things he sees the storehouses where the various meteors are kept, the chambers of the stars, etc.; he visits the earthly paradise and the abode of the damned; he learns the names and offices of the seven archangels, the sin of the seven stars that had been chained for ten thousand centuries, etc.

Chapters 37-71 comprise the "Parables." The first parable describes the struggle between heaven and hell; the latter is defeated on the day of judgment with the advent of the kingdom of the saints. The second pictures the coming and triumph of the "Son of man" and the messianic victory over the impious; the third describes the beatitude of the elect after the fulfillment of the messianic kingdom; and lastly (chaps. 70-71), Enoch is assumed into heaven to admire its wonders.

Chapters 72-82 form the so-called "Astronomical Book," which treats of the movement of the stars, of various cosmic and physical laws, etc.

Chapters 83-90 contain the two visions seen in dreams. The first deals with the Flood; the other presents personages and periods in Hebrew history from Adam down to Judas Machabeus in animal symbols. The Messiah is symbolized by a white bull with great horns, the emblem of power.

Chapters 91-105 contain first (with some transpositions) a vision of ten weeks corresponding to ten periods in the history of the world, and then a series of exhortations and threats addressed by Enoch to his sons.

## CHAPTER X: The Sources

87. THERE are numerous writings of antiquity which speak of Jesus and they fall naturally into two groups: Christian and non-Christian. This classification has a manifest scientific importance for it enables us to judge the impartiality of the respective testimonies; but we must also apply the chronological criterion, for a testimony is usually more authoritative and precious the older it is and the nearer to the facts attested. For all practical purposes, however, it is easier for us in the present instance to follow the first grouping, which leaves little room for discussion, whereas the attempt to fix the chronology of the various writings involves numerous and highly controversial questions. Naturally we must keep these latter in mind also.

### NON-CHRISTIAN SOURCES

The Jews, countrymen and contemporaries of Jesus, should furnish us with the earliest data concerning him, but unfortunately this is not the case. The Jewish sources, while not altogether silent on the subject, are almost as taciturn and sparing of information worthy of note as are the pagan sources.

#### *Official Judaism*

After the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish state in A.D. 70, that is, about forty years after the death of Jesus, the spiritual life of Palestinian Judaism was represented exclusively by the Pharisees. True to their fundamental principles, they devoted themselves completely to the collection and preservation of the oral “tradition,” which, together with the Bible, now formed the only spiritual heritage of Judaism. The Pharisaic doctors dedicated to this labor during the first three centuries are called Tannaim and they were succeeded by the Amoraim, who carried on the work until the end of the fifth century. The Tannaim are responsible for the code of the Mishna, the Amoraim for the commentary on it. The Mishna and its commentary together formed the Talmud, in its alternative Palestinian or Babylonian editions. But the Talmud, though it contains material which may possibly antedate the destruction of Jerusalem, was fixed definitively in writing only in the fifth or sixth century; before that its contents had been handed down orally, entrusted to the memory of the various doctors, though with the primitive wording faithfully retained.



Once assembled, the Talmud became the spiritual citadel of Judaism and, with the Bible, took on an official character. Contemporary with the Talmud we have the elaboration of other material which also was put in writing only after it had been transmitted orally over a long period, though its earliest elements date from the time of the Tannaim. These writings, the most important of which in number and length are the various Midrashim, were not vested with official character like the Talmud, but they did have a subordinate and complementary value.

88. We find that Jesus and his work are certainly known to these official Jewish writings, but often the reference to him is veiled and indirect only, without any mention of his name. If we gather up all the specific information concerning him which it is possible to extract from them, we find nothing like it in any other ancient document, and when pieced together it yields the following biography of Jesus, not at all free from contradictions and incongruities.

Jesus the Nosri (Nazarene) was born of a hairdresser named Mary. Her husband is sometimes called Pappos, son of Judas, and sometimes Stada, although Mary herself is sometimes called Stada. The true father of Jesus was a certain Panthera<sup>13</sup>; hence we find Jesus called the son of Panthera as well as the son of Stada. Having betaken himself to Egypt, Jesus studied magic there under Joshua, son of Perachias. Chronologically speaking, it should be noted here that while this particular Joshua flourished about 100 B.C., the aforementioned Pappos lived about two hundred and thirty years later. Having returned to his own country, rejected by his teacher, Jesus practiced magic and led the people astray. For this reason, he was brought to trial and condemned to death. The authorities waited forty days before executing the sentence, during which time a herald repeatedly invited the people to bring forth any justification whatever in favor of the condemned man. Since no one did, he was stoned and then hanged from the scaffold at Lydda on the vigil of the Pasch. At present he is in Gehenna immersed in boiling mud.

In all this data, veiled as it is, Jesus is indicated with the expression "a certain one," or with the name Balaam (the ancient magician of Numbers 22 ff.), or with the epithets: *lunatic*, *bastard*, and another even more opprobrious.<sup>14</sup>

89. The following anecdote may serve to illustrate how allusion was made to Jesus and his teaching without mentioning him by name, though the allusion

was no less direct because of that. Some learned men in Rome asked Rabbi Joshua, son of Ananias, who flourished about A.D. 90: "Tell us something in the nature of a fable! — He said: Once upon a time there was a she-mule that bore a colt; on the latter was hung a placard, and on this it was written that the colt was to inherit one hundred thousand 'zuz' [a coin] from its sire's family. - And they answered: Rut can a she-mule foal? — He said: But this is a fable! — [Then he was asked:] If the salt becomes insipid, with what must it be salted? —He answered: With the placenta of a she-mule. — [It was said to him:] But has the she-mule [being sterile] a placenta? - [He answered:] And can the salt become insipid?"<sup>15</sup> It is evident that this anecdote refers to the saying of Jesus: "If the salt loses its savor, wherewith shall it be salted?" (*Matt.* 5:13), the point being to represent it as nonsensical. But it is also clear that the two animals are a derisive allusion to Mary and Jesus, while the whole anecdote aims to demonstrate how Judaism is the true salt which will never become insipid, and how, in any case, Jesus less than anyone else could restore to it its natural flavor.

Even non-Jewish sources afford partial proof that all this material is of Jewish origin. In the middle of the second century the Palestinian Justin Martyr hints at it more than once in his *Dialogue with Trypho* (the Jew), accusing the Jewish doctors of spreading everywhere their calumnies and blasphemies against Jesus. We find more explicit reference to it in the pagan Celsus who uses it in his *True Discourse*, written a little before 180, of which we shall have more to say later (§195). It seems certain that Celsus derived his information from some written source. Finally, this same material, which had undergone constant elaboration, went to form the pamphlet entitled *Toledoth Jeshu*, "Generations (History) of Jesus," various editions of which were already in circulation about the eighth and ninth centuries. It remained the semiofficial Jewish biography of Jesus until a few decades ago.

Now all this data may serve to indicate the Jewish attitude toward Jesus during the first centuries of the Christian era; but it would be neither scientific nor dignified to discuss its reliability as documentary material for the biography of Jesus. Besides, it would be highly useless discussion today, because learned and conscientious Jews themselves now consider it sheer legend and so do the rationalist scholars, who usually accompany their verdict with harsh criticism. Renan, for example, defined all these stories as "burlesque and obscene legend."

## *Flavius Josephus*

90. Josephus, a priest of Jerusalem, the son of Matthias, was born in 37-38 of the Christian era. When the Jewish revolt against Rome broke out in 66, he was at the head of the first rebel troops to engage the Roman forces in Galilee. After several defeats, he surrendered to the enemy commander, the future emperor Vespasian, whose faithful servant he later became. When Jerusalem had been destroyed before his eyes, he went to Rome with the conqueror Titus, son of Vespasian, and became a salaried court historian to their Flavian gens, whose name, as a freedman, he added to his own.

Between 75 and 79, Josephus published *The Wars of the Jews*, in which he recounted both the events preceding the insurrection and the whole course of the war, in which he had been both actor and spectator. Though marred by numerous and serious defects, this work is singularly useful in the study of the historical background of Jesus' times and we have nothing that can take its place. Between 93 and 94, Josephus published his *Antiquities of the Jews*, in which he relates the history of the Hebrew nation from its beginnings up to the outbreak of the war against Rome; the preceding work, therefore, serves as a sequel to this. A little after 95, he published the *Contra Apionem*, a polemical writing in defense of Judaism, and after 100 he published the *Life* (his own), which is an apologia for his politics.

In all these writings, though he has a great deal to say of Jewish or Roman personages named also in the Gospels, he mentions Jesus or the Christians in only three instances. In one he speaks with great respect of John the Baptist and his death (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 116-119); in another he mentions with equal respect the violent death of James, "the brother of Jesus, called the Christ" (*ibid.*, XX, 200). About the authenticity of these two passages there are no reasonable doubts despite the hesitancy of a few modern scholars in their regard.

91. This is not the case with the third passage, a literal translation of which follows: "Now about this time there was a certain Jesus, a wise man, if indeed he must be called a man. He was in fact the worker of extraordinary things, the teacher of men who accept the truth with pleasure. And he drew to himself many of the Jews and many Greeks also. This man was the Christ. And when Pilate, because the principal men among us denounced him, had punished him on the cross, those who had loved him from the beginning did not cease. In fact, he appeared to them on the third day alive once more, the

divine prophets having already spoken these and thousands of other wonderful things concerning him. And even today the tribe of those who from him are called Christians has grown no less" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 63-64).

This passage, commonly known as the *testimonium flavianum* appears in all the manuscripts of the *Antiquities of the Jews*, and as early as the fourth century it was known to Eusebius who cites it more than once (*Hist. eccl.*, 1, 11; *Demonst. evang.*, III, 3); nor was its authenticity ever questioned until the sixteenth century. It was then the first doubts were cast upon it, but they were based entirely on internal evidence, that is, it did not seem possible that a Jew and a Pharisee like Josephus should do Jesus so much honor in speaking of him. The conclusion, therefore, was that the passage had been interpolated by some unknown Christian hand. The question continued to be debated down to our own times, and there are champions and adversaries of the authenticity of the passage in every camp. For example, the rationalist Harnack has defended it, while the Catholic Lagrange has considered it an interpolation.

An incontrovertible solution will probably never be found both because we lack sufficient documents and because the arguments brought against its authenticity are theoretical only and hence capable of being judged in various ways. Since it is irrelevant to our purpose here to examine anew the merits of the case, I refer the reader to my discussion of them elsewhere and confine myself to quoting merely the final sentence: "In conclusion, it seems to us that the testimonium as it exists today could have suffered interpolation by a Christian hand, although its substance is certainly genuine; nevertheless, we admit that it is equally possible and even more likely that the other opinion is correct, that is, that it [the testimonium] is wholly genuine and written just as we have it today by the pen of Josephus" (*Giuseppe Flavio*, traduzione e commento, I, 185).

### *Roman and Other Writers*

92. In the second decade of the second century three Roman authors speak of Christ and of the Christians.

Pliny the Younger's famous letter to the Emperor Trajan (*Epist.*, X, 96), written about 112, says nothing about Jesus personally; it merely testifies to the fact that in Bithynia, governed by Pliny, there were many Christians, who

were “accustomed to gather before daybreak and sing hymns to Christ as if he were a God.”

The *Annales* of Tacitus, who is the most generous on the subject, are to be dated a little earlier than 117. Speaking of Nero and the fire in Rome in 64, he says that this emperor, to dissipate the rumors that he himself had ordered the fire to be started, “presented as the guilty ones and visited with the most refined punishments those whom the populace, hating them for their crimes, called *Crestiani*. The author of this denomination, Christ, in the reign of Tiberius, had been condemned to death by Pontius Pilate; but though checked for the moment, the deadly superstition broke out afresh, not only throughout Judea, where this evil originated, but also throughout the *Urbs*, where all outrageous and shameful things gather from every region and are exalted” (*Annal.*, XV, 44). Then there follows a description of the tortures to which the Christians were subjected during the Neronian persecution. It is self-evident that this pagan testimony from distant Rome confirms certain fundamental information about the life of Jesus which was already circulating in Palestine in the preceding century.

Some years later, about 120, Suetonius confirms in general the fact that under Nero the Christians, a race of men given to a new and evil superstition, were subjected to torture” (Nero, 16); but when he speaks of the preceding reign of Claudius, he offers some new data, for he states that this emperor “expelled from Rome the Jews, who, at the instigation of *Crestus*, rioted frequently” (Claudius, 25). This expulsion, confirmed by *Acts* 18:2, took place between 49 and 50. There is no reasonable doubt that the epithet *Crestus* used by Suetonius is the Greek term *christos*, the etymological translation of the Hebrew messiah (§81), especially since even later we find the Christians called *crestiani* (Tertullian, *Apolog.*, 3), as they are in the passage from Tacitus quoted above. We may therefore conclude that about twenty years after the death of Jesus the Jews living in Rome were given to constant and noisy quarrels regarding the character of “Christ,” or Messiah attributed to Jesus, some evidently recognizing him as such and others denying him. The former were undoubtedly the Christians, especially those converted from Judaism. Suetonius, who writes seventy years after the events have taken place and who knows very little about Christianity, thinks that his *Crestus* was present in Rome and personally provoked the riots.

Then we have a letter of the Emperor Hadrian, written about 125 and addressed to the proconsul of Asia, Minusius Fundanus, and preserved for us

by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.*, IV, 9); it merely sets forth rules for the trials of Christians. Another letter addressed about 133 to the consul Servianus, in which there is incidental mention made of Christ and the Christians, is also attributed to Hadrian (Flavius Vopiscus, *Quadrige tyrannorum*, 8, in *Script. Hist. Aug.*).

Note, however, that these Roman writers never mention the name Jesus but only that of Christ (Chrestus).

93. There is nothing additional to be gleaned from non-Roman writers of the first two centuries. The sarcastic Lucian, a Hellenized Semite, often ridicules the Christians but rarely makes any allusion to Jesus. The most specific references are those in the *Peregrinus* (11 and 13), dating from about the year 170, wherein he states that the first law-giver of the Christians, a sophist and magician, was crucified in Palestine.

We have extant a letter in Syriac of another Semite, Mara bar Serapion, addressed to his son Serapion and containing a reference to Jesus (in Cureton, *Spicilegium Syriacum*, London, 1855, p. 43 ff.). With honor and respect, he mentions along with Socrates and Pythagoras a “wise king of the Jews who was put to death by his own nation, which because of that was punished by God with exile and the destruction of its capital. It is clear, therefore, that the letter was written after the events in Palestine in 70, but it is impossible to fix a precise date for it. It might very well belong to the late second century. Neither is it certain whether the author is secretly Christian or whether he is a pagan Stoic who secretly admires Christianity.

## CHRISTIAN -SOURCES

### *Documents Not Contained in the New Testament*

94. There are many Christian writings of the first centuries which concern Jesus but are not included in the New Testament. These sometimes resemble in form the various parts of the New Testament. There are, for example. Gospels, Acts, Epistles, Apocalypses, comprising the so-called apocryphal books. Sometimes they take the form of ecclesiastical writings, such as Constitutions, Canons, etc., and these are the so-called Pseudepigrapha. Lastly, these writings sometimes consist of little sayings or deeds attributed to Jesus which are not included in the New Testament but which are to be found by themselves or in the works of the early fathers or in some particular

manuscript of the New Testament or even in recently discovered fragments of ancient papyri; these tiny excerpts are called *Agrapha* or *Logia*.

Modern scholars have been very busy over these various sets of writings, whereas the last century paid little or no attention to them. But these new studies, while they have undoubtedly contributed to a better knowledge of the various groups of Christians who composed the writings, have also brought out all the more clearly the lack of any historical basis in the apocryphal writings, and, on the other hand, the very solid foundation of the New Testament. Between the two there is in reality “an abyss,” as Renan could say in his generation. When he compared the two from a purely historical point of view, he found the apocryphal gospels a “vulgar and puerile amplification” of the material in the apocryphal Gospels, to which they add absolutely nothing of value. Nor has Renan’s verdict suffered any substantial modification as a result of recent studies on the subject.

95. In general the apocryphal gospels were born of the desire to justify some particular doctrine on the basis of the life and teachings of Jesus himself, or else to embellish with further biographical details the information about him in the canonical Gospels, which, to the Christian populace, seemed entirely too parsimonious. In the first instance, we have the writings which are heretical in origin or at least controversial, and these are the more numerous; in the second, we have the various popular tales with their fondness for the miraculous and wonderful. Frequently the two are interwoven and it is not possible today to fix a precise line of division between them.

Occasion for these fantastic inventions was furnished both by the declaration in one of the canonical Gospels that many other facts about Jesus are not recorded in it (*John* 20:30-31) and that to record them all it would be necessary to fill infinite volumes (*ibid.*, 21:25), and also by the fact that St. Paul in one of his discourses quotes an aphorism of Jesus which is not contained in any of the canonical Gospels (*Acts* 20:35).

This abundant and fanciful embroidery of the gospel narrative began as early as the second century and it continued to grow and flourish until the Middle Ages. But only a small portion has come down to us and it is often difficult to determine the doctrinal tendencies contained in the various writings or even the precise date of their composition. Since it is useless besides to go into very much detail, we shall here confine ourselves to a brief description of the oldest of them.

96. Various ancient writers speak of a Gospel according to the Hebrews and give us besides some few quotations from it. But because these are so few and are engulfed in confusions that arose later, it is difficult to form even an approximate notion of it. It was certainly written in Aramaic and must have been in circulation as early as the first century. It seems to have borne a close relationship to the canonical Gospel of Matthew, if indeed it was not substantially the same Gospel retouched, with abbreviations and additions of doubtful origin. One of these additions, for instance, said that by the power of his mother, who was the Holy Spirit, Jesus was transported by a hair of his head to the top of Mount Tabor. In fact, the word 'spirit' in Aramaic was feminine as St. Jerome, who quotes this addition after Origen (in *Joan.*, II, 12), rightly observes (in *Michaeam*, VII, 6). We cannot be certain whether the Gospel of the *Nazarenes* or *Nazorenes*, members of a Jewish-Christian community settled around Berea (Aleppo), was a particular edition of this apocryphon or whether it was an entirely different composition.

The *Gospel of the Ebionites* belonged to a sect of the same name and championed its ideas and norms, such as vegetarianism. It was composed in the second century but only a few fragments remain to us, quoted by Epiphanius. The Ebionites called it the Gospel according to the Hebrews, but it seems to have been quite distinct from the latter. In any case it, too, was certainly a controversial manipulation of the canonical *Matthew*.

*The Gospel of the Egyptians* was used by the heretical Encratites, Valentinians, Naassenes, and Sabellians. It was composed in Egypt toward the middle of the second century. From the very few fragments extant it is clear that it condemned the institution of marriage in conformity with Encratite principles.

*The Gospel of Peter* seems to have been composed in Syria about the year 130 or shortly afterward. It was known in early times and a long section of it, relating to the death and resurrection of Jesus, was found in 1887. Substantially, the author uses the canonical Gospels, nor is it certain that his aim was to set forth heretical ideas. He does fall, however, into crude historical errors (for example he has Jesus condemned and brought to the scaffold by Herod) and he adds various details which are pure fantasy.

97. Of orthodox origin and great importance is the *Protoevangelion of James*, which goes back to about the middle of the second century. It lingers over details pertaining to the life of Mary and the infancy of Jesus, and some



of the episodes narrated therein and not mentioned in the canonical Gospels, such as the presentation of Mary in the Temple, are commemorated in the liturgy of the Church. The narrative is fundamentally that of the canonical Gospels but it is embellished especially with a great number of miracles which serve no purpose and are often indelicate. For example, the author imagines that Mary's perpetual virginity, on which as an orthodox Christian he lays the greatest stress, was put to a test as decisive as it was unseemly (chap. 20). This apocryphon was widely diffused in the early Church and in later times went through many variations, such as the *Pseudo-Gospel of Matthew* of the sixth century, and *The Book of the Nativity of Mary* of the ninth century.

Early writers speak of a *Gospel of Thomas*, composed toward the middle of the second century, as the work of Gnostic heretics, but the two editions of it which have come down to us —one fuller than the other—do not reveal any Gnostic ideas; they simply contain a number of miracles, almost all puerile, which are, in fact, attributed to Jesus' childhood, from the age of five on.

Other apocrypha, not always well known, which are of later date but are no more reliable, it is sufficient merely to name: *The Gospel of Philip*, third century; *The Gospel of Bartholomew*, fourth century; *The Acts of Pilate*, part of which is prior to the fourth century and which claims to be a report of the trial and resurrection of Jesus; *the Epistles between Abgar, King of Edessa, and Jesus* (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 1, 13), and *The Teaching of Addai*, of Syriac origin, fourth century; and there are other narratives also which date from the fifth century on.

Numerous apocryphal writings entitled *Acts*, *Letters*, *Apocalypses*, or even *Constitutions*, *Canons*, *Didaskalia* refer directly to the various Apostles rather than to Jesus; but he is mentioned a great deal in the so-called *Epistle of the Apostles*, written in Greek in the second century, which contains dialogues between Jesus and his disciples. It has come down to us in a Coptic and an Ethiopic recension (the latter is incorporated in the apocryphal *Testament of Our Lord Jesus Christ*).

By excluding at the start from the Canon of Holy Scriptures this mass of apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, the Church performed an excellent service if only from the point of view of scientific history. In fact, even when these writings do not contain concepts which are manifestly heretical or controversial, they do contain what St. Jerome labeled the "dreams" of the apocrypha.

98. The brief writings called *Agrapha* or *Logia* form a class apart and should perhaps be judged separately. For the sake of accuracy, a distinction should be made between them. If we consider the meaning of the two words, then the *Agrapha*, that is, the “unwritten,” are those short sayings or aphorisms attributed to Jesus which have been handed down through channels other than the Sacred Scriptures (*Graphe*) or apart from the four canonical Gospels. The *Logia*, “sayings,” are also short maxims attributed to Jesus and all of them belong to the class of *Agrapha*, but the term *Logia* is commonly used today to designate those sayings which scholars have been discovering for the past forty years in fragments of ancient papyri yielded up by a seemingly inexhaustible Egypt. The *Agrapha*, on the other hand, are attested in various ancient documents over and above the apocryphal literature — as for instance in the works of one or another Father of the Church, or in some isolated manuscript of the New Testament.

Since St. Paul himself quotes as the word of Jesus a maxim not contained in the Gospels: “It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive” (*Acts* 20:35), it is not theoretically impossible that other such brief remarks should have been preserved orally for a long time in the early Church and then written down sometime during the first centuries of Christianity. In actual fact, quotations of this kind are to be found in early Fathers widely separated in time and locality. Thus, in the first century, St. Clement of Rome attributes to Jesus the saying: “. . . As you shall do, so shall it be done to you; as you shall give, so shall it be given you; as you shall judge, so shall you be judged; as you shall be kind, so shall you be treated with kindness” (*I Cor.* 13); in the second century, the Palestinian St. Justin Martyr attributes to him the saying: “In whatever [works] I shall find you at my coming, in the same will I judge you” (*Dialog. cum Tryph.*, 47); in the third century, the Alexandrian Origen ascribes to him the aphorism: “He who is near to me, is near to the fire; he who is far from me, is far from the kingdom” (in *Jer.*, XX, 3), a saying which in the next century we come upon in Didymus the Blind, who is also an Alexandrian (in *Psalms*. LXXXVIII, 8); and again, in the fourth century the Syrian Aphraates, the “Persian Sage,” offers as the word of Jesus the following admonition: “Do not doubt, lest you sink into the world, like Simon who doubting began to sink into the sea” (*Demonstr.*, 1, 17). And the quotations, which also contain occasionally some little detail regarding the life of Jesus, might be multiplied to include other times and places as well.

What are we to think of these *Agrapha* in the early Christian writers?

99. It is impossible to give a blanket opinion of them; they must be considered singly. Very often these Agrapha are quotations from the canonical Gospels, not exact or literal as we should expect today, but rendered in free and oratorical fashion, the intention of the author being to cite faithfully the concept rather than the expression. At other times, the quotation, especially if it contains some biographical detail, would seem to derive from a pious composition by some private individual or even from a lost apocryphon. In other cases, it may come from oral tradition without our being able today to determine whether that particular tradition really goes back to the origins of Christianity or whether it is the fruit of pious elaboration. In conclusion, though it is theoretically possible that some of the Agrapha are authentic, it is extremely difficult to give concrete proof of it for any one of them.

This same generally diffident attitude is justifiable also toward certain brief passages which appear only in a particular manuscript of the New Testament and not in any of the other early documents. For example, Codex D, called the Codex Beza, of the sixth century, carries the following addition to *Luke* 6:4: "On that same day, [Jesus] having seen a certain man who was toiling on the Sabbath, said to him: Sir, if you know that which you do, you are blessed; if, however, you do not know, you are accursed and a transgressor of the Law. The idea here expressed is as typical as the passage is unique, existing in no other codex whatever. Another famous addition which is also typical and completely unique occurs in Manuscript W (Freer) after *Mark* 16:14. For the reasons already noted, though it is theoretically possible for these particular passages in individual manuscripts to be authentic, it would be a highly arduous undertaking to prove them so.

100. There has been an abundant harvest of Logia during the past forty years, and they are sometimes quite long. A beginning of such discoveries was made at Behnesa, ancient Oxyrhynchus (published by Grenfell and Hunt in *Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, 1897). Since then, Egypt has generously yielded up, together with very ancient manuscripts of the New Testament itself (Chester Beatty), others containing either short, detached maxims or longer well-connected passages. This last is the case with the papyrus (Egerton) published as *Fragments of an Unknown Gospel*, by Bell and Skeat in 1935. It is exceptionally old, dating certainly no later and perhaps earlier than the middle of the second century. The other Logia generally date from the second or the third century but consist of short, detached sayings which usually begin with the words: "Jesus says..."

Some have supposed that the (Egerton) manuscript of the Unknown Gospel contained a part of the apocryphal Gospel of the Egyptians (§96). This opinion is a debatable one but it is nevertheless certain that its content derives more or less directly from the four canonical Gospels and especially from John. The general run of the *Logia*, on the other hand, are relics of the shipwreck that overtook the early collections of the sayings of Jesus. The Christians of the first centuries compiled these collections for their own private use, gathering their material from various sources, even from the apocryphal gospels, not without modifying and adapting it to suit their own individual temperaments and purposes.

When the first of these *Logia* began to come to light, several scholars considered them remnants of ancient collections antedating the canonical Gospels, for which they were the source; hence they believed that they had come into possession of part of the *Logia* of Matthew which Papias mentions (§114if.), or of the writings of those “many” who according to St. Luke (1:1-4) had previously undertaken to narrate the facts pertaining to Jesus. But unfortunately, this rosy hypothesis and the enthusiasm which greeted it were not justified. Today, when we have so much more material and are better able to judge it, the almost unanimous opinion is exactly the opposite, namely, that these *Logia* are posterior to and derive from the canonical Gospels and from other sources as well.

101. We give as an example the first fragment published in 1897 (in *Oxyryhnchus Papyri*, I, n. 1), indicating the verses in the canonical Gospels from which the individual sayings derive:

“[Jesus says:] . . . and then shall you see well to extract the mote which is in the eye of your brother” (cf. *Matt.* 7:5; *Luke* 6:42).

“Jesus says: If you do not fast from the world, you shall not find the kingdom of God; and if you do not make a sabbath of the sabbath [that is, if you do not sanctify the whole week], you shall not see the Father.” (The concept of “fasting from the world” recurs in Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, III, 15, 99; Justin alludes to the concept of a spiritual sabbath, *Dialog, cum Tryph.*, 12.)

“Jesus says: I stood in the midst of the world and I appeared to them in die flesh; and I found them all drunken, and not one who thirsted did I find among them; and my soul is afflicted because of the sons of men, because they are blind in their hearts and do not see . . . (?) and poverty.”

“Wherever there are! [two, they are not] without God, and wherever there is one alone, I say that I am with him. Lift the stone, and there you shall find me; split the wood and I am there” (cf. *Matt.* 18:20).

“Jesus says: No prophet is accepted in his own country, nor does a doctor work cures among those who know him” (cf. *Matt.* 13:57; *Mark* 6:4; *Luke* 4:23-24; *John* 4:44).

“Jesus says: A city built strongly on top of a high mountain cannot fall nor remain hidden” (cf. *Matt.* 5:14).

“Jesus says: You listen with one of your [ears], but [the other you keep closed (?)].”

In conclusion, the Christian sources outside the New Testament — whether apocryphal writings, Agrapha, or Logia — are in overwhelming majority devoid of any historical authority so far as the biography of Jesus is concerned. Some few of them may possibly have an element of reliability, but they are rare and the proof of their actual authority is so difficult that practically speaking they offer us no appreciable help. We should stand to gain, on the best hypothesis in their favor, no more than a mere drop in the bucket. In other words, even if the few most reliable passages could be accepted as unquestionably authentic, we should be richer by about ten lines or so to add as a kind of appendix to the canonical Gospels, but this diminutive appendix would in no way modify their content nor add anything of note to our patrimony of doctrinal or biographical material.

### *New Testament Documents Apart from the Gospels*

102. When we consider the New Testament writings other than the Gospels our horizon grows wider, but even here we can discover no additional information except for a certain few isolated doctrinal precepts. These writings do contain strictly biographical material about Jesus, but it serves merely to confirm a few, albeit important, facts already set forth in the Gospels without adding anything new. This confirmation, however, is most precious, especially if its source chronologically precedes our canonical Gospels and is independent of them. Such is the case with the works of St. Paul.

The Epistles of St. Paul begin to appear about twenty years after the death of Jesus and continue for the next fifteen, occupying approximately the period between 51 and 66, during which our synoptic Gospels were either being published or prepared. These Epistles, therefore, are documents undoubtedly

written independently of the synoptic Gospels and for the most part they antedate them. In addition, these Epistles were composed entirely in view of the circumstances of the time of writing; that is, St. Paul writes to his various addressees for reasons connected with his apostolate. Never in any way does he attempt to give either a complete or a partial account of the life of Jesus, because he is speaking to Christians whom he knows are already acquainted with it. Only incidentally does he record an act or saying of Jesus where this will serve to strengthen his argument; for example, he tells of the institution of the Holy Eucharist (I *Cor.* 11) because at the moment he is trying to bring order into the religious gatherings of the faithful. Yet if we collect all these scanty and incidental bits of information, we find we have a not too meager sheaf. Even Renan recognized the fact that a miniature “life of Jesus” could be gleaned from the information in the Epistles to the Romans, Corinthians, Galatians, and Hebrews alone.

A few other kernels of information may be culled from the other writings of the New Testament, especially from the Acts of the Apostles, whose author, however, is St. Luke, a synoptic Evangelist.

103. If we sum up all the afore-mentioned material, we obtain the following brief extra-evangelical “Life of Jesus.”

Jesus was not a heavenly aeon but a “man” (*Rom.* 5:15) “made of a woman” (*Gal.* 4:4), a descendant of Abraham (*Gal.* 3:16) through the tribe of Juda (*Heb.* 7:14) and the house of David (*Rom.* 1:3). His mother’s name was Mary (*Acts* 1:14); he was called the Nazarene (*Acts* 2:22) or “Jesus of Nazareth” (*Acts* 10:38; cf. §259, n. 24), and he had brethren (1 *Cor.* 9:5; *Acts* 1:14) one of whom was named James (*Gal.* 1:19; §264). He was poor (2 *Cor.* 8:9), meek and gentle (2 *Cor.* 10:1). He was baptized by John the Baptist (*Acts* 1:22). He gathered disciples about him and lived in constant companionship with them (*Acts* 1:21-22). Twelve of them were called “Apostles” and to this group belonged, among others, Cephas, or Peter, and John (1 *Cor.* 9:5; 15:5-7; *Acts* 1:13, 26). During his lifetime Jesus worked many miracles (*Acts* 2:22) and went about doing good (*Acts* 10:38). On one occasion he appeared to his disciples gloriously transfigured (2 *Pet.* 1:16-18). He was betrayed by Judas (*Acts* 1:16-19), On the night of his betrayal he instituted the Eucharist (I *Cor.* 11:23-25), prayed in anguish (*Heb.* 5:7), was subjected to reproaches (*Rom.* 15:3); a murderer was preferred before him (*Acts* 3:14). He suffered under Herod and Pontius Pilate (1 *Tim.* 6:13; *Acts* 3:13; 4:27; 13:28). He was crucified (*Gal.* 3:1; 1 *Cor.* 1:13, 23; 2:2; *Acts* 2:36; 4:10) outside the gate of the city (*Heb.* 13:12),

and was buried (1 *Cor.* 15:4; *Acts* 2:29; 13:29). He rose from the dead on the third day (1 *Cor.* 15:4; *Acts* 10:40), and then appeared to many (1 *Cor.* 15:5-8; *Acts* 1:3; 10:41; 13:31) and ascended into heaven (*Rom.* 8:34; *Acts* 1:2, 9-10; 2:33-34).

104. If we compare this limited, extra-evangelical sketch of Jesus' life with the ample biography presented in the Gospels, we find a difference in quantity but not in substance. The former contains a slender and linear framework which is enriched with a variety of material and color in the latter; but both are built according to one and the same design and they are divided into the same structural parts.

In other words, during the first generations of Christianity there were not different types of biographies of Jesus but one single type. And this is all the more important because the testimony of those first generations, gathered into the New Testament, derives from persons who are not near each other in time or place and who were for the most part independent of one another so far as the information in question was concerned.

### *The Gospels*

105. The word "evangel" (gospel<sup>16</sup>) originally meant the recompense given a messenger bringing good news, or even the good tidings in themselves. Christianity used this term from the first to designate the most important and precious "good tidings" of all, those announced by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry, when he "came into Galilee, preaching the good tidings of the kingdom of God, and saying: The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the good tidings" (*Mark* 1:14-15). Hence the "good tidings" Jesus announced in the very beginning were essentially this: "The kingdom of God is at hand."

But this preliminary announcement then underwent a development in the course of which the content of the "good tidings" was translated into reality through the teachings, the life, and the redemptive death of Jesus. Consequently, the whole sum total of facts representing the salvation prepared by Jesus for all mankind was later designated with the term "good tidings," in the sense of a message of salvation already effected and completed. It is with this meaning in mind that St. Paul introduces himself as a "minister" of the "good tidings" (*Col.* 1:23, etc.) paralleling the expression used by his disciple Luke, who speaks of the "ministers of the word" (*Luke*

1:2). In this sense also must we take the first verse in one of the canonical Gospels: "The beginning of the good tidings of Jesus Christ" (*Mark* 1:1).

106. This last example anticipates a later use of the word. For several years after the death of Jesus the diffusion of the "good tidings" was accomplished exclusively by word of mouth. This method, after all, was that used by Jesus himself who preached only, without leaving anything written down; and it was in keeping, too, with the method employed by the Jewish doctors of the time whose opinions continued to be handed down orally until a much later period when they were finally set in writing in the Talmud (§87). The Christians called this method "catechesis," that is, "re-echoing," because the teacher made his words "re-echo" (Greek, *katecheo*) in the presence of his disciples; hence the disciple who had completed his course of instruction was the "catechized" (*Gal.* 6:6; *Luke* 1:4; *Acts* 18:25), that is, one to whom the good tidings had been "re-echoed." But the diffusion of the "good tidings" was so wide and so rapid that from a practical point of view it became impossible to entrust it entirely to oral tradition for any length of time. The fact that the "good tidings" leaped the boundaries of Palestine and the Jewish world; that they penetrated regions where other languages were spoken, such as Syria, Asia Minor, and finally Italy and Rome; that they burst into the academies and other gatherings of the Graeco-Roman world, and finally that they accomplished this triumphal advance within the space of a few years—all this made it necessary within a short time for the spoken word to be supplemented by the written in order that it might more easily and effectively proceed to new goals. We know, in fact, that as early as the sixth decade of the first century, writings containing the "good tidings" were already in circulation and that they were "many" (*Luke* 1:4). This new aid in the diffusion of Christianity was like a second highway opened parallel to the first, and from then on, the "good tidings" advanced along both roads, the spoken catechesis and the written.

This explains the later use of the word. From this time on the "good tidings" were not only the message of man's salvation but also the writing which contained the message; the writing took its name from the content and became known as "the Gospel." In any case, even if the oral "good tidings" changed their mode of transmission to become written Gospel, both remained in substance a "catechesis." Similarly, the speeches (orationes) of Cicero, essentially oral, remained speeches even when they were circulated in writing.



107. It is, therefore, extremely important to note that the written Gospel never pretended to eliminate or even adequately substitute for the oral Gospel, because, apart from other considerations, the latter was far richer and contained much more material than that set in writing. In this regard we have the valuable testimony of Papias of Hierapolis, who, writing about 120, asserted that he had anxiously sought what the Apostles and others of Jesus' immediate disciples, whom he names individually, had taught by word of mouth and for this reason: "I deemed indeed that the things contained in the books would not profit me as much as those [communicated] by a living and abiding voice" (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, III, 39, 4). When he speaks of "books" and "voice" he is undoubtedly alluding to the sources of the life and teaching of Jesus, for he immediately proceeds to treat explicitly of the Gospels of Mark and Matthew.

The Christian writers of the second century still use the term gospel indiscriminately. Sometimes it has its earliest meaning and indicates the "good tidings" in themselves, that is, the salvation of mankind which had been wrought by Jesus. Irenaeus often uses it this way (*Adv. haer.*, IV, 37, 4), but he (*ibid.*, III, 11, 8) and Justin before him (*Apol.*, I, 66) also use the word to denote specific writings, that is, our Gospels. Even the heretic Marcion, about 140, prefixed the title "gospel" to his writing, which he took from the third of the canonical Gospels and doctored to suit his own teachings (Tertullian, *Adv. Marcion*, IV, 2).

108. What was the first and principal subject of Christian catechesis, whether written or oral? On this there can be no doubts whatever. If the Christian faith was founded on the person of Jesus, then necessarily the first step on the road to this faith was to learn the facts concerning him, and we have explicit testimony that Christian instruction began with learning or teaching the "things that are of Jesus" (*Acts* 18:25; cf. 28:31); and we are occasionally given brief summaries of catechesis, which do contain just such facts concerning Jesus (*Acts* 1:22; 2:22 ff.; 10:37 ff.). Actually, a Christian would not have been a Christian if he did not know what the Christ, Jesus, had done, what doctrines he had taught, what permanent rites he had established, what proofs had demonstrated the genuineness of his mission, in short, if he did not possess at least a summary knowledge of Jesus' life. Without this knowledge the "good tidings" could not be carried among men, for "how then are they to call upon him, in whom they have not believed? But how are they

to believe him whom they have not heard? And how are they to hear, if no one preaches?" (*Rom.* 10:14.)

109. Now among the preachers of the "good tidings," there was a special group who apparently were entrusted in a particular manner with the mission of transmitting the narrative and the testimony regarding the things of Jesus; hence these special preachers naturally came to be called the "bringers of the good tidings," or the "evangelists" (*Eph.* 4:11; *2 Tim.* 4:5; *Acts* 21:8). Undoubtedly Christian catechesis in general, which aimed at the spiritual formation and edification of the faithful, was advanced by the concurrence of all those charisms which St. Paul mentions so often, praising their effectiveness in exhortation (*1 Cor.* 12:8-10, 28-30; 14:26; *Rom.* 12:6-8, etc.). The charism of "evangelist," however, together with that of "apostle" formed the advance guard and opened up the way for the other charismatic gifts precisely because it planted the first seed of faith in Jesus through the story of his life.

Eusebius thus describes the mission of the "evangelists." "They held first place in the succession to the Apostles. Being wonderful disciples of such teachers, they built upon the foundations of the churches which had already been laid in every place by the Apostles, always disseminating further the message (khrugma) and sowing the salutary seed of the kingdom of heaven far and wide over all the earth.... Going forth from their country, they performed the work of evangelists eager to preach the message (khruttein) to those who had heard nothing at all of the word of faith and to pass on the written record of the holy Gospels. After having laid only the foundations of faith in the various foreign places, they would establish there other pastors to whom they entrusted the care of those who had just been initiated [to the faith]. Then they moved again into other regions and nations with the grace and co-operation of God" (*Hist. eccl.*, III, 37). This description is aptly occasioned by the mention of Philip, who is the only "evangelist" named in the New Testament (*Acts* 21:8) and who in fact evangelized Samaria (*Acts* 8:5 ff.) and other regions (*Acts* 8:40).

110. Thus we reach the storehouse from which the "many" writers took their materials who, as we noted above (§106) recounted the things of Jesus as early as the sixth decade of the first century and whose work was contemporary with, or even anterior in part to the composition of the canonical Gospels. This great common storehouse is called "catechesis"; and unquestionably there was in substance only one Christian catechesis, though

its presentation might take somewhat different forms depending on which of the various authoritative preachers of the “good tidings” was its source.

On the other hand, the early Church did not take an indiscriminate interest in the “many” writings which appeared during the first century but concerned herself with only four of them. She disregarded the others and so they have been lost, while the four favored ones became the four basic pillars of the faith. On them alone the Church bestowed official character as history; in them she recognized the inspiration of God and therefore included them in the list of holy Scriptures called the Canon. They are the four canonical Gospels, the four “Good Tidings” of the New Testament. But the Church never lost sight of the one single origin of her four Gospels. Though the writings were four, their source was one, and that was the catechesis. So it is that Irenaeus, in the second century, speaks with perfect historical appropriateness of one “fourfold Gospel” (*Adv. haer.*, III, 11, 8) just as in the following century Origen asserts that the “Gospel, recorded faithfully by four, is one alone” (*in Joan.*, V, 7); and they are echoed in the fourth century by St. Augustine who speaks of the “four books of the one Gospel” (*in Joan.*, 36, 1).

111. This attitude of the early Church with regard to the common source of the four Gospels is witnessed by the titles under which they have come down to us. In Greek the titles read *kata* Matthew, *kata* Mark, *kata* Luke, *kata* John, which expressions were transferred bodily into Latin by writers of the second century, as is evidenced by Cyprian and various ancient Latin codices, where we read *cata* Matthew, *cata* Mark, etc. with the original meaning of *according to Matthew*, *according to Mark*, etc. This practice was inspired by the idea that the Gospel in reality was only one, that derived from the catechesis, though it was presented in four ways, that *according to Matthew*, that *according to Mark*, etc.

The foregoing observations are extremely important for understanding what the Christians considered the true foundation of the historical authority of the Gospels. That foundation was the authority of the Church, the one fourfold Gospel being the genuine and direct product of her catechesis. The separate authors of the four presentations of the Gospel had authority in so far as they represented the Church, under whose authority they were sheltered. But by believing those four authors, the Christian really believed in the one Church, while if, through them, he had not been able to arrive at the Church, he would not have believed in their Gospel. All this is neatly expressed by St. Augustine in his celebrated aphorism: "I should not, however, believe

the Gospel, did not the authority of the Church catholic persuade me to it” (*Contra epist. Manich.*, V, 6).

In conclusion the historical process by which the Gospels came into being was the following: the oral “good tidings” were older and more extensive than the written; both were products of the Church, by whose authority they were fostered. This means that the written Gospel presupposes the Church and is based on it.

112. This conclusion is the absolute contrary of the old concept of the canonical Gospels arrived at by the Lutheran Reform, and perhaps some will suspect that it is inspired by apologetical intent instead of being based on historical documentation alone. But in recent times scholars who not only have no interest in Catholic apologetics, but whose methods of Gospel criticism have been among the most radical and destructive, have also reached this very same conclusion. It is enough to quote the opinion of one of them:

“In assigning the canon of the New Testament to a date at the end of the second century, it was forgotten that our Gospels have a most important prehistory and that they are to be placed not at the beginning but at the end of a long process which led up to them. With its notion of tradition, on the other hand, Catholicism has always been wary of an exaggerated and exclusive attention to the written letter.... The Reformation falsified our concept of the origin of the Gospels. The Reformation carried to extremes the canonization of the new Testament, making the principle of verbal inspiration its fundamental dogma. While Catholicism never completely forgot that tradition preceded the Scriptures, the theologians born of the Reformation disregarded the fact that between the period in which Jesus lived and that in which the Gospels were composed, thirty years elapsed during which there existed no written ‘life of Jesus.’ It is strange to note that it was precisely the most liberal theologians of the second half of the nineteenth century who unconsciously fell under the influence of the theory of verbal inspiration, taking into account only the written letter and paying no attention to the important period during which the Gospel existed only in the form of oral tradition” (O. Cullman, “Les récentes études sur la formation de la tradition évangélique” in *Revue d’histoire et de philosophie religieuses*, 1925, pp. 459-460).

(Figure 16, Figure 17, Figure 18, Figure 19)

113. We cannot state anything with certainty about the length or nature of the lost writings of the “many” which were in circulation during the sixth decade of the first century. It is highly probable that their contents were very limited, even briefer than Mark which is our shortest Gospel. They must have been of various types. Though they all treated of the life of Jesus, some may have dealt particularly with what Jesus did, others with his teachings and words. Among the writings which concerned his actions, some may have confined themselves to his ministry in Galilee, others to the ministry in Judea, some to the events of his Passion and death, and still others to his infancy and the events preceding his public life. As for the writings on his teachings, one may have chosen to set forth the parables, another the fundamental commandments of the new Law (which are to be found in the Sermon on the Mount), a third the prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the entire world, and so on.

We find, however, all these separate elements gathered into our first three Gospels, called the Synoptics (John, in this regard, stands apart), just as we find that the Synoptics in their turn follow one general and constant pattern which is as follows: the ministry of John the Baptist and the baptism of Jesus; Jesus’ ministry in Galilee; his ministry in Judea; the Passion, Death, and Resurrection. This outline may be prefaced by the more or less full account of the infancy, as in Matthew and Luke, in which case this part of the narrative is a kind of preamble to the usual pattern while the real body of the story begins with the ministry of John the Baptist, including, that is, the time “the Lord Jesus came in and went out among us, beginning from the baptism of John, until the day wherein he was taken up from us.” It would seem that with these words (*Acts* 1:21-22) Peter sketched the general plan to be followed and apparently, he followed it himself, for one of his discourses briefly touches upon the four headings in the above-mentioned outline, beginning “from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached” and ending with Jesus’ appearances after his Resurrection (*Acts* 10:37-41). The fact that St. Peter follows in his preaching the sequence he himself laid down (cf. also *Acts* 2:22-24), together with his position of pre-eminence among the very first preachers of the “good tidings;” justifies the supposition that he is responsible for the plan of the catechesis whose general outline our first three Gospels follow. And the details of this plan must have served as the framework for the majority of the “many” writings which have been lost.

We do not know who the authors of these lost writings were. It is very possible that they were among those marked by the charism of “evangelist.” Some may have been actual disciples of Jesus, who had died some twenty years before, and were therefore eyewitnesses of the events narrated. However, a comparison of *Luke* 1:1 with 1:2 seems to indicate that authors and witnesses were not one and the same, but that the former depended for their information on the latter and were not-at least in the majority of cases —themselves eyewitnesses of the events.

As for the authors of the canonical Gospels and the type of catechesis on which each bases his writing, we have only to seek out the testimony of tradition, proceeding from the period of preparation to that of the actual composition of the four Gospels.

### *Matthew*

114. A constant tradition, dating back to the beginning of the second century, attributes the first Gospel to the Apostle Matthew, also named Levi, a former publican (§306). About A.D. 120, Papias of Hierapolis- whom we have already mentioned - wrote five books entitled *Explanation of the Sayings (logiwn) of the Lord*, in which he asserted that Matthew put the sayings in order (ta logia sunetaato) in the Hebrew dialect; then each one interpreted them as he was able” (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, III, 39, 16). Subsequent testimonies — like that of Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.*, III, I, 1), Tertullian (*Adv. Marcion.*, IV, 2), Clement of Alexandria (*Stromata*, I, 21), etc.— confirm more or less explicitly the statement of Papias. It is also certain that all Christian antiquity, in a great number of testimonies which it would serve no purpose to list, attributed to St. Matthew the first of our canonical Gospels and no other writing.

Just exactly what does Papias say about the writing of St. Matthew? He says that Matthew “put in order” the sayings of Jesus,<sup>17</sup> that is, he not only gathered together (sun), but also arranged in a certain order (etaxato), the “sayings” in question. The ancients, in fact, paid a great deal of attention to the “order” (taxiz) in any literary work. They held that an author should first investigate his subject (enresiz) and then put his discourse in “order”; but this order was not always chronological. Even the historians frequently followed a “logical order,” based either on some analogy between the various subjects treated, on the juxtaposition of cause and effect, on the unities of place and person, or the like.<sup>18</sup> That Papias has a literary order of this sort in mind is

evident from the fact that immediately before this he says St. Mark “wrote with accuracy but not with order” (taxei); on the other hand, he is pleased to find this order in *Matthew*.

115. Now what are the “sayings” (logia) contained in St. Matthew’s writing? The etymology of the Greek term is “sayings” (“maxims, oracles”); but in Jewish and Christian authors the word was used specially to indicate passages from the Scriptures in general, whether they contained maxims or episodes. Papias himself elsewhere uses it in, this second, broader sense. In the above-mentioned passage where he speaks of the *Gospel of Mark*, he says that the latter contains the “things spoken or performed” (h lecqenta h pracqenta) by Jesus; yet immediately afterward he describes the whole narrative with the word “sayings” (logia) of Jesus. In addition, Papias’ work was entitled *Explanation of the Sayings* (logiwn) *of The Lord*, but judging from the references to it and the quotations from it extant today it is clear that besides the maxims it treated also of Jesus’ works and the events of the apostolic era. Consequently, not only Christian antiquity but also all scholars up to the late nineteenth century held that these “sayings” attributed to Matthew by Papias indicate the first of our canonical Gospels, especially since there is absolutely no evidence or trace, handed down from antiquity, of any work attributed to St. Matthew or any of the other Apostles, which contained only the “maxims” of Jesus.

If now we compare with this limited data afforded by our sources the content of our first Gospel, we find adequate evidence of the two qualities noted by Papias, that is, it fits the term “sayings” and it does follow a certain literary arrangement or “order.”

116. In the first place, Matthew gives more space than the other synoptic Gospels to Jesus’ discourses, which take up about three-fifths of his entire document. Hence there was a particular reason for describing it as a collection of “sayings” even though we use the term in its usual broader sense to include episodes also.

In addition, the discourses of Jesus recorded in Matthew are divided into five groups according to the principle of “order” so dear to Papias. The first group contains what might be called the constitution of the kingdom founded by Jesus, that is, the Sermon on the Mount (*Matt.* chaps. 5-7); the second contains the instructions given the Apostles for the diffusion of the kingdom (chap. 10); the third, the parables of the kingdom (chap. 13); the fourth, the

moral requisites for membership in the kingdom (chap. 18); and the fifth, the perfecting of the kingdom and its consummation at the end of time (chaps. 23-25). It is noteworthy that each of these groups is prefaced by a few words of introduction and is immediately followed by a conclusion which in all five instances reads, with only the slightest variation, "And it came to pass when Jesus had ended" either "these words" or "these parables," etc. (7:28; 11:1; 13:53; 19:1; 26:1). It is also noteworthy that this arrangement in five groups, which is certainly not accidental, corresponds numerically with the five books into which Papias divided his Explanation of the Sayings of the Lord; this would lead us to suspect, though it is not at all certain, that Papias in his work followed the "order" he noted in Matthew, if in it he was concerned principally with the discourses of Jesus.

117. When the former publican Matthew set his hand to this work, he was certainly a man long accustomed to writing, for he had had to do it every day in the past to keep in good order the accounts of payments he received at his tax-collectors bench. The rest of the Apostles, on the other hand, though not illiterate, must have been in general much more familiar with oars and fish nets than with parchment and calamus (except perhaps for the two well-to-do sons of Zebedee), especially just after the death of Jesus when they began their mission. All without exception had been eyewitnesses to the works of Jesus, but Matthew's familiarity with writing gave him a technical advantage over the other Apostles and this must have led them to assign him, by preference, the task of writing down their oral catechesis.

When St. Matthew began his work, it is possible, though not proved, that some other writings containing the sayings or works of Jesus were already in circulation. Even if this should be proved, however, any such compositions would most certainly have been nothing more than brief sketches, very meager both in number and content, written besides on the initiative of some private individual and therefore lacking any official character whatever. On the other hand, the assignment given Matthew was to meet the need, created by the ever-widening diffusion of the Gospel (§106), for an ample and official written reproduction of the oral catechesis of the Apostles as a practical aid to their ministry. The catechesis to be written down could be none other than that already endorsed by Church practice, the general plan of which had been sketched by him who held the pre-eminent position among the official preachers of the good tidings. It was, therefore, the type of catechesis mapped out by Peter (§113), not excluding, however, elements contributed by



other apostolic sources and not ordinarily included in the Petrine model. In conclusion, Matthew's writing, while it followed the basic outline of St. Peter's catechesis, summed up the thought of the whole apostolic college.

118. A document like Matthew's, composed by an eyewitness of the events, vouched for and contributed to by other eyewitnesses, set within the general outline of an official plan of instruction, and fuller in extent than any other writing on the same plan, was inevitably bound to acquire a singular importance. In fact, we find that the Gospel of Matthew, just as it was first in order of time according to the universal testimony of antiquity, was also the most used from the very earliest times. It is sufficient to note that on the Catholic side, Justin Martyr, in the middle of the second century, quoted our Matthew no less than one hundred and seventy times, and that before him the earliest Ebionite heretics, according to Irenaeus (*Adv. Haer.*, III, 11, 7), used only Matthew's Gospel, probably altered, however, as we have already noted (§96).

119. Yet from the beginning the language in which it was written furnished a serious obstacle to the wide use and diffusion of St. Matthew's work. The information offered by Papias that Matthew wrote in "the Hebrew dialect" (ebaidi dialektw), is in fact confirmed by other early authors —like Irenaeus, Origen, Eusebius, Jerome —who all speak of a "Hebrew" or "ancestral" language. Almost certainly the term "Hebrew" here denotes Aramaic (as it does in the contemporary Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, VI, 96; cf. V, 272, 361, etc.), which was generally spoken throughout Palestine at the time of St. Matthew. In any case, this original Semitic language, whether Hebrew or Aramaic, was not understood by Christians of non-Jewish origin or even by the numerous converts of the Diaspora who knew no language but Greek.

But the obstacle was overcome, for better or worse, in the manner mentioned by the same Papias. The "sayings" in their original Semitic text were taken up by various readers and catechists and "each one then interpreted them as he was able" (hrmhnejse d'auta wz hn dunatoz ekastoiz). This statement suggests the great activity which soon arose about so opportune and authoritative a text. Some catechists must have made extemporaneous oral translations of the passages they happened to need in the course of their ministry. Others probably made written translations also of certain parts, or more rarely of the whole work. And there must have been other writings too which, like the Explanation of Papias, were an illustrative exegesis rather than a simple translation. But Papias' observation that each

interpreted "as he was able" also shows that the good will characterizing this activity was not always accompanied by adequate knowledge, especially with regard to the language of the original, or even that into which the translation was being made.<sup>19</sup>

It is also entirely within the realm of possibility that the 'many' who in the sixth decade of the first century had already written about the things of Jesus (§110) helped themselves generously from the composition of St. Matthew, adding other elements derived from the oral tradition of actual eyewitnesses or their disciples.

120. But the Church, which had fostered by her authority the catechesis written in a Semitic dialect by St. Matthew, must at a certain point have extended her vigilant care also to the translations of the original text lest her official sanction be unduly invoked to recommend translations which did not deserve the honor. We do not know precisely what happened, but the results are clear and eloquent. The oral and extemporaneous translations must have grown constantly fewer as there were gradually fewer catechists able to understand the original Semitic text. The written translations, whether partial or complete, remained more or less in the background, that is, private but not official use was made of them, and so they were bound sooner or later to be lost. Only one translation was not lost and has come down to us, and that because it was officially adopted by the Church as a substitute for the too difficult Semitic text of the original, namely, the Greek text of our canonical *Matthew*.

We do not know who made this translation, nor, by his own confession, did St. Jerome even in his day. It was certainly completed a few decades after Matthew's composition first appeared, that is, when the original Semitic was becoming constantly less usable with the diffusion of Christianity outside of Palestine. Careful comparison of the texts also indicates that the translation was completed after the appearance of the other two synoptic Gospels, for it shows the influence of their mode of expression. The translator, in fact, did not confine himself to the mere literal transfer of terms from one language to another; in addition to aiming at a certain easy and natural style (for which reason to begin with he did not confine himself to a slavish rendering), he had in view the needs of the practical catechist. Since the two Gospels of Mark and Luke had already come out, written originally in Greek and mirroring more directly the catecheses of Peter and Paul respectively, the translator had them

before him as he worked, and tended to choose words and phrases which he found already at hand in the parallel passages of the two new Greek Gospels. In this way he deliberately contributed a certain uniformity of expression to all three documents, each of which reproduced the one basic catechesis.

121. This catechetical aim influenced his translation in other ways also. In the Greek, Matthew's Gospel had an immeasurably wider field of influence and could reach out to a non-Jewish audience as well, that is, to people who were not accustomed to typically Semitic ideas and expressions. On the other hand, there must have been in the Semitic text of Matthew (as we see by comparing it with the other two Synoptics) certain phrases apt to be misunderstood or to cause surprise among these new readers. Hence the translator, in order better to adapt the work to the new field of instruction, forestalled these possibilities of error or surprise by softening certain expressions without altering their fundamental meaning.<sup>20</sup> It also seems probable that he shifted some of the passages, grouping them differently from the original text in an arrangement more similar to that of Mark and Luke, because it seemed to him more practical for catechetical reasons.

This freedom was not at all incompatible with the Hebrew idea of a good "translation," as is evident from various instances in the Old Testament. To cite the single example of Ecclesiasticus, the early translations of this book made directly from the original Hebrew text (whether or not it is the one found forty-odd years ago) were extremely free. The translator of Matthew was much more temperate; while his standards were less strict than ours, they allowed him a freedom that turned to the advantage of his chief purpose, which was instruction.

But the fact that the Church approved and adopted his translation and that the earliest ecclesiastical writers used it as a canonical text of the Gospel, shows that his rendering of the original Semitic manuscript was "substantially identical." The Church's vigilance was too jealous to permit the majestic name of the oldest authoritative written document of her official teaching to be attributed to a translation that was only a passing reflection of it. The severity the Church later displayed toward the apocrypha, which also took refuge, though falsely, behind glorious names and which sometimes were actually free variations of canonical books, confirms the customary rigor of her vigilance and is a guarantee for the Greek translation of *Matthew*.

122. The fact that the translation of *Matthew* is not a slavishly literal one also serves to underline a most important principle for the interpretation of the gospel narratives in general. That is, the Evangelists themselves are equally free from any slavish fidelity to literalness in their respective accounts; for they differ in their choice of vocabulary even when recording texts which originally had one definite and specific wording or pronouncements of especially important doctrinal significance. For example, the inscription Pilate caused to be affixed to the cross of Jesus was undoubtedly worded in one specific way; yet this one text is reported with the following variations: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews" (*John* 19:19); "This is Jesus, the King of the Jews" (*Matt.* 27:37); "This is the King of the Jews" (*Luke* 23:38); "The King of the Jews" (*Mark* 15:26). Even more important is the example of the passages concerning the Eucharist, which Jesus instituted only once and in very precise terms. Yet even here the difference in the actual phrases in which it is recorded in the three Synoptics and in St. Paul (*I Cor.* 11:23-26) are self-evident.

Now all this goes to prove that early Christian catechesis and therefore the canonical Evangelists, who drew upon it, were anxious to give a faithful presentation not so much of the phrase itself as of the substance; they sought to adhere strictly not to the letter but to the essential meaning. The cult of literal interpretation put in its appearance some sixteen centuries later, when the Protestant Reformation forgot that the Gospels derived from the early catechesis and considered their content on the basis of the letter alone independent of everything else. Hence the Evangelists, with their disregard for literal reporting, present an official historical refutation to the opinion advanced by the Reformation; and the Greek translator of Matthew strengthens this refutation by imitating their freedom in the choice of vocabulary.<sup>21</sup>

123. We have only one certain argument for fixing the date of composition for the Semitic Gospel of Matthew; all the others which may be advanced are limited to the field of mere probability. The certain evidence is furnished by the unanimous and constant testimony of the early documents that Matthew was, chronologically speaking, the first of the canonical Evangelists. His Gospel, therefore, precedes that of Luke, which was written no later than 62, and also that of Mark, written shortly before Luke's. Beyond this we have only conjectures: if the "many" who wrote about the things of Jesus during the sixth decade of the first century drew much of their material from Matthew,

as we supposed above (§119), then this authoritative source must go back to the beginning of that decade or to about 50-55.

This conclusion seems to be contradicted by the famous passage in Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.*, III, I, 1), which in the Greek text (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, V, 8, 2) reads literally as follows: "Among the Hebrews Matthew produced also a writing of the Gospel in their own language, while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome and founding the church; then, after their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, also delivered to us in writing the things preached by Peter . . ." This particular mention of Matthew parallels the publication of the Semitic text of his work with the preaching of Peter and Paul in Rome and apparently supposes that the two events coincided; if this is true, then Matthew was writing after the end of 61, the year in which St. Paul arrived in Rome as we know from *Acts* 28:14 ff. Attempt has been made to explain the passage by supposing that Irenaeus is not concerned here with the actual sequence of events but is merely comparing Matthew's activity in Palestine, writing as well as preaching, with Peter's and Paul's purely oral work of evangelizing in Rome. The explanation, however, is not convincing because of the specific chronological reference which follows (after their departure," etc.). On the other hand, Irenaeus, who was so very familiar with the New Testament and its sources, must have known that even before Paul's arrival there existed a flourishing church in Rome, as we learn both from the *Acts* (*ibid.*) and from the anterior Epistle to the Romans. The mention of St. Paul's presence in Rome in connection with the foundation of the Roman Church, therefore, cannot be interpreted literally to indicate that these two facts were strictly simultaneous.

And this is probably the clue to the explanation. Irenaeus, who is used to thinking of the Church of Rome as the work of St. Peter and St. Paul together, speaks of it as such in the passage under discussion, regardless of the fact that one actually preceded the other there. Hence it is the foundation of the Roman Church, taken by itself, which he represents as coinciding with Matthew's composition of his Gospel. This interpretation would confirm the date we have already assigned to Matthew, that is, between 50 and 55 since those are precisely the years in which the Church in Rome was being fully established and developed.

124. The internal evidence in Matthew's composition confirms and clarifies the information furnished by tradition.

Recent long and carefully detailed comparisons, which it would be irrelevant to our purpose to quote here, bring out the many typically Semitic elements both in style and vocabulary which the original text bequeathed to the Greek translation. Principal among them is the phrase “kingdom of heaven,” which is certainly the literal rendering of the Aramaic expression Jesus used (*malkuta dishemayya*; Hebrew *malkut shamayim*). This formula was born of the rabbinic anxiety to avoid the use of the name of God, and it was, therefore, a substitute for the equivalent phrase, “kingdom of God,” which is the only one used by the other Evangelists.<sup>22</sup>

125. It is clear from the nature of his treatment that St. Matthew is addressing Christians of Jewish origin. Undoubtedly his aim is historical, i.e., to record the teachings and the works of Jesus; but he does so in what seems to him the most effective and appropriate manner for readers who already believe in Moses. In the Gospel of Matthew more than in any of the others, Jesus appears as the Messiah promised in the Old Testament, the One who has truly fulfilled in himself all the old messianic prophecies. That is why the Evangelist takes special care to bring many episodes to a close with the reminder that “all this came to pass that there might be fulfilled what was spoken . . . etc.,” with reference to some passage in the Old Testament (cf. *Matt.* 1:22-23; 2:15,17, 23; etc.).

Jesus’ teaching also is presented with special attention to its relation both to the Old Testament and to the prevailing Pharisaic doctrines and attitude. The new teaching does not abrogate the Old Testament but perfects and completes it. Only Matthew records Jesus’ assertions that he came not to destroy the Law and the Prophets but to fulfill them, that not one jot or tittle of the Law shall pass until all has been fulfilled (*Matt.* 5:17-18). As for the Pharisees, Jesus’ teaching is the perfect antithesis to their doctrine. Not only is the threat, “Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites...” repeated fully seven times in one chapter (23; verse 14 is an addition introduced from other contexts), but throughout the rest of this Gospel the abyss between the two is emphasized more than in the other Synoptics.

Similarly, Matthew alone points out that Jesus’ personal ministry was directly addressed only to the Jewish nation (15:24; cf. 1:21) just as the preparatory ministry of the Apostles was directed to Israel only, pagans and Samaritans being specifically excluded (10:5-6). Even the term Gentiles applied to the pagans, the *goyim* of the Old Testament, still reflects in



Matthew's words the inveterate scorn which Judaism had decreed toward non-Jews and which considered Gentile practically synonymous with the abhorred term publican (5:46-47; 18:17), while the Gentile bore the same relation to the Jew as a household dog to the son of the owner of the house (15:24-27). These expressions either are softened or disappear altogether in the later Synoptics, which are addressed particularly to Christians of pagan origin.

Beneath this Judaic crust, however, the Gospel of Matthew is strictly universal. It is more than any other the "Gospel of the Church," as it seemed to Renan. The word "Church" is used by Matthew (16:18, 18:17) alone among the Evangelists. And this institution established by Jesus is not reserved to the Jews but open to all the nations that shall throng into it in great numbers from the East and the West to feast with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven (8:11); and the boundaries of the kingdom shall be the confines of the world (13:38). In fact, the pagan Gentiles shall, practically speaking, supplant the Israelites in the possession of the kingdom of God (21:43).

126. St. Matthew's arrangement is, as we know, the systematic "order" which won Papias' approval (§114). Since he is writing for readers brought up in Judaism and since he has besides a definite aim in their regard, he often subordinates the chronological sequence to this order and has recourse to literary devices common in the rabbinic schools, the practical purpose of which was to afford a useful mnemonic aid. Just as he divides the "sayings" of Jesus into five main groups (§116), he also arranges individual maxims or facts in groups of five, seven, or ten.

Frequent also is his use of "parallelism," a fundamental characteristic of Hebrew poetry, and especially of "antithetic parallelism"; that is, a given statement is followed by the negation of its contrary by way of confirmation. The entire Sermon on the Mount (chap. 5-7), that is, the first of the five groups of "sayings," is actually a chain of such devices.

### Mark

127. The second Gospel is attributed to St. Mark. The Acts speak several times of a "John who was surnamed Mark" (12:12, 25; 15:37) and whose mother was named Mary and had a house in Jerusalem, while other passages speak of "John" (Acts 13:5, 13), and of "Mark" (*ibid.*, 15:39; *Col.* 4:10; *Phil.* 1:24; 1 *Pet.* 5:13). It is undoubtedly the same person in all three instances since it was very common for the Jews at that time to take a Graeco-Roman

name in addition to their own Jewish one. It is certain, too, that Christian antiquity attributed the second Gospel to this John Mark.

The house of Mark's mother in Jerusalem was a meeting place for the Christians of the city, and there Simon Peter took refuge when he was miraculously freed from prison in A.D. 44. Mark was the cousin of the distinguished Barnabas, who, together with Paul, took him to Antioch. But during Paul's first missionary voyage Mark left the two at Perge in Pamphilia, and returned to Jerusalem. This aroused Paul's displeasure and he refused to take Mark with him on his second journey although Barnabas wanted him to. Hence Barnabas also left Paul and went with Mark to the island of Cyprus, which was his native country. Paul's unyielding attitude, however, did not alienate Mark's affections, for some ten years later, about 61-62, Mark was once more with him, this time in Rome, where he was a help and comfort to the Apostle as he awaited trial by Nero (*Col.* 4:10-11; *Phil.* 1:24). Between 63 and 64, Mark was in Rome with Peter, for the latter sends from "Babylon" (Rome) greetings from his "son" Mark (1 *Pet.* 5:13). In 66, Mark was in Asia Minor, for Paul, writing to Timothy in Ephesus, urged him: "Take Mark, and bring him with thee, for he is useful to me for the ministry" (2 *Tim.* 4:11).

In this New Testament data Mark's contacts with Paul are more numerous and important than those with Peter. But subsequent tradition unanimously gives greater emphasis to his relations with Peter, showing that it does not derive from the incidental information given in the New Testament. In reality, since Peter calls Mark his "son," it is probable that he baptized him; and it is also highly probable that Peter cherished a particular affection for Mark's family since he fled directly to his house while still stunned by his miraculous escape from prison. The New Testament data says nothing about Mark's sharing in Peter's apostolate, but this fact is strongly attested by later tradition, especially with regard to the composition of an evangelical work.

128. Here too, as in the case of Matthew, the oldest and most authoritative documentation is furnished by Papias (§114) who writes: "This also did the Presbyter say: Mark, having become the interpreter (ermhnethz) of Peter, wrote exactly, but not with order (taxei) what he remembered of the things spoken or performed (hecqenta h praxqenta) by the Lord. — He, in fact, did not hear the Lord nor was he among his immediate disciples, but later, as I have said, he was among the followers of Peter. The latter gave instruction as was necessary but not, as it were, with the aim of arranging in a particular order (suntaxin) the sayings (logiwn) of the Lord; hence Mark is not guilty of



any defect in writing certain things just as he remembered them. To one thing only did he pay especial attention, namely, to omit none of the things which he heard and not to report any of them falsely" (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, II, 39, 15). This testimony is actually older than Papias himself, for in the first sentence — that is, as far as "spoken or performed by the Lord" — he is quoting the statement of the "Presbyter" John. Whether this John was the Apostle and Evangelist or a completely different person does not concern us here (§158); for the present, it is enough to be sure that this statement goes back to the first century. It is hardly necessary to point out that the observations (§114 ff.) we made in connection with *Matthew* concerning the meaning of "order," "set in order," "sayings," as used by Papias retain here also their full significance.

In what sense did Mark become the "interpreter" of Peter? The word in itself (*ermhneuthz*) can mean either interpreter of the words, a translator, or interpreter of the thought, a kind of amanuensis or secretary. Both these interpretations are acceptable and in fact have been accepted. After all, it is possible that both apply successively in that Peter — who in the first years of his apostolate outside Palestine must have known little Greek and less Latin — could have used Mark first as an interpreter in the modern sense of the term and later as an amanuensis and secretary.

According to the Presbyter and Papias, therefore, Mark's writing is an "exact" rendering of Peter's oral catechesis: that is why it lacks "order," for Peter gave his instructions to suit the occasion, "as was necessary" for a particular group of listeners, without trying to "set in order," systematically or completely, the things "spoken and performed" by Jesus.

129. All this information is confirmed in our Gospel of Mark. It does not go beyond the outline we have found characteristic of Peter's catechesis (§113), for it begins with Jesus' baptism by John the Baptist and ends with his appearance after the Resurrection (cf. *Acts* 10:37-41; cf. §623). Besides, it is a writing which lacks "order," as the Presbyter observed and Papias agreed. If the Presbyter is John the Evangelist, then we may consider it is the chronological order which is lacking, for the Gospel of John is the most accurate of the four in fixing the sequence of events relating to Jesus (§163), while Mark sometimes follows it in a general way and sometimes ignores it altogether. But whatever the opinion of the Presbyter, Papias could have been thinking only of the logical arrangement because he prefers *Matthew* to *Mark*,

as we noted, although *Matthew* is less concerned with chronological sequence even than *Mark*. As a matter of fact, Papias himself furnishes the explanation. Mark's writing follows Peter's preaching. Peter, suiting his words to the occasion, would select certain subjects from his usual catechesis, and, since he was addressing pagans, he was more likely to choose episodes from Jesus' life rather than his discourses as being more suitable for that particular audience. In fact, *Mark* does resemble in good measure a collection of biographical anecdotes, which would be the "certain things" the author remembered according to Papias, and it does not have the full account of the discourses which we find in *Matthew*, though it too is described as a collection of logia, but not "set in order."

130. Later testimony confirms and defines that of the Presbyter and Papias. In the middle of the second century, St. Justin Martyr, in citing a fact contained only in this Gospel (*Mark* 3:17), says that it is in the "Memoirs" (apomnhmoneumata) of Peter (*Dial. cum Tryph.*, 106); this designation does not suggest that Justin is referring to some apocryphal writing—for which in any case there exists no evidence—but rather proves that he considers the writing of the "interpreter" of St. Peter a faithful reproduction of the latter's teaching.

About 180, Irenaeus, in the passages already quoted (§123) testifies that Mark was the interpreter (ermhneuthz) of St. Peter and wrote according to his preaching.

About 200, Clement of Alexandria adds several important details regarding the place and circumstances in which this Gospel was written. Speaking of St. Peter's apostolate in Rome, Eusebius says: "The minds of Peter's listeners were illumined by such a flame of devotion that they were not satisfied to do with a single hearing or with an unwritten instruction concerning the divine message; but with every kind of exhortation they insisted that Mark, whose Gospel is now in circulation and who was a follower of Peter, leave also in writing a record (upomnhma) of the instruction given them by word of mouth, and they did not cease until he had finished it: and so they were the occasion for the writing of the Gospel according to Mark.' The Apostle [Peter] having learned later what had happened — according to what is said — through a revelation of the Spirit, was pleased with the zeal of those persons and granted them the writing to be read at their gatherings. Clement records this fact in the sixth Hypotyposis, and a testimony similar to his is given by the Bishop of Hierapolis, named Papias" (*Hist. eccl.*, II, 15, 1-2). Clement himself

repeats the same incident in another fragment (*Hypotyp. ad I Petri*, 5, 14), where he adds that those persons in Rome who prevailed upon Mark to write his Gospel were among “Caesar’s equestrians.” Eusebius gives a third summary, from the Hypotyposes again: “In addition, in these same books Clement sets forth the tradition of the early presbyters regarding the sequence of the Gospels, which is this: He says those Gospels were written first which contain the genealogies,<sup>23</sup> and that the one according to Mark has the following origin. When Peter had preached publicly in Rome the word [of God] and set forth the Gospel by virtue of the Spirit, the many who were there exhorted Mark, as the one who had followed him for a long time and remembered the things he said, to put in writing what had been preached. He [Mark] did this, and gave the Gospel to those who had besought him. Peter, having learned of it, did not explicitly hinder or encourage it” (*Hist. eccl.*, VI, 14, 5-7). As we see, the three Clementine testimonies agree on the essential point, that is, that Mark composed his Gospel in Rome as the direct result of Peter’s preaching.

Many other later testimonies confirm this same point but they may be considered superfluous (Tertullian, *Adv. Marcion.*, IV, 5; Origen, in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, VI, 25, etc.). Of special importance, on the other hand, is the completely unexpected information that Mark was kolobodaktuloz, that is, that his “fingers were stunted.” Hippolytus (*Refut.*, VII, 30, 1) uses the Greek adjective and the old Latin Prologue to the Gospel of Mark has *colobodactylus*, with an explanation (“because his fingers were stunted in proportion to the rest of his body”), together with the usual statement that Mark was the interpreter of Peter and that he wrote his Gospel in Italy. The very strangeness of this bit of information shows its authenticity. Indeed, there could have been no motive for arbitrarily inventing a physical detail of this kind, which is of no moral importance whatever. The information, completely true to fact, must have come from Christian circles in Rome to which Hippolytus also belonged. This additional confirmation of the place of writing, though contained in a trifle, is an eloquent one.

131. As for the time of composition of Mark’s Gospel, we have a certain argument in the almost uniform testimony of antiquity that he was the second Evangelist in point of time and therefore anterior to Luke. Modern criticism is convinced of this and also of the fact that Luke knew and used the Gospel of Mark. Therefore, the latter would have to have been written after 55, which we set as the latest possible date for Matthew (§123), but before 62, which is

the approximate date of Luke (§139). Between 55 and 62, therefore, Mark must have been in Rome with Peter. Now, Mark's sojourn in Rome, at least so far as the last years are concerned, is corroborated by the already cited passages in the Epistles of Paul to the Colossians and to Philemon, if these letters were written — as is highly probable — between 61 and 63 from Rome.

The passage of Irenaeus quoted above (§123) would seem to prevent our attributing the Gospel of Mark to this period since it says that “after their [Peter's and Paul's] departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter delivered to us even in wilting the things preached by Peter.” In this passage “departure” (exodon; §403) undoubtedly means death and not a going away on a journey as some modern critics have supposed, and this would fix the date later, after 67 (or 64). The interpretation of the expression “delivered to us” (paradedwke) to mean that only after the death of Peter and Paul did Mark “publish” and “circulate” the writing he had composed earlier would be a forced and unconvincing one; quite to the contrary, the only natural interpretation of various ancient testimonies and especially those of Clement of Alexandria is that Marks Gospel was in circulation as soon as it was finished. If we do not accept the supposition that Irenaeus was speaking only in a general way without paying strict attention to actual chronology, as we pointed out with regard to Matthew, then we must reject his statement (if indeed it has been faithfully preserved in the manuscripts) since it manifestly contradicts both early historical testimonies and the findings of modern criticism.

132. As for internal evidence, there are notable traces of this Gospel's particular origin. It is the shortest of the four and only one-tenth of its content is peculiar to it alone, the other nine-tenths being included in the other two Synoptics. The narrative, brief as it is, deals with many miracles of Jesus, a few parables, and a very few discourses. All except four of the miracles recounted in the other two Synoptics are to be found in Mark's Gospel, but he includes still others which they do not mention. On the other hand, his writing does not contain any discourses of fundamental importance, like the Sermon on the Mount, just as he has none of the earnest and lively solicitude of Matthew about demonstrating that the ancient messianic prophecies found their fulfillment in Jesus.

Mark's description of events is vivid and straightforward, and he includes unexpected details often lacking in the other two Synoptics; yet his Greek is poor, his sentences unadorned and even crude, his style elementary and

uniform. We seem to be reading the letter of an intelligent rustic who is describing the wonderful events he has witnessed. The narrative of such a writer will be all the more vivid and direct the more profoundly he has been impressed and the simpler and more limited are the literary mechanics at his disposal.

133. Now, these observations dovetail perfectly with the picture delivered to us by tradition.

While Peter needed Mark as an "interpreter," the latter in his turn must have had a bare working knowledge of foreign languages, being neither an accomplished man of letters nor even a writer with the experience of Luke or Paul or the stylist of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In the course of his instructions Peter had told his story in the simple but powerfully effective manner of the eyewitness, and his interpreter set it in writing with whatever ingenuous skill he possessed.

Besides, the majority of Peter's listeners in Rome were from a pagan background and they knew little or nothing about Hebrew doctrines and traditions; and it is precisely for this reason that in Mark Jesus is presented not so much as the Messiah awaited by the Hebrews but as the Son of God, the wonder-working Lord of Nature, the conqueror of the infernal powers. On the other hand, doctrinal questions of particular interest to the Jews, such as the observance of the Law, the spirit of the Pharisees, etc., are here omitted. Some of the precise Aramaic terms used by Jesus are recorded, out of special reverence, such as Boanerges (*Mark* 3:17), *Telita qumi* (5:41), *'Ethpetah* (7:34), etc., but they are immediately translated into Greek, as would be necessary for readers or listeners in Rome. For the same reason certain Jewish customs are explained, such as the washing of the hands before meals (7:3-4).

A little judicious sampling will reveal a pronounced Roman flavor in the writing. Latin words are used in the Greek more frequently than in the other two Synoptics, for example, *centurio* (15:39, 44), *speculator* (6:27), *sextarius* (translated as *xesth*, 7:4) and others. It is sprinkled besides with expressions which are more Latin than Greek, so much so that they seem Italicisms in style; for example, "they caught him with blows on the face,"<sup>24</sup> which is the literal rendering, in 14:65, of the phrase for which *Matthew* (26:67) has instead, "they struck his face." Nor could there be any reason for definitions like the following except that the work was addressed to Latin readers: "two mites (*lepra*), which make a quadrans," the latter being the Roman coin

equivalent to the two Greek coins (12:42); or "into the court, which is the Praetorium," in which the precise Roman military term is added to the more generic Greek word (15:16).

It is highly probable, too, that we feel the presence of that Roman audience in the episode of Simon the Cyrenean who helped Jesus to carry his cross. The other two Synoptics also recount the incident but only Mark adds that Simon was "the father of Alexander and Rufus" (15:21). Why this unexpected identification if the two sons are not named again in any of the Gospels? The end of Paul's Epistle to the Romans seems to offer some explanation, for the Apostle sends his greetings to "Rufus, elect in the Lord and his mother and mine" (*Rom.* 16:13), who are obviously in Rome. It is clear that this Rufus was outstanding among the Christians of Rome and so was his mother if Paul venerates her so much that he calls her his own mother. The mention of Rufus in Mark is equally unexplainable unless it refers to a very well-known person, and therefore it is natural to suppose that the two are one and the same individual, especially since the name Rufus must have been rare in Jerusalem, the city from which this man came (§604).

134. And finally, the treatment of Peter in Mark is peculiar to this Gospel. While some episodes contain a few additional details concerning him, such as the cure of his mother-in-law (1:29-31), there is no passage whatever in praise of him and in fact the episodes which do him most honor, such as his walking on the waters, his finding the didrachma in the fish's mouth, even the conferring of the primacy upon him — all included in the other Synoptics — are omitted. This confirms the tradition which concerns us here, for St. Peter in all probability would not dwell in his preaching on incidents which redounded to his own glory, and his "interpreter" has faithfully reflected his modesty in this Gospel.

But does this Gospel contain also some allusion to Mark himself? Early tradition agrees with Papias (§128) that Mark was not a disciple of Jesus; one or two assertions to the contrary (e.g., *Epiphanius, Haeres.*, XX, 4) are the exception and have no authority. This tradition in itself, however, does not exclude the possibility that Mark, as a young boy, may have caught a glimpse of Jesus on one occasion or another without being actually his disciple. The fact that his mother's house in Jerusalem was a meeting place for Christians and that in the year 44 Peter hid there as soon as he escaped from prison (§127) would indicate an old friendship which might well go back to before the death of Jesus. Once we accept this possibility, we may then associate it

with a singular incident in the Passion of Jesus, which is found only in St. Mark and which is specific enough despite its mysterious reserve.

In the words of Gabriel D'Annunzio: "Have you never thought who that youth might be *amictus sindone super nudo*, mentioned in the Gospel of Mark? 'Then his disciples leaving him, all fled away. And a certain young man followed him, having a linen cloth cast about his naked body; and they laid hold on him. But he, casting off the linen cloth, fled from them naked.' Who was this thirteenth apostle who had stepped into Judas' place in that hour of terror and unutterable anguish? . . . He was clad in a light garment. He fled naked: *reiecta sindone, nudus profugit ab eis*. Nothing else in the world was known about him" (in *Contemplazione della morte*, Chap. XV, 1912).

This episode (14:51-52) is an unexpected outcrop in the record: it has no connection with the other events of the Passion, and in fact it could be deleted without impairing the narrative as a whole. Yet the author is well informed. He knows that the young boy (*neaniskoz*), wakened by the untoward clamor in the night, did not have time even to throw a cloak about him, but clad as he was in only a linen cloth set out to follow the crowd, and that finally, when he was caught, he left his captors holding the cloth and fled naked (§561). All of Jesus' disciples had already run away, as the author has just told us. Even Peter, Mark's principal informant, had fled too and so was no longer on the scene. Who, then, was this youth, the only onlooker friendly to Jesus among all those enemies? Why does Mark, who knows all about him, fail to name him, preferring apparently to shield his identity beneath a veil of mystery?

Perhaps the young man was Mark himself as many modern scholars think. Just as Peter in his preaching passed over the events that did him honor, so Mark may have wished here to conceal his own face, though unwilling to omit the episode entirely, which might serve to seal his composition, symbolically, with the impress of its author's signet.

### *Luke*

135. The third Gospel is attributed to Luke, the name being perhaps an abbreviation of Lucanus.

In the first generation of Christianity, Luke appears as the satellite to the splendor of Paul, who calls him "the dearest physician" (*Col.* 4:14). Originally from Antioch, Luke was not a Jew but a Greek both by birth and education and became a Christian well before the year 50 although we are sure he was not

among the immediate disciples of Jesus and had never seen him. Shortly after 50, he is at Paul's side through the latter's second missionary journey (*Acts* 16:10 ff.), probably in the capacity of physician also, because of Paul's recent illness (cf. *Gal.* 4:13, with *Acts* 16:6). From that time on Luke was Paul's shadow throughout almost all the latter's travels except for what was probably a long separation after their common sojourn in Philippi (cf. *Acts* 16:40 with 20:5). He joined Paul again in Philippi during the Apostle's third missionary voyage, about 57, and finished the journey with him, going as far as Jerusalem (*Acts* 21:15). During Paul's two years in prison in Caesarea (57-59), Luke, it seems, could not stay near him; but he accompanied him devotedly in his journey to Rome, sharing with him the hazardous adventures of the crossing (*Acts* 27:1 ff.). During the Apostle's first imprisonment in Rome, Luke stayed near at hand; later, faithful even unto death, he attended him during his second Roman imprisonment, earning from him, in that letter which is like the last will and testament of the failing Apostle, the moving tribute: "Only Luke is with me" (2 *Tim.* 4:11).

Writing to the Corinthians in 57 or 58, St. Paul mentions without naming him a "brother, whose praise is in the gospel through all the churches" (2 *Cor.* 8:18). St. Jerome, along with other early writers believes that this unnamed "brother" is none other than St. Luke (*De viris ill.*, 7) and adds also the opinion of others that "every time St. Paul in his letter says 'according to my gospel' he is referring to the volume of Luke." While this last statement is completely unfounded, the first is no more acceptable if it refers to Luke's Gospel, for it is most improbable that this Gospel was already written when Paul sent the letter in question; besides, nowhere else in Paul's Epistles does the term "gospel" denote a specific writing but simply the message of the "good tidings" (§105 ff.). On the other hand, there is a considerable degree of probability that the unknown "brother" and Luke are the same person if we take "gospel" here to mean not a definite writing but the work of "evangelist" in the original sense of the term (§109), that is, as a preacher of the "good tidings." If that is the case, then Luke even before he had recourse to the written word, was preaching widely, throughout the churches of Paul's apostolate, a definite oral catechesis; and at the same time, he was "diligently" (cf. *Luke* 1:3) reviewing its content in order to enrich it with other material and arrange it in appropriate form (cf. *anataxasqai*, *Luke* 1:1), until he finally decided the time had come to set in writing.



This interpretation is all the more likely since recent studies confirm the probability that Paul himself followed a definite plan of catechesis, not only oral but also in part written. Hence the faithful Luke might very reasonably be the outstanding representative after Paul of this particular type of catechesis, the brother “whose praise is in the *good tidings*” preached by Paul “through all the churches” which he founded.

136. Whatever the merits of this hypothesis, Luke is credited both with the third Gospel, which bears a marked affinity with St. Paul’s writings, and also the *Acts of the Apostles*, which deals in large measure with Paul’s adventures and, containing as it does long passages in which the narrator speaks in the first-person plural, indicates that he was present at the events he is recording. Not only do all the early writers agree in attributing these works to St. Luke — and his case is strengthened by the fact that the prologues of both (cf. *Luke* 1:1-4, with *Acts* 1:1-2) indicate they are from the same pen — but so do most of the modern authorities, and this is a rather rare phenomenon.

Our testimonies in this case, however, are later than those regarding *Matthew* and *Mark*, going back no further than the late second century. The so-called Muratorian Fragment, a catalogue of religious works accepted by the Church of Rome, composed about the year 180 and discovered by Ludovico A. Muratori in the Ambrosian Library of Milan, says in its appalling Latin (amended here and there)<sup>25</sup>: “The third book of the Gospel is that according to Luke. This Luke, a physician, when, after the Ascension of Christ, Paul had made him, a student of the Law, his companion, decided to write in his own name. He too had not seen the Lord in the flesh, and therefore when he began his narrative with John’s birth, he did so from what he could learn.”

At about the same time Irenaeus is stating: “Luke also, the follower of Paul, put in a book the gospel preached by him” (*Adv. haer.*, III, I, 1; cf. III, 14).

Also, from, the end of the second century date the various Greek or Latin prologues prefixed to the third Gospel, which keep adding more and more information through the centuries but still agree in substance. As an example, we may quote the so-called Monarchian prologue, which says: “Luke, a Syrian, of Antiochene nationality, a physician by profession, a disciple of the Apostles, was later the follower of Paul until his confession [martyrdom], serving God without blame. For, having never had wife nor children, at the age of 74 [others say 84], he died in Bithynia [others have Boeotia] filled with the Holy Spirit. The Gospels of Matthew in Judea and Mark in Italy having already been

written, he, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote this Gospel in the regions of Achaëa, he himself setting forth at the beginning that the others had been written before....”

Later testimonies merely confirm these main points (Tertullian, *Adv. Marcion.*, IV, 5; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata*, I, 21, 145; Origen, *In Matt.*, tom. I, in: Migne, P.G., 13, 830; etc.). Eusebius, however, deserves to be quoted as summing up the tradition in this regard: “Luke, who was by birth of Antioch and by profession a physician, remained longest with Paul, but he was associated also with the other Apostles in a more than incidental way. Of the knowledge of curing souls, which he had learned from them, he left us proof in two divinely inspired books: [in the first place] the Gospel, which he states he composed according to the things delivered to him by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, and he says too that all these things he followed up from the beginning [cf. *Luke* 1:1-4]; and [in the second place] the *Acts of the Apostles*, which he has set in order from information acquired not by hearsay but as an eyewitness” (*Hist. eccl.*, III, 4, 6). The testimonies of Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.*, II, 11; cf. 1, 27) and Tertullian (*Adv. Marcion.*, IV, 3ff.) also have their importance; according to the latter the heretic Marcion, about 140, accepted only *Luke* of all the canonical Gospels, though he did mutilate it to suit it to his own doctrines.

137. The Greek, the physician, the disciple of Paul are all reflected clearly enough in Luke’s Gospel (as they are in the Acts too, but the latter does not concern us here).

The Greek man of letters is apparent from the opening lines of his first work; in contrast to the style followed in the other books of the New Testament but in conformity with Greek usage, they contain an elaborate introduction. In addition, this introduction bears a surprising resemblance in structure and expression to the introduction to the *Materia Medica* of Pedanius Dioscurides, who was not only a professional colleague and contemporary of St. Luke, but being a native of the district of Tarsus, was also a fellow countryman of Paul.<sup>26</sup>

Luke’s language is certainly not the classical Greek of Attica, but it has a refinement about it which is not usual in a Hellenistic writer. His vocabulary is rich and often literary, his sentences polished and dignified; so, when modern philologists declare his style superior to that of the other Evangelists, they agree in substance with St. Jerome, for whom Luke “of all the Evangelists was

the most skilled in Greek, by virtue of his being a physician.” There are traces of Semitic influence in construction and even in the choice of words, however, and these are especially numerous in the first two chapters which recount the infancy of Jesus, which would indicate that for these the author depended more exclusively on Semitic sources.

We certainly cannot prove merely from his writing that the author of the third Gospel was a physician. But several little touches in his work serve quite well to confirm the tradition which called him one. Patient modern research has brought out the numerous technical terms in Luke which are to be found also in the writings of Hippocrates, Dioscurides, Galen, and other Greek physicians.<sup>27</sup> It is true that such expressions may be found also in nonmedical writers who occasionally affect a certain medical knowledge (Lucian, for example) but Luke’s case is different, for he could have no particular reason for introducing such terminology into episodes narrated already in the other Synoptics except the fact that he himself was a physician.

We can also detect the “clinical eye,” so to speak, in certain of Luke’s descriptions, especially when we compare them with the parallel passages in *Mark*: the symptoms are given particular attention in the episodes of Peter’s mother-in-law (4:38-39), the Gadarene demoniac (8: 27 ff.), the woman with the issue of blood (8:43 ff.) the demoniac boy (9:38ff.), the woman bent double (13:11 ff.). And it is only *Luke* who tells us of the bloody sweat Jesus suffered in Gethsemani (22:44).

Then in the case of the woman with the issue of blood, there is evident in Luke a kindly concern, *pro domo sua*, for the medical profession. In fact, Mark (5:25-26) bluntly announces that the woman had been ill for “twelve years, and had suffered much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had and found no benefit but rather grew worse.” Luke, on the other hand (8:43 of the Greek text) omits all these particulars, which could not have been very palatable to his colleagues, and says only that the woman had been ill for twelve years, but could obtain no cure from anyone.

138. Lastly, Luke more than any of the other Evangelists delights in portraying Jesus as the supreme Healer, both of bodies and souls. He is the only one who has Jesus’ fellow townsmen call him “physician” by way of challenge (4:23), and shortly afterward, as if in answer to that challenge, he relates that “power went forth from him and healed all” (6:19; cf. 5:17). Then from the spiritual point of view Luke pictures Jesus as the compassionate

healer of ailing humanity, the tender comforter of the afflicted, gentle, and meek, pardoning those who have gone most astray. Hence it is with complete historical appropriateness that Dante Alighieri describes St. Luke, without naming him, as the “chronicler of the meekness of Christ” (*scriba mansuetudinis Christi: De monarchia*, I, 16).

The disciple of Paul is no less evident in Luke’s writings. A kind of spiritual kinship links them to the Epistles of Paul. About a hundred words common to these two authors are not to be found in any of the other writers of the New Testament. We also, not rarely, find phrases which are typical of and peculiar to them. But this kinship is reflected not so much in the expression as in the content, which emphasizes the great principles stressed in Paul’s catechesis, such as the universality of the salvation wrought by Jesus, his “goodness and kindness” (*Tit.* 3:4), the value of humility and poverty, the power of prayer, the joyousness of spirit characteristic of the faithful, and the like. Not that he expresses these thoughts in Paul’s very words, for Luke was not for him the “interpreter” Mark had been for Peter; rather they are the shining beacons which guide his course, to borrow a metaphor from Tertullian, who found that Luke was “illuminated” by Paul (*Adv. Marcion*, IV, 2).

139. When did Luke write his Gospel? Certainly, after the other two Synoptics, according to the almost constant tradition of antiquity, which places it third in the series of Gospels; hence it follows Mark, which is no later than 61. On the other hand, Luke wrote his Gospel before the Acts of the Apostles, the introduction of which refers to it explicitly (*Acts* 1:1). In all probability, according to the prevailing opinion among modern scholars, the Acts were written before Paul’s release from his first imprisonment in Rome (cf. *Acts* 28:30) and therefore prior to the great persecution under Nero in 64, that is, all considered, in 62 or 63. St. Luke’s Gospel, then, preceded the Acts, if only by a short time.

It is probable that the Gospel received its final form and was published in Rome rather than in Achaëa, Egypt, or other places to which the wavering early traditions would assign it. In fact, it seems certain that Luke knew and used the Gospel of Mark, which had appeared in Rome shortly before he arrived there with the prisoner Paul (cf. *Col.* 4:10, 14; *Philem.* 1:24). On the other hand, Luke’s prologue indicates that he had been preparing and gathering material for his Gospel for a long time. His attendance on the venerated prisoner for no less than two years and his knowledge of Mark’s writing, which had been warmly received by the Roman Christians,

undoubtedly furnished him two fine opportunities to add color to his original canvas and probably led him to publish his Gospel too in Rome itself.

140. Luke addresses his Gospel to a definite person, Theophilus, to whom he later addresses the Acts as well. It was a gesture of respect to dedicate a writing to some outstanding person; and Flavius Josephus is following the same custom thirty years later when, also in Rome, he dedicates his *Antiquities of the Jews* (I, 8) and the *Contra Apionem* (I, I; II, I) to Epaphroditus. Luke's Theophilus is called *kratiste* (1:3), which may have been equivalent to our "excellency" and possibly indicates the man's distinguished station; but we know nothing else about him despite the abundance of ancient and modern conjectures. In any case, though the writing is dedicated to Theophilus, Luke is looking to a multitude of other readers for whom his words are also intended.

The brief prologue to Theophilus, which permits St. Luke to set forth the circumstances, scope, and method of his work is of supreme historical value; it might well be called the most important document we have regarding the date of composition for the synoptic Gospels. Hence we quote it here in its entirety (*Luke 1:1-4*): "Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order (*anataxasqai*) a narrative of the things which have been accomplished among us, according as they have delivered them unto us who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having diligently attained to [followed up] all things from the beginning [or even "for a long time": *anwqen*] to write to thee in order (*akaqexhz*), most excellent Theophilus, that thou mayest know the certainty of those words concerning which thou hast been instructed (*kathchqhzh*). "

We do not need to discuss again the information we have already deduced from this passage, including the fact that prior to Luke "many" had written about the things of Jesus and that their writings derived from the oral tradition of "eyewitnesses" and "ministers of the word" or from the early catechesis of the Church (§106 ff.). The new facts to note here are that Theophilus had already been instructed in that catechesis and perhaps had finished it (as the use of the aorist, literally "thou wert instructed" would indicate); hence he had probably been baptized. Now Luke, to confirm for Theophilus the "words" in which he has been instructed and to give him besides a deeper knowledge of them, offers him this written work, which is the fruit of inquiry and research "diligently" made concerning "all the things" he writes about "from the beginning" of the events (or at least "for a long time"). And finally, the narrative has been arranged "in order."

The “many” prior to Luke cannot be taken to mean no more than two, namely, the Gospels of Matthew and Mark which are known to us. The term “many” may on the whole suggest about ten writings, in which, of course, the two we know may be included. But even amid this plenty Luke thinks a new work will be useful. He has not witnessed these things himself, but the long and diligent searches he has made in the one mine of information, namely, the reports of the “eyewitnesses” and “ministers of the word,” lead him to hope that this new work of his will serve to deepen for others the “certainty” of the catechetical “discourses.”

Then, as we know, Luke followed the catechesis of Paul. Hence, he is going to add somewhat to the usual picture presented in Peter’s instruction, which began with the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist. And since he has “followed up from the beginning” the story he is about to tell, he naturally starts with the account of Jesus’ infancy as Matthew had done to a lesser degree. His whole exposition is to be “in order,” and by this he means — it would seem — the chronological sequence of the events in themselves and their connection with the more noteworthy happenings in secular history, and also a logical order proceeding from cause to effect or according to the grouping of related subjects. So far as we are able to judge today with the scant information we possess and our different mentality, Luke effectively followed the plan he set for himself.

141. He is the only Evangelist who takes care to link his narrative with the principal events in contemporary history (cf. 2:1-2; 3:1-2), to set the Christian picture against the background of all humanity, thus showing that he is a historian of wide vision who keenly perceives that Christianity has initiated a new era in the story of mankind. Similarly, two centuries earlier, Polybius had pointed out at the beginning of his *Histories* (I, I ff.) that Rome’s dominion over the world marked the beginning of a new epoch in the history of civilization. And at the same time Luke reveals himself once more as the disciple of Paul, who had read in the diffusion of the “good tidings” throughout all peoples “the mystery hidden for ages and generations, but now manifested to his saints” (Col 1:26).

As for the chronological sequence, *Luke* follows *Mark*, so much so that the latter brief Gospel seems to have served as his general outline; in fact, about three-fifths of the material in *Mark* is included in *Luke*. Yet, though he does follow Mark’s pattern, Luke omits some things, transposes others, and above all makes copious additions. About one half the contents of *Luke* are peculiar

to this Gospel and are not included in the other two Synoptics. The additions include seven miracles and about twenty parables together with the account of the birth and infancy of Jesus, which is not identical with Matthew's.

Evidently this fresh information is the fruit of the "diligent" studies Luke refers to in his prologue. But where did he find it?

142. The same prologue points to tradition as one source, though without being specific. It is not difficult, however, to glimpse among the "eyewitnesses" and "ministers of the word" first the revered teacher Paul, and then other well-known persons whom Luke, in his journeys with Paul, may well have met in Antioch, Asia Minor, Macedonia, Jerusalem, Caesarea, and Rome. It is no hazardous guess to presume that his reliable informants included the Apostle Peter and possibly James (cf. Acts 21:18), as well as the "evangelist" Philip with whom he lived in Caesarea (cf. Acts 21:8); and there are other possibilities as well, though it would serve little purpose to spend oneself in drawing out what must remain mere conjectures.

The specific mention of certain women is significant. "Certain women" had followed Jesus, "who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, who is called the Magdalene, from whom seven devils had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who used to provide for them out of their means" (*Luke* 8:2-3; cf. 24:10). Neither Joanna nor Susanna is mentioned by the other Evangelists although they were well-to-do women of high social position. Perhaps Luke's mention of them is a tactful allusion to one source of his information.

No less delicate but much more precise is his reference to another woman of incomparable dignity and importance, the Mother of Jesus herself. The only eyewitness and source of information for many of the things this Gospel tells us about the conception, birth, and infancy of Jesus could have been no one but Mary, Jesus' own mother. Twice in the course of his narrative — within a short space and in practically the same words— Luke draws our attention to the fact that "Mary kept all these words, pondering them in her heart" (2:19), and shortly afterward, that "his mother kept all these words in her heart" (2:51). This repetition of thought and expression is eloquent in its deliberate reticence. Whether or not Luke knew Mary personally we do not know; but even granted that he had never spoken with her, he could still have obtained the very precise information she was able to furnish from the Apostle John, the adoptive son whom Jesus gave her as he died and, in whose home, she

lived after the death of her own son (*John* 19:26-27). A late tradition, not recorded before Theodore the Lector (sixth century), makes Luke the painter of Mary's portrait, and still later legends are full of many more such portraits. But in reality, the portrait of the mother of Jesus was painted by the pen and not by the brush of St. Luke. It shines forth from his description of Jesus' infancy, spent beneath his mother's thoughtful gaze, and it was from this description that Christian painters later took their favorite themes.

It is highly probable, too, that in writing the story of the infancy, which includes some metrical passages, Luke even had recourse to Hebrew or Aramaic documents; if he did derive directly from these, it would satisfactorily explain the extraordinary frequency of Semitisms in the Greek of this particular section. But we cannot state anything sure or definite about the nature and source of such documents except what Luke himself implies in his prologue. Nor can the various conjectures offered by modern scholars make up for what we lack in ancient data.

143. Luke is writing not only for Theophilus, but also for other Christians who are of more or less the same spiritual mold. They are the Christians of the churches founded by Paul, composed for the most part of converts from paganism. Indeed, Origen noted the fact that Luke's Gospel was "for those from among the Gentiles" (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, VI, 25, 6).

Luke includes certain explanations which would have been superfluous for Jewish readers, such as the fact that the Jewish Feast of the Azymes is called the Pasch (*Luke* 22:1); and then he omits other things which a convert from paganism might misunderstand, like the precept Jesus gave the Apostles not to go in the direction of the Gentiles (*Matt.* 10:5, which Mark also omits for the same reason). Again, he softens certain expressions which might have seemed somewhat harsh to Gentile ears; for instance, instead of "Do not even the Gentiles do that?" (*Matt.* 5:47), he has "For even sinners do that" (*Luke* 6:33). It is the same tactfulness which prompts him to add special little particulars complimentary to the Gentiles, like the cordial welcome John the Baptist gives the soldiers (3:14), the centurions generosity toward the Jews (7:4-5), and even the charity and gratitude to be found among the abhorred Samaritans (10:33-35; 17:15-18).

In addition, Luke's writing aims specially to spread the "good tidings" of kindness and mercy. The disciple of Paul, speaking to the converts of Paul, depicts Jesus not only as the Savior of all men without distinction, but as the



friend, in a special way, of the most sinful, the lowliest and the disinherited of the earth. If his treatment of Jesus as the supreme spiritual healer inspired Dante to describe him as the *scriba mansuetudinis Christi* (§138), it also inspired Renan to define his Gospel as “the most beautiful book there is,” and in this particular instance the French writer’s usual hyperbole plays a much smaller part than it does in his other opinions. Luke is the only one who records the parable of the Prodigal Son, a literary miracle of psychological insight. Only in Luke does the shepherd place on his shoulders the lost sheep he has just found again and, on his arrival home, rejoice over it with his friends (15:5-6; not in *Matt.* 18:13). Again, only Luke speaks of the woman who finds the drachma she has lost and rejoices with her neighbors just as there is “joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents” (*Luke* 15:8-10). No one but Luke records the words of the dying Jesus, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!” and immediately afterward his promise of paradise to the repentant thief suffering his last agony beside him (23:34, 43).

144. And there is still another consideration which helps to underline the true nature of Luke’s writings. Think for a moment what the society in which the readers of this Gospel lived was really like historically.

A contemporary of Luke, also living in Rome, Seneca, calmly asserts of woman, *impudens animal est... ferum, cupiditatum incontinens (De constantia sapientis, XIV, 1).*<sup>28</sup> Another contemporary inhabitant of the Urbs was Petronius Arbiter, the author of the *Satyricon*, which, though it is the most cynically obscene book to come down to us from classical Rome, is also a faithful mirror of the Oriental sumptuousness enjoyed by some few members of that society among the numberless masses of proletarians and slaves. There probably were exceptions, but they could not have been many and in any case, they existed more in theory than in practice. The same "moralist Seneca," for all his excellent discussion of civic and private virtues, can still define woman as mentioned above; and while on one hand he dictated the famous maxim of Christian flavor: "money makes no man like to God; God has none of it... he is naked,"<sup>29</sup> on the other he confessed to Nero that he possessed "unbounded wealth" and that he loaned money at usury (Tac., *Annal.*, XIV, 53), indicating that he had no desire whatever to be as naked as his god. It was, in short, the society accurately summed up by Claudius Secundus, who had inscribed on his own tomb: *Balnea vina venus corrumpunt corpora nostra, sed vitam faciunt balnea vina venus (Corpus Inscr. Lat.*, VI, 3, n. 15258). It was a society under the almost absolute dominion of luxury and lust.

The perfect antithesis to that society is in the very nature of the Gospel of Luke, which exalts woman, sings the praises of poverty, and eulogizes the joyousness of a simple and humble life: a writing which finds its summary in the binomial "poverty and purity," accompanied by that spirit of perfect joyousness which we should be tempted to define as typically Franciscan if it had not already been typically "Lucan" so long before.

If the women in Luke's Gospel have a probable role as sources of his information, they certainly have an honorable one as personages in his narrative. Besides those in the foreground, like Mary, the mother of Jesus, and Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, we have other women, introduced to us only by Luke —the prophetess Anna (2:36-38), the widow of Naim (7:11 ff.), the penitent woman (7:37 ff.), the woman bent double (13:10 ff.), the other woman who calls the mother of Jesus blessed (11:27-28), the housewife Martha (10:38 ff.), and the women on the road to Golgotha (23:27 ff.). There are many more such feminine portraits in the Acts, forming a whole gallery of

pictures which present woman in a far different light from that in which contemporary pagan society had set her.

145. Along with purity, the Gospel of Luke exalts poverty. While the Sermon on the Mount in *Matthew* has Jesus' "Blessed . . ." nine times, Luke has it only four times, but in recompense he adds the malediction, "Woe..." addressed to the rich and the pleasure bent (6:20-26), four separate times. In addition, while the first beatitude in *Matthew* is addressed to the "poor in spirit," in Luke it is addressed simply to the "poor." And so, it is entirely consistent that Luke alone expressly records the "lowliness" (*tapenwsin*) of the mother of Jesus (1:48), the poverty of her offering to the Temple (2:24), the bleak wretchedness of Christ's birthplace in Bethlehem, and the poverty of the shepherds who were his first adorers. Luke is the only one who reports that Jesus, speaking in the synagogue in Nazareth, applied to himself the words of Isaias: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me, wherefore he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor" (4:18). And if Luke is repeating with Matthew, "The foxes have dens . . . but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (9:58), he alone tells us that certain wealthy women assisted him "out of their own means" (8:3). In fact, the exaltation of poverty occurs so frequently in Luke's Gospel that some modern scholars thought they recognized in it the influence of the ancient sect of the Ebionites (the "poor"), composed of Jewish Christians. But the very fact that they were Jewish would be sufficient to exclude the possibility of any such influence in a writing like this, which is completely foreign to the Jewish temper and is inspired instead by a spirit of universality. The aversion to riches is adequately explained as a reaction to the very character of contemporary pagan society.

The spirit of serene, almost lyric joyousness which breathes through Luke's Gospel seems the natural consequence of his predilection for purity and poverty. St. Paul had already urged the faithful to "rejoice in the Lord always; again, I say, rejoice" (*Philip*. 4:4), repeating the commendation elsewhere in identical or equivalent words: "Rejoice always" (*I Thess*. 5:16; cf. *Rom*. 12:12; etc.). The reason for this joyousness was that the "kingdom of God is . . . justice, and peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit" (*Rom*. 14:17), and that the "fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, etc." (*Gal*. 5:22.) In this too the disciple follows his teacher; the first two chapters of his Gospel contain the four metrical compositions (*Magnificat*; *Benedictus*; *Gloria in altissimis*; *Nunc dimittis*) which are unique expressions of this spiritual joy and which are not in the other Gospels. Finally, the whole work is brought to a close with the

statement that the Apostles, after they had watched Jesus ascend into heaven, “returned to Jerusalem with great joy, and were continually in the Temple blessing God” (24:52-53).

And so, the *scriba mansuetudinis Christi* becomes also the troubadour of God in perfect joyousness.

### *The Question of the Synoptics*

146. Since the beginning of the eighteenth century, the three Gospels so far examined have been called the “Synoptics” because, if they are arranged in parallel columns, it is possible to note immediately, at a glance (“synopsis”), their many similarities. Their texts are not identical, and there are even many discrepancies which, however, do not cancel the impression that these three Gospels are substantially the same, suggesting on the whole harmony amid dissonances, a *concordia discors*.

The harmony is evident in the topics treated, the order in which they are arranged, and the choice of words. The content common to all the Synoptics is the inauguration of Christ's public life, his ministry first in Galilee — centering about Capharnaum — and then in Judea, and the events of the last week of his life, including his death and resurrection (§113); to this common material *Matthew* and *Luke* prefix the story of the infancy, about which *Mark* says nothing.

We find a certain agreement also in the arrangement of the individual items of this common subject matter, the respective divisions being generally parallel, especially in *Mark* and *Luke*; *Matthew* often groups together events and sayings which the others record separately.

Finally, there are frequent passages in which all three texts carry the very same words, so that having read one, we have read the other two; this is true even where the words are rare (duakolwz, *Matt.* 19:23; *Mark* 10:23; *Luke* 18:24) or employed with a rare meaning (epiblhma for “patch,” *Matt.* 9:16; *Mark* 2:21; *Luke* 5:36), or represent foreign idioms (“children of the bridegroom,” for groomsmen, *Matt.* 9:15; *Mark* 2:19; *Luke* 5:34), or are otherwise unusual. Sometimes all three cite a passage from the Old Testament in identical words which differ both from the Hebrew text and from the Greek text of the Septuagint (cf. *Matt.* 3:3; *Mark* 1:3; *Luke* 3:4, with *Isa.* 40:3 in the Hebrew and the Septuagint).<sup>30</sup> 18

147. But at the same time this fundamental harmony is crossed by numerous dissonances. Even leaving aside passages peculiar to any individual

synoptic Gospel, we sometimes find one same subject given a quite different treatment by two of them, as, for example, the infancy of Jesus (*Matt.* 1:18-2:23; *Luke* 1:5-2:52) and his genealogy (*Matt.* 1:1-17; *Luke* 3:23-38). The Sermon on the Mount, which is very long in Matthew (chap. 5-7) and very short in Luke (6:20-49), presents differences even from the beginning, where the number of beatitudes varies. Then even apart from differences in the grouping of episodes and discourses, we are confronted with other discrepancies in the narrative sequence which are hard to explain. For example, while the three Synoptics present the story of the Passion in an almost identical manner, they immediately proceed to differ on the order of Christs appearances after the resurrection.

Frequently there are differences in just those passages which otherwise are entirely parallel. These may be differences in expression only; for instance, in an account the development of which is absolutely identical in all three Gospels, one may suppress a word or two or substitute other, almost synonymous, expressions; take for example, the visit paid to Jesus by his relatives.

Matthew, chap. 12	Mark, chap. 3	Luke, chap. 8
46 While he was still speaking to the crowds,		
[behold] his mother and his brethren were standing outside, seeking to speak to him.	31 And his mother and brethren came and standing outside, they sent to him, calling him.	19 Now his mother and brethren came to him; and they could not get to him because of the crowd.
	32 Now a crowd was sitting about him;	
47	and they said to him: Behold, thy mother and	20

And someone said to him: Behold, thy mother and thy brethren are standing outside seeking [to speak to] thee.	thy brethren are outside seeking thee.	And it was told him: Thy mother and thy brethren are standing outside wishing to see thee.
48 But he answered and said to him that told him: Who is my mother, and who are my brethren?	33 And he answered and said to them: Who are my mother and my brethren?	21 But he answered and said to them:
	34 And looking round on those who were sitting about him, he said:	
49 And stretching forth his hand towards his disciples, he said: Behold my mother and my brethren!	Behold my mother and my brethren.	My mother and my brethren
50 for whosoever shall do the will of my Father that is in heaven, he is my brother, and sister, and mother.	35 For whosoever does the will of God, he is my brother and sister, and mother.	are they who hear the word of God and do it.

Sometimes the differences concern not only the words but the thought as well: in *Matthew* (10:10) and *Luke* (9:3), Jesus forbids the Apostles to take

anything with them on a journey, not even a “staff,” while in *Mark* (6:8) he forbids them to take anything with them except “a staff only”; and again in the district of the Gadarenes or Gerasenes, Jesus cures two demoniacs according to *Matthew* (8:28-34) but only one according to *Mark* (5:1-20) and *Luke* (8:26-39); similarly two blind men are cured near Jericho according to *Matthew* (20:29-34) but only one according to *Mark* (10:46-52) and *Luke* (18:35-43); and there are various other examples of such differences.

This, then, is the problem: we must explain the reason for this harmony which, though it sometimes seems dissonant when we compare these three Gospels with one another, seems all the more harmonious when we compare them in turn with the one nonsynoptic Gospel, *John*, which is quite different in nature and in tone.

148. The question is one which is vigorously debated, and it might be said that for more than a century it has been the chief problem on which New Testament scholars have concentrated their research. The various solutions, hypotheses, and conjectures born of it are most numerous, and to discuss them all would require a long and special study, which practically speaking, would be of historical value only since the majority of the theories have today been abandoned.

Until a few years ago, the explanation most in vogue and held as axiomatic by the so-called Liberal School (§203 ff.) was that the three Synoptics derived from two written documents: one of these was a collection containing only the “sayings” or “discourses” of Christ, none other, in fact, than the collection Papias calls *Logia* (*Adyta*) and attributes to the Apostle Matthew (§114); the other was Mark’s Gospel, either in an earlier form or as we know it today, which contained chiefly the miracles and other works of Jesus. This supposes an independent origin for *Mark*, while *Matthew* (which then would not be the work of this Apostle) and *Luke* are explained as separate fusions of the bulk of the *Logia*, with some of the events narrated by Mark. This fundamental assumption does not exclude a possibility that some elements in both *Matthew* and *Luke* were derived from other sources and that in choosing his material each Evangelist had his own particular aim in view.

Though this explanation today still has a large following, it is contested much more than it was formerly. The new trend initiated by the so-called Form-Critical Method (§217), which had the merit of calling attention to the importance of the period of preparation before the canonical Gospels were

written, considers it too simple and elementary a solution because two documents alone are hardly sufficient to represent the ample production of the period and because we must suppose, in any case, that a whole set of oral testimony and a whole series of written documents existed side by side.

(Figure 20, Figure 21, Figure 22, Figure 23)

149. In reality, almost all the various explanations are based not so much on the pure and simple testimonies of ancient documents as on a priori principles of modern birth, and they betray their authors' anxious attempt to force the testimony to fit the principle.

For instance, it is supposed that the *Logia* of Papias was not our *Matthew* at all. Now, this supposition, which is a fundamental axiom in the theory of the two original documents, not only has never been demonstrated by historical arguments but it is contradicted by all the testimony of antiquity, which consistently held that our *Matthew* does correspond to these *Logia*. It was not until October, 1832, that Schleiermacher for the first time denied it, not on the basis of any newly discovered historical evidence, but on the basis of his own particular philosophical principles.

Another basic criterion in the above-mentioned theory is that *Mark*, the shortest of all the Gospels, must be the first and oldest because religious narratives tend always to increase and enlarge upon their content, and not to diminish it. But this too is an a priori principle and we find it clearly refuted by documents of precisely Jewish origin (to mention no others). Why could not *Mark* have been the "summary" of another writing—as St. Augustine thought (*De consensu evangel.*, 1, 2, 4) — if the Hebrew *Chronicles* were a summary of the earlier books of Kings and other documents, and if the second book of the Machabees was a summary of the five books of Jason of Cyrene? And still within the field of the New Testament, is it not true that while Luke, the last of the Synoptics, adds so much information it also summarizes a great deal? Finally, if for their own private use, the Christians of the first two centuries were accustomed to put together such extracts of evangelical maxims as those from which fragments have come down to us in Egyptian papyri (§100), could not *Mark* have put together a somewhat larger extract which he deemed suitable and convenient for a specific group of Christians?

Therefore, sparing ourselves any discussion of hazardous guesses and forced interpretations, let us briefly examine how much light the ancient



testimonies and the observations of modern times can shed on this highly intricate problem.

150. Historical evidence shows us that chronologically the first of the Synoptics is Matthew's Semitic writing, corresponding substantially to our Greek *Matthew*, and that the second is *Mark*, and the third *Luke*. But we have also noted that these three writings had a previous history, represented by approximately twenty-five years of oral catechesis, which is mirrored in them from different angles (§110). Then, too, we pointed out that the author of the last Synoptic had available many previous writings on the same subject which he himself used, though with the object of adding somewhat to their content (§140). In fact, there existed still other data outside of these categories, since a few decades after the appearance of the three Synoptics and the 'many' anonymous writings, the Gospel of *John* was composed, which contains a great deal of new information. Now how did it happen that out of this sea of facts, which has been explored so little as far as we are concerned, the three Synoptics took almost always the very same pearls and no others, and in addition arranged them almost always in the same setting? In other words, what is the reason for the striking harmony of the three Synoptics?

Among the Semites memory training was a most important part of education in general and of religious instruction in particular. For long periods abundant teaching was entrusted to the memory alone and only later set in writing. Among the many examples we might quote, it is enough here to mention one which is not Hebrew, but is a classic Semitic example, nevertheless, and of a later date than the Gospels, and that is the Koran. This was not written by Mohammed; for about a generation its contents were entrusted only to the memory of his disciples but preserved with verbal fidelity. Hence one theory is that something of the same nature occurred in the case of the Synoptics: they all derived from a body of oral teachings worded in a specific manner, namely, the catechesis of the Apostles, which each of them put in writing with varying degrees of completeness but with verbal fidelity, something like the way in which the Talmud was composed (§§87, 106).

Yet, while we cannot deny the importance of the memory among the Semites in general and in early Christian catechesis too, this explanation seems a little too elementary and mechanical. We should have to suppose — if we may use a modern comparison — a rich series of imaginary phonograph records, each corresponding to a particular section of this early catechesis,

which were made to play from time to time with mechanical precision. And who made this imaginary recording? The college of Apostles, certainly. And in what language? Surely in Aramaic, then the prevailing tongue in Palestine. But can we prove all this?

151. Whatever the possibility in theory, when we come down to concrete facts, that is, to the documents, we learn that a collection of this kind was indeed prepared by the college of Apostles, but it was no such incorporeal recording; it was a real written work, the Gospel of Matthew (§117). This official document, of course, did not include the oral catechesis in its entirety; the latter continued to exist side by side with the written word, and in its memory still played a large and fundamental part. But we have no proof whatever that the oral catechesis was as set and unchanging in its form of expression as a writing would be. In fact, we are led to suppose exactly the opposite because of the freedom evident in the translation of the Semitic text of *Matthew* and such differences in phraseology as we noted in the Greek Gospels (§§121-122). Hence, if the Synoptics agree because they derive from a specifically worded form of catechesis, then the latter must have been written and not oral.

A comparison of the texts of the Synoptics with regard to vocabulary and arrangement (§146) points to the same conclusion. Without doubt the earliest oral catechesis of the Apostles was in Aramaic. Then how does it happen that Mark and Luke, who wrote in Greek, translated that fluid verbal patrimony with so much conformity in the choice of words and phrases and in grammatical construction, even to the smallest details. And on the other hand, how does it also happen that they unexpectedly differ in other points of special importance, like the wording of the institution of the Eucharist or of the tablet affixed to the cross of Jesus (§122)? Hence, at least these two Synoptics presuppose a written text, which they in part used and in part ignored; and this written text, again, can be none other than Matthew's, either in the complete original, or in extracts and editions of various kinds.

152. Having ascertained these points from the early documents, let us see how they fit in with the other information which tradition has given us regarding the origin of *Mark* and *Luke*.

The published Semitic text of *Matthew* enjoyed supreme authority because of its Apostolic origin and its official character, but as the gospel message gradually penetrated among people who could not understand the Semitic

dialects it was becoming increasingly impossible to use it directly. Nevertheless, it could still be used by many "evangelists" or preachers who did understand it, and in any case, there soon appeared those complete or partial translations referred to by Papias (§119). This attachment to Matthew's composition seems most natural given the halo of authority which surrounded it; in the field of the written "good tidings" it held a priority which could not be ignored by any of the later writers. Apart from the "many" who wrote before Luke and about whom all we have is guesswork, we know that Mark wrote according to the catechesis of Peter, and Luke according to that of Paul. What importance has this early data with regard to the Semitic composition of Matthew? Did the two later Synoptic writers know and use it?

Modern scholars for the most part answer this in the negative. Those who consider the Semitic *Matthew* identical with the Logic of Papias but not with the Greek *Matthew* maintain that *Mark* did not know the *Logia* but that Luke did. As for the relationship between *Mark* and *Luke*, it is generally agreed that the latter made some use of the former. But those who fail to see any historical basis for supposing a substantial difference between the Semitic *Matthew* (the *Logia*) and the Greek *Matthew*, may still find differences between the original Semitic text and the Greek translation because of the liberties taken by the translator, as noted above (§§120 ff.). In fact, it is always possible that if *Mark* and *Luke* used the original Semitic text in any way whatever, they were used in turn by its Greek translator.

Modern scholars have gathered the most tenuous and elusive proofs to support their respective theses. With extremely patient studies, worthy of sincere admiration, they have shown that if Mark had used Matthew he would not have upset the 'arrangement' so characteristic of the latter, nor would he have left out this or that episode or maxim or word; and similarly, if Luke had used Matthew he would not have differed from him so much in his account of the infancy, the resurrection, and the genealogy of Jesus, and in the beatitudes, nor would he have preferred the sequence of events followed by Mark; and many more such discerning arguments deduced from comparison of the texts.

153. But unfortunately these texts are few — only three; yet we know that in ancient times they were "many," even prior to *Luke*, that is, when the texts we know were only two in number (§140) — in fact, not even two completely, because our *Matthew* is not an absolutely literal rendering of the Semitic

*Matthew*. This is the great lacuna we must not forget whenever we compare the Synoptics, the lacuna of the "many" texts which we do not possess.

If then we keep in mind that these "many," as we have already supposed, derived in large part from the Semitic *Matthew*; that, though differing in length, they may well have included certain data not contained in the Semitic *Matthew*; that contemporary with these written "good tidings" the old oral "good tidings" of the "evangelists" continued to resound among the faithful, re-echoing in substance the content of the former, then it is easy to understand how much more complicated is the problem of the literary origins of our Synoptics and how inadequate must inevitably be the conclusions based on any comparison of the texts we have today, precisely because these texts are so few, or rather because we do not have most of the ancient texts.

154. By way of summary, we can trace the following genealogy for our Synoptics, keeping in mind the information brought to light by modern textual research as well as the definite evidence furnished by antiquity.

First of all, came the Semitic *Matthew*, which contained both the discourses and the works of Jesus; it was also the principal, if not the only source from which flowed the "many" little streams and rivulets of information at the time of Luke.

Mark was induced to write in Rome by the circumstances we have already reviewed. In his writing he reproduced the oral catechesis of Peter, which, however, was not far removed from nor foreign to the writing of Matthew, but rather comprised the greater part of the latter's source material. Therefore, when Mark undertook his composition, he found that it would not only make his task easier but would also be a kind of guarantee for his work if he took for his guide the writing which in a certain sense was influenced by Peter himself, namely, the document of Matthew. But in what form did this document come into Mark's hands—in its complete original text, or in some extract, or in one of those translations Papias mentions? And if he knew it in a translation, then what was the nature and extent of the latter? And what was its resemblance to our Greek *Matthew*? These are the questions we are unable to answer.

Supposing, however, that this document we are unable to describe was at Mark's disposal, then his writing is easily explained as a blending of material from two sources, namely, his memory and the document. When the material was the same in both he simply followed the document; when there was a difference, he wrote down Peter's preaching as he remembered it. This

explanation seems to account for both the dissonance and the harmony between the first two Synoptics as well as the uniform testimony of antiquity that Mark is the “interpreter” of Peter.

The case of Luke is more complicated not only because *Matthew*, *Mark*, and the “many” he diligently studied had already appeared, but also because he echoes Paul’s catechesis. Hence his sources are more numerous and for us today they are lost in the mists of the past. Did Luke use the Semitic *Matthew*? It is the common opinion that this cannot be proved with certainty by comparing the texts we possess, but without entering into a discussion of the question, it would seem that Luke must have used at least some document which may have been a kind of generous extract from the Semitic *Matthew*, perhaps even translated into Greek, and which itself was one of the “many”; the very numerous identical and parallel passages in our *Luke* and *Matthew* leave no room for doubt on this point.

And it is also generally admitted, as we have noted, that Luke used *Mark*, especially for the chronological sequence of his narrative. If, then, we accept the hypothesis that Luke wrote his Gospel in Rome, we may also conclude that he used *Mark* as a kind of general outline. But he worked long on the pattern and filled it out to double its size with the very numerous threads he had “diligently” gathered from the “many” previous writings and from oral tradition, and particularly from his teacher Paul.

Third in form though not in content, comes our Greek *Matthew*, which is substantially the same as the Semitic *Matthew*; but its Greek shows the influence of *Mark* and *Luke* for the reasons and to the extent noted above.

In this genealogy of the Synoptics, the harmony springs from the source common to all three, which is directly or indirectly the original composition of *Matthew* and the written catechesis of the Apostles and of Peter especially. This harmony involves dissonances when the individual authors, according to their own separate aims, either shorten or transpose parts of this material or else add other elements, which also derive, for the most part, from the preaching of the Apostles, though through other channels. (cf. Figure 24)

### *John*

155. The three synoptic Gospels contain no direct identification of their authors. On the other hand, at the end of the fourth Gospel, the only nonsynoptic, we do find just such an identification, however veiled: This is the disciple who bears witness concerning these things, and who has written

these things" (*John* 21:24), the demonstrative "this" referring to a "disciple whom Jesus loved," mentioned shortly before (21:20).

If such a statement, which brings the whole work to a close, is not exactly an autograph, it may be considered a kind of cryptic signature. And how are we to interpret it? Who is the anonymous "disciple whom Jesus loved"?

We find the same affectionate designation elsewhere too (13:23; 19:26; 20:2; 21:7, 20), but only toward the close of the story of Jesus' life, that is, the account of its most tragic and moving period, from the Last Supper to the end (13:23). Before that we do not find it, but we do find instead an equally unnamed disciple of Jesus who is among the first to join him, having been among the followers of John the Baptist along with Andrew of Bethsaida, brother of Simon Peter (1:35-44). And at Jesus' trial there also appears an unnamed disciple who uses his acquaintance with the high priest to gain Simon Peter's entrance into the courtyard (18:15-16).

Now, this anonymous disciple and the "disciple whom Jesus loved" are in reality one and the same person. From the Synoptics we learn that the disciples dearest to Jesus were the Apostles Peter, James, and John; hence it is reasonable to suppose that one of these was the "disciple whom Jesus loved." This could not be Peter, for he is mentioned more than once as someone quite distinct from the person we are seeking (13:23-24; 18:15; 20:2; etc.); nor could it be James for the reasons which follow.

The James in question is James the Elder, the son of Zebedee and Salome and therefore the brother of the Apostle John. Since these two brothers were natives of Bethsaida it is easy to understand their friendship with the other two brothers, Andrew and Simon Peter, who were from the same town (1:35-44; cf. *Mark* 1:16-20). But this James was killed quite early by Herod Agrippa I (*Acts* 12:2), in the year 44, when none of our Gospels had been written, much less the fourth and last one which is precisely the one attributed to the beloved disciple we wish to identify. Hence, he must be the other brother, that is, the Apostle John, the son of Zebedee.

Various other points confirm this. The special friendship which existed between Simon Peter and John of Zebedee existed also between Simon Peter and the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (13:24-26; 18:15-16; 20:2 ff.; 21:7, 20 ff.). In addition, while Simon Peter is named in this Gospel at least forty times and there is frequent mention of the other Apostles as well, the brothers James and John are never mentioned by name at all and only once by the phrase,

“the sons of Zebedee” (21:2). It is impossible to suppose that they were unknown to the author of the Gospel, especially if from the Acts we learn that John was a person of the greatest authority and Paul himself mentions him immediately after Peter as one of the “pillars” of the Church (*Gal.* 2:9). It is, therefore, a conscious omission dictated by modesty, a reserve similar to that of Mark, the “interpreter” of Peter, who deliberately omits facts complimentary to Peter (§134).

In a moment we shall see how the characteristics of the fourth Gospel correspond to those of the author we have thus discovered. First let us listen to what early tradition says of him.

156. John stood at the foot of the cross with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and “from that hour, the disciple took her to his own [house]” (*John* 19:27). After Pentecost, John appears with Peter in Jerusalem (*Acts* 3:1 ff.) and then in Samaria (*Acts* 8:14). When Paul goes to Jerusalem in 49 to attend the council of the Apostles, he finds John there (*Gal.* 2:9; cf. *Acts* 15:1 ff.). After this, we do not find the guardian of Jesus' mother in Palestine again; probably he left by the year 57, for when Paul returns to Jerusalem, he makes no mention of him (*Acts* 21:15 ff.). Later tradition points to John in Asia Minor, in Ephesus, toward the end of the first century. During the persecution of both Jews and Christians inaugurated by Domitian (81-96), John was exiled to the island of Patmos where he wrote the *Apocalypse*. After Domitian's death, he returned to Ephesus 'where he lived during Nerva's reign (96-98) and through part of Trajan's. He died a natural death at a very advanced age, perhaps in the seventh year of Trajan's rule, or A.D. 104.

On this constant tradition, additional details and legends were soon embroidered, fostered no doubt by the aura of mysterious wonder which must have surrounded the venerable old age of him who had been the favored friend of Jesus and his spiritual biographer. These legends are even hinted at in his Gospel, which says: “This saying therefore went abroad among the brethren, that this disciple was not to die. But Jesus had not said to him: He is not to die; but rather: If I wish him to remain until I come, what is it to thee [Peter]?” (21:23.) Hence among the admirers of the aged disciple there were some who believed that he alone, untouched by death, would survive the disciples of Jesus until his second and glorious coming. It was an affectionate and pious belief but the writer himself takes care to dissipate it.

Recently, however, we have evidence of an attempt quite to the contrary, a regular conspiracy to make John die before his time. Some scholars, in fact, suppose that he was killed in 44 along with his brother James or at least in some undetermined year not long afterward. The proofs brought forward for this disconcerting hypothesis, which hardly deserves special consideration, are an arbitrary interpretation of a passage in the Gospel and a pair of later and extremely doubtful texts, while a veritable pile of crystal-clear and ancient testimonies is blithely disregarded. But these texts are in reality pretexts, for the true motive of the hypothesis is to make it impossible for John the Apostle to have written the fourth Gospel.<sup>31</sup>

157. Here, however, are the earliest testimonies we have concerning John himself and his Gospel.

In this case, too, Papias (§114) is first chronologically although his testimony this time is more indirect than usual and we have it only in summary. The old Latin Prologue, which is certainly a very bad translation of the Greek original, says: "John's Gospel was published and given to the Churches [some codices add *in Asia*] by John while he yet lived, as one Papias of Hierapolis, a favorite disciple of John, has affirmed in *Exoterica* [perhaps instead of *Exegetica*, the "Explanations," cf. above], that is, in his last five books; he [Papias?] wrote down the true gospel at John's exact dictation."<sup>32</sup> The same Prologue, after speaking of Luke, adds: "Afterward the Apostle John wrote the Apocalypse on the island of Patmos, and then the Gospel in Asia."<sup>33</sup> These Prologues, as we have noted (§136) date from the end of the second century, and therefore we find no difficulty in agreeing that the information attributed to Papias was taken directly from his work in five books (*Exegetica*) composed about eighty years before.<sup>34</sup>

The statement that John published his Gospel *adhuc in corpore constituto*, while it denies the legend of his immortality by implying his death, was intended to show that the writing was not published posthumously as some might mistakenly conclude from its ending (21:23-24).

About the year 180, Irenaeus, after speaking of the first three Gospels, adds: "Afterward John, the disciple of the Lord, he who leaned on his breast, also published the Gospel while living in Ephesus of Asia" (*Adv. haer.*, II, I, I; Greek text in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, V. 8, 4). There can be no reasonable doubt that for Irenaeus this "John, the disciple of the Lord," is the Apostle who at the Last Supper "leaned on the breast" of Jesus (*John* 13:23). But the singular



importance of Irenaeus" testimony in this case is due to the fact that as a youth he had been the pupil of Polycarp of Smyrna<sup>35</sup> (d. 155 when almost ninety years of age), who in his turn had heard John preach; hence Irenaeus derives from John through Polycarp, and is only once removed from John himself.

158. But this brings us to a famous problem born of a passage in Papias and the comment made on it by Eusebius in quoting it: that is, whether or not Irenaeus confused the Apostle John with someone else of the same name.

To indicate the source of his teachings, Papias says at the beginning of his work: "If ever there came one who had been in the following of the presbyters [or ancients: presbuteroiz], I used to question him concerning the sayings (logouz) of the presbyters, what things Andrew or Peter said, or what things Philip, or what things Thomas or James, or what things John or Matthew, or any other of the disciples of the Lord; besides those things which Aristion and the presbyter John, disciples of the Lord, say." Eusebius follows this quotation from Papias (translated with scrupulous literalness) with the comment: "Here it is also fitting to point out that he twice mentions the name of John, the first of whom he lists together with Peter and James and Matthew and the other Apostles, showing clearly [that he is] the evangelist: while, breaking the thread of his discourse, he places the other John among the others not in the number of the Apostles, setting Aristion before him and expressly calling him presbyter. Thus, from these things also, the information is proved true of those who have said that there were two of the same name in Asia and that in Ephesus there are two tombs, both called, even now, of John. And it is also necessary to give heed to these things, for if one does not admit it was the first, then it is likely it was the second who beheld the Apocalypse which circulates under the name of John" (*Hist. eccl.*, III, 39, 4-6). Here Eusebius concludes that Irenaeus in asserting that Papias has been a 'listener to John and companion of Polycarp,' confused John the Presbyter with John the Apostle (*ibid.*, 1-2).

There have been infinite discussions on these two texts, and first of all on the accuracy with which they have been handed down to us. So far as we can judge no one before Eusebius thought of the existence of two Johns except Dionysius of Alexandria, in the middle of the third century, who, however, attributes the Gospel to the Apostle and not to the Presbyter (*ibid.*, VII, 25, 4-16), as Eusebius does also. Taking Papias' statement by itself, our first

impression is naturally that there were two different Johns, but this first impression could also be mistaken for various reasons which it does not concern us to discuss here. In any case, even admitting that there were two, this does not in the least prejudice the fact that John the Apostle was the author of the Gospel, which is the opinion of both Dionysius and Eusebius, the latter of whom had the complete writing of Papias before him. Even though it were proved to a certainty that Irenaeus confused two different Johns, the same could not be said of Polycarp who was personally associated with the Apostle, just as it is the latter, irrespective of the existence of another John, who is credited with the Gospel by the other churches in Asia and the West, which — whatever the conjectures in modern times — were in no way influenced by Irenaeus.

159. The testimony of Polycrates is in no way affected by Irenaeus either. He was not only the bishop of Ephesus, writing in the name of the other bishops of Asia, but he was also the eighth bishop in his family and therefore heir to the very earliest traditions. In a letter to Pope Victor in Rome (189-199), Polycrates mentions “John, he who leaned on the breast of the Lord, who was a priest wearing the *petalon*, a martyr and a teacher: he went to sleep on Ephesus” (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, V, 24, 3). The *petalon*, a liturgical vestment worn in the Old Testament only by the high priest (cf. *Exod.* 28:36; 39:30) is here applied metaphorically. The rest is clear, even the term “martyr” used here in a broad sense, as we have already observed (§156, note) and as is indicated by the subsequent “fell asleep.” It has been asserted that Polycrates also confused the two Johns, but the assertion has not been proved in any way.

In the West, the tradition of the church in Rome is represented chiefly by the Muratorian Fragment, which has more to say about the fourth Gospel than about the other writings. Here is the passage that concerns us: “The fourth of the Gospels is that of John, one of the disciples. At the urging of his fellow disciples and bishops he said, ‘Join me in fasting for these three days, and we shall tell each other whatever is revealed to any.’ The same night Andrew, one of the apostles, received a revelation that John, with the concurrence of all, should write everything down in his own name. And therefore, although various principles are inculcated by the several gospel books, it makes no difference to the belief of the faithful, since all of these in every Gospel were declared by the one governing Spirit.... What wonder then, if John so constantly urges individual points in his epistles as well, saying of

himself, "What we have seen with our eyes, and heard with our ears, and what our hands have felt, this we have written for you' (cf. *John* 1:1)? For he thus declares himself not only the eyewitness and hearer, but also the recorder of all the wonderful works of the Lord in order."<sup>36</sup> Parts of this testimony are undoubtedly legend — like the pact between John and the disciples and the vision of Andrew — fancies built perhaps on the information in *John* 21:24. But there is evident also a clear polemic intent, which accounts for the unusual length of this passage concerning the fourth Gospel (I have shortened it). No doubt it was intended as answer to the few remnants of the school of the Roman priest Caius; to oppose the Montanists, who based their tenets on the fourth Gospel in particular, he rejected it entirely. His followers were therefore called *Alogi*, that is, 'without the logos' because the fourth Gospel is the Gospel of the divine Logos, but the epithet had also a nontheological implication, that is, "without reason," the human logos.

160. Egypt is represented by Clement of Alexandria. Immediately after the last passage we cited in connection with the Gospel of Mark (§130) he says: "The last, however, is John: seeing that in the [preceding] Gospels there had been made manifest the corporal things [ta swmatika], he, urged by his friends and divinely born aloft by the Spirit, produced a spiritual Gospel [pneumatikon]" (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, VI, 14, 7). Here too, Clement is not speaking on his own authority so much as recording the "tradition of the early presbyters" to whom he refers (*ibid.*, 5). On the other hand, he agrees, at least in a general way, with the Muratorian Fragment that John wrote at the instigation of others. Nor is there any doubt that the John mentioned by Clement is the Apostle, as is demonstrated also by the episode of the young man who had fallen away and was later reconverted by John, narrated by Clement in the *Quis dives salvetur*, 42, and quoted by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.*, III, 23, 6, ff.). The epithet "spiritual" as opposed to "corporal" reflects the anthropological distinction (body, soul, spirit) common in Hellenistic thought, but it is also such an apt description of the nature of the fourth Gospel that it became very popular.

These are the principal though not all the testimonies of the first two centuries. It would be useless to list those of the third, because no one denies that by the end of the second century, John was unanimously considered the author of the fourth Gospel. Nor is it necessary to enumerate the various traces of this Gospel to be found as early as the first half of the second century both in orthodox writers like Ignatius of Antioch, Justin Martyr and

others, and in the various exponents of Gnosis like Valentinus, Heracleon, etc., and Marcion himself. We do not need to discuss them because we have unmistakable evidence that the fourth Gospel was circulating in Egypt as early as the year 130.

In addition to the Egerton papyrus which we have already mentioned (§100) and which betrays an unmistakable dependence on John, we have also a fragment of papyrus, published in 1935 which contains passages of this Gospel.<sup>37</sup> -The fragment is very tiny, only about eight centimeters long, and it contains no more than a few verses of the dialogue between Jesus and Pilate (that is, *John* 18:31-33 and 37-38), but its incomparable importance is due to its antiquity. The most competent authorities in the world, whose opinion was solicited, agree in attributing the fragment to the first half of the second century and probably to the first decades rather than the later ones; hence the year 130 may be taken as a mean. Also, to be noted is the fact that the fragment, part of a complete codex (not of a *volumen* or roll), unquestionably comes from Egypt though we do not know exactly where. Therefore, by approximately that year Egypt was already acquainted with this writing which had been composed in Asia Minor. If we subtract from 130 the number of years it would reasonably take a writing published in Asia to reach Egypt and then be copied and circulated, we obtain the date tradition assigns to the composition of the fourth Gospel, that is, the end of the first century.

This poor little scrap of papyrus has been enough to dissipate the *a priori* lucubrations of the scholars who decided that the fourth Gospel could not be earlier than 130, or 150, or even 170. Nor were they scholars of the past century only, for in 1935, when the papyrus was already in Europe though unedited, Loisy (*La naissance du christianisme*, p. 59) was asserting that the fourth Gospel had appeared in two editions, the first and oldest of which fell between 135 and 140 and the second between 150 and 160.

161. There is another extremely important point also on which new discoveries give the lie to arbitrary judgments, which are not free from malice aforethought. For many scholars, even of our own day, the fourth Gospel is “a theological theorem which barely retains the appearance of history” (Loisy); that is, it is an allegorical and symbolic writing that moves about in a world of mystical abstractions and at the most sets its scenes against a purely fictitious geographical background, clearly contradicting at times the real topography of its supposed locale. As usual, this damning judgment was inspired chiefly by

preconceived philosophical notions; and in addition, those who pronounced it were library researchers, very few of whom ever made a careful, or even cursory, visit to Palestine, while all of them have very little regard for archeology and historical geography. Their imprudence is a serious matter, especially since even Renan, who was the first to study the geography for a life of Jesus on the spot (though in his own fashion), could write: The historical outline of the fourth Gospel is, in my opinion, the life of Jesus as it was known to the group gathered about John. In fact, in my opinion, this school was better acquainted with various external circumstances in the life of the founder than the group whose recollections have formed the synoptic Gospels." But despite this warning from one so little subject to the suspicion of special pleading on the point, some continued to assert that the author of the fourth Gospel was ignorant of the topography of Palestine, so much so that he did not even have a clear notion of the site of Jerusalem (this last statement was made by an Italian dilettante whose name is unimportant).

The truth is precisely the contrary. The author of the fourth Gospel shows he has more accurate topographical knowledge than the writers of the Synoptics, and he delights in presenting many surprising little details which could have been omitted entirely without affecting the narrative in any way. If he did not omit them, it is because he was very sure of himself. There are at least ten localities in Palestine specified in the fourth Gospel exclusively; not one of these designations has been proved untrue and several have been shown to be precise and exact beyond our expectation. We may take two or three as an example.

162. In *John* 1:28, there is mention of a "Bethany beyond the Jordan," otherwise unknown; on the other hand, in 11:18 we learn that Bethany is only fifteen stadia, or about 3060 yards, from Jerusalem, while the distance from Jerusalem to the Jordan is about twenty-five miles. But there were two Bethanys (just as there were two Bethlehems and two Beth-horons, etc.). The Bethany on the Jordan was near a ferry-crossing over the river, which fact is perhaps responsible for its name (*beth- oniyyah*, "house" of the "boat"); and for the same reason the place was also called *Beth-abarah* ("house of the crossing"), as Origen reads in this passage instead of Bethany. Ancient installations have recently been discovered on the site.

The Greek text of 5:2 says that in Jerusalem, near the Probatica or Sheep Gate, there was a pool called *Bethzatha* or *Bezatha*, perhaps from the name of the district; and it adds that this pool had five porticoes. Was it, therefore,

surrounded by a pentagonal cloister? This would be a very odd shape and it has not failed to suggest to modern scholars that the whole scene is allegorical, the pool symbolizing the spiritual well- spring of Judaism and the five porticoes the five books of the Law. But here, too, recent excavations have brought the lovely castle of allegorical fancies tumbling down. It has been discovered that the pool was enclosed in the ordinary fashion by four porticoes and was rectangular in shape, being about one hundred and twenty yards long and sixty yards wide. There was a fifth portico across the middle of it which divided it into two sections.

In 19:13 we are told that Pilate, in the course of the trial, “brought Jesus outside, and sat down on the judgment-seat, at the place called Lithostrotos, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha.” Where was this place with the double name about which we know nothing else? Excavations made a few years ago have furnished us with definite information. The two names do not at all pretend to be a translation one of the other; they are interchangeable designations of the same place, and this place, which was in the Fortress Antonia, has recently been discovered. It has all the archeological characteristics of the period of Herod the Great, who built the Antonia (§578).

163. We find the same careful accuracy in the chronology of John’s narrative, as if to prove the famous axiom that the two eyes of true history are geography and chronology.

When we compare the internal evidence for the time sequence of events given us in the Synoptics with what we find in the fourth Gospel, we have the impression that John deliberately goes out of his way to specify and establish whatever is indefinite in them. Judging from the Synoptics alone, it would seem that Christ’s public life could be condensed into one year and even less. John, on the other hand, expressly mentions three different Paschs and thereby extends it to at least two years and some months (§177).

In 2:11 John points out explicitly that the “beginning of miracles” wrought by Jesus was that at the marriage in Cana, an episode not narrated by the Synoptics; and immediately afterward (2:13 ff.) he describes the driving of the money-changers from the Temple, almost as the first solemn and authoritative act of Jesus’ public life, while the Synoptics give this incident only a few days before Jesus’ death.

Now, in what year did the episode of the money-changers take place, if we reckon from some outstanding event in the history of Palestine? It happened

forty-six years after the reconstruction of the “sanctuary” of the Temple was begun; but here again it is only John who tells us this (2:20).

Finally, from the account of the Passion in the Synoptics, we conclude that on the evening before his death Jesus celebrated with his disciples the Feast of the Pasch, that is, the feast which, according to the Law, was to be celebrated on the fourteenth day of the month *Nisan*, so that Jesus presumably died on the fifteenth *Nisan*. John, on the other hand, takes care to point out that on the very morning of the day Jesus was killed the Jews in the mob clamoring against him before Pilate had not yet celebrated the Paschal meal; in fact, “they themselves did not enter the praetorium, that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Pasch” (18:28) — if they were defiled, they would be unable to eat the Pasch that same evening as they should. If this is the case, then Jesus died on the fourteenth *Nisan* and the supper of the evening before was not the legal celebration of the Hebrew Pasch. For the moment we do not need to enter into this famous question to show that the Synoptics and John may both be right (§§536 ff.); but it serves to point out once again the constant and deliberate care with which John follows his own chronological sequence to fix and establish what the preceding Evangelists had left indefinite.

164. These are, after all, only a few of the passages which reveal a thoroughly direct and personal knowledge of his facts on the part of the narrator and we might easily continue them at great length.

John is well acquainted with what the Synoptics have written, but he deliberately chooses to travel a different road. Without at all pretending to exhaust his subject (cf. *John*, 21:25), he does aim to supply in part what the Synoptics have omitted. By actual count, they do not include 92 per cent of the content of his Gospel. Sometimes, of course, the two accounts are necessarily parallel because of the subject, but even in these instances John stands out as the eyewitness who is anxious to specify and complete the narrative. This is most evident in the account of the Passion.

The Synoptics do not tell us the identity of the disciple who, with a stroke of his sword, cut off the right ear of the high priest's servant, nor do they name the servant; John specifies that the disciple was Simon Peter and that the servant was called Malchus (18:10). According to the Synoptics, it would seem that after Jesus was arrested, he was led directly to the house of the high priest Caiphas; John wishes to correct this mistaken impression and informs us

that they “brought him to Annas first” (18:13) and immediately gives us the reason why. The Synoptics have Peter follow the prisoner and enter immediately into the courtyard of the high priest; according to John, however, Peter follows with “another disciple” but first stops outside the courtyard while the other goes right in, and Peter enters later thanks to his intercession (18:15-16). From John alone and not from the Synoptics we learn that Pilate questions Jesus inside the praetorium while the Jews remain outside, and again John describes the scene of the *Ecce homo* and reports the discussion between Pilate and the Jews in which the former tries to free Jesus even after the scourging, while the latter keep shouting that they are loyal subjects of Caesar (18:33 ff.; 19:4 ff.). From John alone do we learn that when Jesus was dead the Roman soldiers did not break his legs as was the usual custom but instead opened his breast with a lance (19: 31-34). And immediately after this statement he adds: “And he that saw it, hath given testimony; and his testimony is true” (19:35). This eyewitness is none other than the beloved disciple of Jesus whose presence at the foot of the cross, together with the mother of Jesus, is recorded just before this also by John alone (19:25-27).

None of these details, minute and realistic as they are, betray in any way all those allegorical meanings some scholars arbitrarily read between the lines.

165. That John travels a different road from the Synoptics is apparent from the whole content of his Gospel. The Synoptics emphasize Jesus’ ministry in Galilee; John, the ministry in Judea and Jerusalem. John relates only seven of Jesus’ miracles but five of these are not included in the Synoptics. He gives more space to the doctrinal discussions of Jesus, especially his debates with the Jewish leaders, than to his actions. In these discourses, as in the rest of this Gospel, characteristic concepts frequently appear which are rare or omitted altogether in the Synoptics, for example, the symbolic expressions Light, Darkness, Water, World, Flesh, or the abstract terms Life, Death, Truth, Justice, Sin.

But though John does not follow the Synoptic tradition, he never loses sight of it. Renan rightly said that John “had a tradition of his own, a tradition parallel to that of the Synoptics,” that his position “is that of an author who is not unaware of what has already been written concerning the subject he is treating, who approves many of the things already said, but believes that he has better information which he gives without concerning himself about the others.”



This is not all, however. Even John's silence is an indirect use of the Synoptic tradition in that he takes it for granted his readers are already familiar with it; on the other hand, there are not a few allusions in the Synoptics which find their full explanation only in the tradition of John. We might say that the two traditions courteously nod to each other in turn: *Nec tecum, nec sine te*.

John relates nothing concerning the infancy of Jesus or his private life. He speaks of the mother of Jesus but never names her although he does name other Marys. Twice he uses the expression "Jesus the son of Joseph" (1:45; 6:42) but without thinking it necessary to explain this ambiguous designation. He says he is writing that people may believe "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God" (20:31) and yet he makes no mention of the Transfiguration on Mount Thabor, which would have been most suitable for this purpose. He reports a long discourse, omitted by the Synoptics, in which Jesus presents himself as the mystical bread from heaven (6:25ff.), and has not one word on the actual institution of the Eucharist at the Last Supper. And yet these omissions are not omissions and these inconsistencies are most consistent for the simple reason that John does not want to repeat what is well known to his readers and he therefore depends on the knowledge they already have of the Synoptic tradition.

But in its turn the Synoptic tradition also presupposes that of John. The Synoptics, especially the first two, say very little about Jesus' teaching in Jerusalem, yet two of them record Jesus' lament: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered together thy children, as the hen doth gather her chickens under her wings and thou wouldst not?" (*Matt.* 23:37; *Luke* 13:34.) From the synoptic narrative alone, we could not explain that "How often . . .!" for they treat almost exclusively of the ministry in Galilee. In *John*, on the other hand, where no less than four trips of Jesus to Jerusalem are recorded, the exclamation is entirely understandable. Hence the Synoptics in their silence also take for granted the tradition of John, nodding courteously in their turn: *Nec tecum, nec sine te*.

166. It is apparent from his style and method of exposition that the author of the fourth Gospel was of Jewish origin, so much so that some modern scholars have ventured to suppose, with some exaggeration, that he wrote originally in Aramaic. As a matter of fact, he not only uses Semitic expressions like "rejoiceth with joy" (3:29), "son of perdition" (17:12), etc., but also Semitic words which he regularly translates for the benefit of his readers, like

“Rabbi” and “Rabboni” (1:38; 20:16), “Messiah” (1:41), “Cephas” (1:42), “Siloe” (9:7), etc. His periods are quite elementary and bare in outline with none of the Greek fondness for subordinate clauses or complicated arrangement. On the other hand, his style shows a pronounced tendency toward parallel ideas which is a fundamental characteristic of Hebrew poetry. For example:

“A slave is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than he who has sent him....

“He who receives anyone whom I send receives me; and he who receives me receives him who sent me.” (13:16, 20.)

“A woman when in childbirth has sorrow, because her hour is come; but when she has given birth to the child, she no longer remembers the anguish, for the joy that a man is born into the world.” (16:21.)

This loose, paratactic arrangement often makes it difficult to trace the implicit train of thought, but in compensation the solemn and aphoristic movement of the lines bestows on the whole discourse a mysterious and hieratic majesty which impresses the reader from the very beginning:

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God; and the Word was God.

“He was in the beginning with God,

“All things were made through him, and without him was made nothing that has been made.”<sup>38</sup>

“In him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men.

“And the Light shines in the darkness; and the darkness did not grasp it....

“It was the true Light that enlightens every man, coming [the Light] into this world.

“He was in the world, and the world was made through him, and the world knew him not. ...

“And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.” (1:1 ff.)

167. But this same solemn beginning has also been the beginning of a long list of difficulties. How could the untutored fisherman of Bethsaida soar to concepts so sublime? How could he, alone among all the writers of the New Testament, rise to proclaim the identity of the man Jesus not only with the Hebrew Messiah, but actually with the eternal, divine Logos? How could he proceed from the shrewd skill of the fisherman to speculate on the subtle

concepts of the Logos, about whom ancient Greek and contemporary Alexandrian philosophy had reasoned so much? How does it happen that the Jesus he presents is so different from the one in the Synoptics, so transcendent and so “divine”? Where did he get these discourses of Jesus, so rich in abstractions and allegories? Where did he find those wonderful dialogues in which Jesus' interlocutors seem like baby chicks caught up above the clouds in an eagle's claws while, in their astonished bewilderment, they can manage only stupid and awkward replies, like Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman, and often the disciples themselves?

These and many other observations have been brought forward only to point the conclusion that the writing could not be the work of the fisherman of Bethsaida; in all probability therefore, he is summing up the mystical speculations of some solitary philosopher who has transformed the historical Jesus into a religious ideal, not without the help of concepts deriving from Alexandrian Platonizing Judaism, or Hellenistic syncretism, or the mystery religions, or even from Mandeism.

It is more than obvious that to attribute this Gospel to some unknown writer runs counter to all the ancient historical testimonies; but this does not in the least disturb the exponents of this particular theory. They do not attach much importance to testimonies unless they seem to be in their favor, as in the case of the supposed martyrdom of John (§156 note), and then these confirmed skeptics regarding all documents pounce upon the most wretched little texts and claim for them an exaggerated importance. In any case, we may well ask why the characteristics of their unknown and solitary philosopher cannot also be found in John of Bethsaida.

It is true he was a fisherman, but the Gospels seem to suggest that his father Zebedee was a well-to-do owner of boats and therefore could have given his son a certain formal education. However, this may be, it was in perfect harmony with Palestinian custom to pursue knowledge and practice a trade at the same time. St. Paul worked with his hands, and so, both before and after his time, did the celebrated Hillel, who earned only a half denarius a day, Rabbi Aqiba who was a wood chopper. Rabbi Joshua, a charcoal maker. Rabbi Meir, a scrivener, Rabbi Jonathan, a cobbler, and so many others who formed the majority of the Talmudic doctors while only the minority were wealthy men who did not need to practice a trade.

If the ardent John, a true "son of thunder" (*Mark* 3:17), began while still very young to follow first John the Baptist and then Jesus, he might well have lost this last teacher when he was little more than twenty years old. Then, true to the custom of the region, he concentrated on the study of the Law, not that explored in the contemporary rabbinic schools but the new Law of perfection and love which had been proclaimed by his last teacher and the memory of which —even without his writing anything — persisted bright and clear in his spirit.

In the archive of memory, and it was the only archive even for the rabbinic schools of the time (§106, §150), John could pursue through the long years his labor of love on the treasures stored in it by his vanished teacher, who, just as he had had a special affection for his very young disciple, must also have communicated and confided special things to him. From this activity of editing mentally and formulating in a practical and ordered way the treasures guarded by his memory was born John's catechesis, which differs from, but does not contradict, that of Peter and the Synoptics, supplying in part what these lack and in part explaining them; above all, it is better suited to the new external circumstances the Christian message was encountering.

168. John's catechesis, fully elaborated in his mind before it was ever written down, must have existed also in oral form for several decades. As the disciple meditated on his memories of the master, he communicated them to the faithful committed to his care, first in Palestine, then in Syria and Asia Minor.

In these later fields of action, John, now advanced in years and wearing increasing authority because of the gradual disappearance of the other Apostles, met a new kind of obstacle. The opposition was no longer coming from the old conventicles of Judaizing Christians which had so molested Paul, but from the various Gnostic currents in large part pre-Christian, which toward the end of the first century were beginning to seep into the channel of Christianity. It was necessary to stem these currents, and John kept drawing fresh and increasingly appropriate material from the treasures of his memory to make his catechesis particularly effective against this new threat.

At a certain point —as we should suppose and as the Muratorian Fragment and Clement of Alexandria actually attest (§159, §160) — the disciples of the aged Apostle affectionately compel him to put in writing the essential part of his catechesis. John dictates it, but at the end of the whole writing there is

affixed as a seal a declaration of authenticity made both by the one who had conceded and those who had requested the writing: "This is the disciple who bears witness concerning these things, and who has written these things; and we know that his witness is true" (21:24).

169. This prehistory explains the special nature of John's writing, which has been called the "spiritual" Gospel par excellence. In every possible way he emphasizes the transcendence and divinity of Jesus the Christ because this is his principal aim (20:81) in the fight against pagan Gnosis; hence the particular character of his Gospel.

But this same thesis is already to be found in the Synoptics, though less fully developed or barely sketched — especially in Mark, the shortest of them all. This has been recognized for some time by the most radical critics (who therefore proceed to split Mark into various layers and to reject the "supernatural" and "dogmatic" parts). John, of course, added immeasurably, but he did not invent. Among the innumerable things he could have said about Jesus (cf. 21:25) he studiously selected certain particulars which had not been told before, but which it was most opportune to tell at that very time; he did not invent them and he connected them with other common and widespread information. There emerged a Jesus more resplendent with divine light, but that was due to John's choice of material, just as the Jesus of the Synoptics is a more human figure and that is equally due to the choice of material in the Synoptics. Each biographer has portrayed his subject from the particular angle of his contemplation and each has given us a whole, if not a complete, picture; but none of them has pretended to reproduce all the many individual features of Christ's personality.

If the discourses and dialogues of Jesus in the fourth Gospel are extraordinarily sublime, they are not therefore any less historical than those in the Synoptics. It would be unhistorical to suppose that Jesus spoke always and on every occasion in the same manner, whether he was addressing the mountaineers of Galilee with whom we usually find him speaking in the Synoptics, or arguing with the subtle casuists of Jerusalem with whom John has him speaking for the most part. And except for the sublimity of the concepts, the method followed in the discussions with the Scribes and Pharisees offers a number of similarities to those employed in the rabbinic disputations of the time. Modern Jewish scholars particularly well versed in the Talmud have pointed out these similarities with fine discrimination and adjudged them a collective confirmation of the historical character of the

discourses in the fourth Gospel.<sup>39</sup> Even with his disciples Jesus must have taken a different tone at different times; we might expect his words to be more simple at first when they had just begun to follow him and more difficult later, until he lifted them to heights never reached before in his discourse of farewell at the Last Supper. Then, too, among the disciples themselves he must have had his chosen and more intimate friends for whom he reserved confidences he did not give the others (cf. 13:21-28); and the most intimate among these, as we know, was John, who is therefore the most important witness of all even from a purely historical point of view.

170. Now, this extraordinary witness begins his writing with the assertion that Jesus is the divine Logos become man. Even here he shows his sound historical sense though his approach is theological: The Logos, who is with God from all eternity, became a man a few years ago and “we saw his glory — glory as of the only begotten of the Father” (1:14). Never, however, does our trustworthy witness with his scrupulous historical honesty, state that Jesus calls himself the Logos; it is John who gives him that name in the prologue to his Gospel, in the epistle which might well be called its companion piece (1 John, 1:1), and in the Apocalypse (19:13). In the whole New Testament, the word Logos occurs only in these three places. We may conclude from this that the term was not used in the catechesis which derived from Peter and from Paul; but it must have been usual in the catechesis of John for he uses it in the first verses of his writing with no explanation whatever, taking for granted that his readers know what he means. The term itself was a familiar one in Greek philosophy from the time of Heraclitus. But the same word expressed different concepts in different centuries just as it varied in meaning with the Sophists, the followers of Socrates (logic) and the Stoics. It played a great part in the speculations of the Alexandrian Jew Philo also, but his concept of the Logos is different from the Greek and more akin to that of “Wisdom” in the Old Testament. This is also true of the thought implied in the terms *Memra* and *Dibbum*, in the sense of “word” (of God), which are extremely frequent in the Jewish *Targumim* but not in the Talmud. In Samaria, John was acquainted with the earliest Christian Gnostic known to us, Simon Magus (Acts 8:9 ff.), who —if we accept the exposition given us by Hippolytus (Refut. VI, 7 ff.) — included in his system instead of the Logos the Logismos, which formed part of the third pair of eons (logimoz and enqumhsiz) emanating from the Supreme Principle.

171. Until a few years ago it was confidently asserted that John had taken his concept of the Logos from one or the other of the afore-mentioned schemes, but more commonly from Philo. In reality the Logos of John, an essentially divine and uncreated hypostasis, is completely different from the Logos of Philo, a being wavering between a divine personality and a divine attribute and functioning more or less as an intermediate between the immaterial God and the corporeal universe. In any case it is now useless to carry the discussion further since the difference between the two concepts of the Logos has recently been recognized by the most radical scholars. Loisy, who in the first edition of his commentary on the fourth Gospel (1903, pp. 121-122) maintained that the partial influence of Philo's ideas on John could not be denied, in his second edition (1921, p. 88) considered it improbable that John borrowed from Philo, maintaining instead that John's Logos "follows rather the personification of Wisdom in the Old Testament." And that is what the old Scholastics had said centuries ago.

Nor is it necessary to discuss the possibility that the Logos of John is derived from Mandeism. This theory was a straw blaze that burned bravely for a short time a few years ago, but there is nothing left of it now except a scattering of cold ashes (§214).

We must therefore conclude that John's concept of the Logos is exclusively his own, with no true parallel in previous concepts. As for the word itself, John seems to have used it to express his concept because it was suited to his thought and already a familiar term in the Graeco- Roman world which he wished to approach, at least along the path of terminology, in order to conquer it for the Logos Jesus. He therefore became Greek with the Greeks as Paul became all things to all men, to the Jews and the non-Jews, to win all of them to the good tidings (I Cor. 9:19-23).

It is said that whenever a tempest overtook Columbus in the course of his voyages, he would stand in the prow of his ship and there recite over the storm-tossed sea the beginning of the Gospel of John: In principio erat Verbum, et Verbum erat apud Deum.... omnia per ipsum facta sunt.... Above the tumultuous elements of creation resounded the eulogy of the Logos who had created them; it was the explorer of the world commenting in his own fashion on the explorer of God,

. . . *beginning the high eulogy, which proclaims the secret of heaven to earth, above all other edict. (Paradiso, XXVI, 43-45.)*





## CHAPTER XI: Chronology of the Life of Christ

172. THE chronological sequence of the events in Christ's life is completely buried in a mist of uncertainties, not only in so far as the events themselves are concerned but their relation to contemporary history as well. We cannot be absolutely sure of the day or year of his birth or when he began his public life or how long it lasted or the day or year of his death.

Some medieval mystic would perhaps have discovered a mysterious providence in all this, especially since the only time the official Christian world tried to penetrate that mist of uncertainty it made a serious error, as if in punishment for its temerity. When the Scythian monk of the sixth century, Dionysius the Little, set the date of Jesus' birth in the year 754 of Rome, he fixed it at least four years too late, and the modern Christian world, which still follows his reckoning, perpetuates also his error.

In reality, our uncertainties are due not to mystical causes but to lowly historical reasons which are evident and simple enough. We have already observed that all we know of Christ's life was handed down to us in the catechesis of the early Church from which the four canonical Gospels derive (§106 ff.). But it was never the intention of any of these to present a "life" of Jesus in the modern sense of the term. For us today a biography without properly established dates is a body without a skeleton; the thing we notice first is the dates. It is possible that the Evangelists had the same concept of biography but paid no attention to the chronological outline precisely because their intention was not to write a biography. As a matter of fact, the two Evangelists whose narratives come closest to being biographies (though their methods and aims differ) are Luke and John, the two who are also most generous with chronological information, the former in regard to contemporary history, the latter for the sequence of events in themselves.

The aim of the Gospels, and more generally of the catechesis which they echo, was the edification and spiritual formation of the faithful, not historical scholarship. This spiritual purpose undoubtedly required the Evangelists to recount the teachings of Jesus and the facts concerning him, but a carefully measured chronological outline was not indispensable to their narrative nor was there any need to associate it with other contemporary events. Christ was father to the first Christian age. When a father dies, a son remembers accurately what he did and said though he may neglect to mention the exact

day on which a certain thing happened or his father spoke certain words of admonition or advice. The true spiritual heritage the father bequeaths to his son lies in his actions and his advice, but their time sequence may be at the most a scholarly adjunct. Hence, the early catechesis centered its attention on the substance and not on erudition; it collected facts and teachings to educate the spirit without bothering about days and years to satisfy the curiosity.

Luke and John do give some attention to the chronological sequence precisely because they are the last of the four and have their own particular aims besides those common to the catechesis. Luke is somewhat concerned with world history and so gives us the one definite date which links the evangelical narratives with secular history (*Luke* 3:1-2). John is not at all concerned with the latter, but he wants to fix many points the other Evangelists merely suggest; hence he is precise about the time sequence of his story, too, and gives us the several details we have already noted (§163). These two Evangelists furnish the only available dates for a modern biography of Jesus.

If geography and chronology are the two eyes of history, then we must gather these available dates as anxiously and carefully as we search out geographical evidence. The dates are too few and often too uncertain for the detailed accuracy commonly desired today, yet within certain limits we can establish an approximate certainty in the several cases. Let us examine them.

## THE BIRTH OF JESUS

173. One absolutely certain factor in determining the date of Jesus' birth is that he was born before the death of Herod the Great, that is, before the end of March or the beginning of April in 750 a.u.c. or 4 B.C., for it is certain that Herod died at that time (§12). But how long before the death of Herod was Jesus born? Various considerations help us to narrow the field of possibilities before 750 a.u.c.

One is Herod's order to put to death all the children born in Bethlehem "from two years old and under" (*Matt.* 2:16), for this supposes that the infant Jesus was certainly within those limits. Hence, we may argue that Jesus was born much less than two years earlier, because it is altogether reasonable to assume that Herod would allow an extra generous margin in order to be certain of his victim. This two-year period, however, does not date back from the death of Herod but from the visit of the Magi who furnished him with the basis for his reckoning.

On the other hand, when the Magi came, they found Herod still in Jerusalem (*Matt.* 2:1 ff.) whereas we know that the old king, seriously ill and steadily growing worse, moved to the warmer climate of Jericho before he died. We may justifiably surmise that this transfer of residence took place when the first cold of the winter of 749 a.u.c. set in, or four months before Herod's death.

This gives us the following sequence: the birth of Jesus; the arrival of the Magi in Jerusalem; the decree to slaughter all babies two years old and under; Herod's departure for Jericho; the death of Herod. To determine the time relation between the two extremes — the birth of Jesus and Herod's death — we must reckon with the two years indicated in Herod's decree, remembering that they represent much more time than was necessary for his purpose, and then we must consider the four months we have just indicated. There is, besides, the interval between the arrival of the Magi and Herod's departure for Jericho. About this we know nothing definite. And third, there is also the interval between the birth of Jesus and the visit of the Magi, and here we know only that it could not have been less than the forty days of the purification (*Luke* 2:22 ff.), for Joseph would certainly not have presented the child in Jerusalem and exposed him to such serious peril if his death had already been decreed there. On the other hand, this interval may be considerably longer than forty days. In conclusion, reckoning backward from the date of Herod's death, we may conclude that the margin of time allowed in the two years decreed by Herod balances the four months and the two intervals we have just mentioned with a little extra period of time left over. Hence Jesus was born a little less than two years before the death of Herod, that is, at the beginning of the year 748 of Rome or 6 B.C.

174. Another factor in establishing the date of Jesus' birth is the census of Quirinius which occasioned the journey of Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem; but this is such a complicated question that we must treat it by itself (§183 ff.).

Many scholars have gone hunting other evidence in astronomy, that is, they have tried to identify the star which appeared to the Magi with some extraordinary meteor. The famous Kepler believed that it was the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in the year 747 of Rome (7 B.C.). Since then, others down to our day have identified it with Halley's comet or with other meteors which appeared at about that time. These attempts have nothing to recommend them but their sincere good will, for they have completely mistaken the road. It is enough to consider for a moment the details of the

gospel account (*Matt.* 2:2, 9, 10) to perceive that the phenomenon is recorded as utterly miraculous and therefore cannot in any way be made to obey the laws of natural meteors however rare.

There have also been numerous attempts to determine, if not the day, at least the season in which Jesus was born, but these, too, have all been futile. The fact that on the night of Jesus' birth there were shepherds outside Bethlehem watching their flocks in the open (*Luke* 2:8) does not prove that it was a warm season, perhaps spring, as some have reasoned. We know that in southern Palestine especially, where Bethlehem is located, flocks were left out even through the winter nights without any discomfort.

## BEGINNING OF THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

175. In the account of the beginning of Christ's public ministry, the Evangelists do give us another hint to help us determine the date of his birth. First of all, we have the classic text of *Luke* (3:1-2) concerning John the Baptist's appearance in public.

"Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea, and Herod tetrarch of Galilee, and Philip his brother tetrarch of the district of Iturea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilina, under the high-priesthood of Annas and ' Caiphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zachary, in the desert."

The chronological information we possess concerning almost all these persons offers too much leeway, as we have already seen (Pilate, §§24- 27; Herod, §15; Philip, §19; Annas and Caiphas, §52), to determine the precise year to which this text alludes, and about Lysanias we know too little, merely that he stopped governing in the year 37. Only the date regarding Tiberius is definite enough, but unfortunately, it was more definite in the mind of the author than it is in the minds of his modern readers.

What was the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius"? Tiberius' predecessor Augustus died on the nineteenth of August in the year 767 of Rome (A.D. 14), and so the first year of Tiberius' reign would seem to extend from that day until the eighteenth of August 768 (A.D. 15), hence the fifteenth year would extend from the nineteenth of August in 781 (A.D. 28) to the eighteenth of August in 782 (A.D. 29). This is the reckoning accepted by most scholars.

It has recently been noted, however, that it was the custom in the Orient to count as a whole year the interval between the death of a ruler and the beginning of the next calendar year, which would, therefore, mark the beginning of the second year of his successor's reign. The Roman year began on January first, the Jewish on the first of the month Tishri (October), or, more rarely, of *Nisan* (March: the beginning of the religious year). If we use this reckoning, then the first year of the reign of Tiberius, according to the Roman calendar, would be from August nineteenth to December thirty-first, A.D. 14, the second all of A.D. 15, and the fifteenth all of A.D. 28; according to the Jewish calendar, the first year of Tiberius would be from August nineteenth to September thirtieth, A.D. 14 (or to the vigil of March first, A.D. 15) and the fifteenth year would include from October first, A.D. 27, to September thirtieth, A.D. 28 (or from March first, A.D. 28, until the eve of March first, A.D. 29).

But as if all this uncertainty were not enough, another more radical doubt has reared its head. When Luke said "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius," did his reckoning begin actually from the death of Augustus? We must remember that Augustus, two years before his death (765 of Rome, A.D. 12), had made Tiberius his associate in the government of the empire (*collega imperii*), "participant in the tribunicial power"<sup>40</sup> (Tacitus, *Annal.*, I, 3) and more expressly, "joint administrator with Augustus of the provinces, and co-director of the census"<sup>41</sup> (Suetonius, *Tiber.*, 21). Since this gave Tiberius the same power as Augustus in the provinces, some have thought that Luke, a provincial, counted the "fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius" from the beginning of his participation in the government and not from the death of Augustus. In that case the "fifteenth year" would be A.D. 26.

Parallel cases have been brought forward in support of this interpretation, that of Titus, for example. He reigned as emperor a little over two years, but at his death he was credited with eleven years of rule, counting, that is, from the time when his father Vespasian had associated him with himself in the government of the empire and bestowed on him the power of tribune. But despite analogies like this, it does not seem likely that Luke's reckoning begins with the joint rule of Tiberius and Augustus. No ancient writer and none of the archeological evidence which has come down to us do follow this second reckoning whereas the beginning of the reign of Tiberius is consistently dated from the time of his succession to Augustus.

176. Luke gives us two other chronological hints also. The first is that John the Baptist's public ministry began shortly before the baptism and public life of Jesus (*Luke* 3:1-2 and 3:21; and from *Acts* 1:22, and 10: 37-38). The second is that at the time of his baptism "Jesus himself was beginning [his ministry] about the age of thirty years" (hn lhspuz arcomenoz wsei etwn triakonta,, *Luke* 3:23).

The expression "about thirty years of age" is purposely elastic in virtue of the adverb "about." For us today this might mean one or two years more or less; a man "about thirty" may be thirty-two or he may be twenty-eight. Among the ancient Jews this expression must have implied even greater leeway — judging from various indications — especially on the plus side; that is, such an expression would leave room for the addition of three or four units to the given number. A man thirty-four might still be "about thirty." In any case, this leeway makes the chronological hint less valuable than it might seem at first glance.

To sum up the dates in Luke we have: (1) that John the Baptist began his ministry in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius, that is, in a period between October 1, A.D. 27 and August 18, A.D. 29, depending on the interpretation (but excluding A.D. 26); (2) that shortly after this, Jesus was baptized and began his public life, being about thirty years old, perhaps a little older.

We can see at a glance that this information is too indefinite and does not give us a very firm starting point for any real mathematical reckoning.

We are, however, given a very important hint quite incidentally when the Jews arguing with Jesus exclaim regarding the Temple of Jerusalem: "Forty-six years has this temple (naoz) been in building, and wilt thou raise it up in three days?" (*John* 2:20.) With his usual careful attention to chronology, the Evangelist has indicated in the context that this statement was made during the Pasch of the first year of Jesus' public life (*ibid.*, 2:13, 23). Since we can establish with certainty that Herod the Great began the complete reconstruction of the Temple in 20-19 B.C., forty-six years later would give us A.D. 27-28 as the first year of Jesus' public ministry.

Note that this dovetails accurately enough with the "fifteenth year of Tiberius." If we suppose that the Jews meant forty-six completed years, then we have more or less confirmed all the various interpretations which set the fifteenth year of Tiberius between October 1, A.D. 27, and August 18, A.D. 29.

On the other hand, we can derive no definite help whatever from the words the Jews addressed to Jesus a few months later: "Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?" (*John* 8:57), despite the confident use Irenaeus makes of the passage, referring at the same time to tradition (*Adv. Haer.*, II, 22, 4-6; cf. §182). The Jews evidently chose fifty here because it represented a much longer period than Jesus' real age and perhaps also because it was the typical number of the Hebrew jubilee. But just how much margin they were allowing we do not know and so their words tell us nothing of the actual age of Jesus at this time.

### LENGTH OF JESUS' PUBLIC LIFE

177. How much time elapsed between Christ's baptism, which for all practical purposes may be considered the beginning of his public activity, and his death? In other words, how long did Jesus go about preaching?

In tracking down this question, John is our best, and in truth only guide, for the reasons we have already noted (§163). Now his Gospel, taken as it is without any arbitrary corrections of the text (such as are made all too frequently), mentions three separate Paschs: the first at the beginning of Jesus' public life right after the miracle at the marriage in Cana (*John* 2:13); the second at about the middle of his public life (*John* 6:4); the third on the occasion of his death (*John* 11:55; 12:1; etc.). In addition to these, John mentions other Hebrew feasts: after the second Pasch he speaks of the Scenopegia or Feast of Tabernacles (7:2) and the Dedication of the Temple (10:22) which must have fallen between the second and third Paschs. Hence if we confine ourselves to this data, we must conclude that the public life of Jesus lasted the two years included between the first and third Paschs and in addition the few months which elapsed between his baptism and the first Pasch mentioned.

But here again there is some reason for uncertainty. Between the mention of the first and the second Pasch, the same Gospel carries the statement (5:1) which reads literally: "After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem." What was this unnamed feast? Some reliable Greek codices have the definite article and read "it was the feast of the Jews"; but most of the other codices and almost all the modern critical editions omit the article and this seems to be the correct reading. In any case, however we read it, we have no reason to suppose that "a" or "the" Jewish feast meant, at the time of Jesus, the Pasch and no other; the same vague designation might refer to



Pentecost or the Feast of Tabernacles (§76), which were also “feasts of pilgrimage” (§74), or to the Dedication, which was very solemn and well attended, or even to some other feast day (§77). Besides, even in early times the theory was advanced that the events narrated in that chapter of John (5) chronologically follow those in the next (6); in that case, the unnamed feast (5:1) might be the second Pasch mentioned (6:4) or more probably the subsequent Pentecost. This theory has impressive arguments in its favor (for example, the reference in 7:21-23 to the events of 5:8-16 as recent), but it is not absolutely necessary to accept it and in any case our problem is not affected by it.

From the Gospel of John, then, we cannot conclude that during Jesus' public life the Pasch was celebrated more than three times.<sup>42</sup>

(Figure 25, Figure 26, Figure 27, Figure 28)

178. We can ferret no chronological help in this regard from the Synoptics, as we have seen, yet a vague reference in them now and then does indirectly confirm the time sequence indicated by John. In the parable of the sterile fig tree, which Jesus relates toward the end of his public life, he says: “Behold for three years I come seeking fruit . . . and I find none” (*Luke* 13:7). This may be an allusion to the length of time Jesus has been preaching during which he has, metaphorically speaking, looked in vain for fruit on a sterile tree. If we suppose that the number three here is to be taken literally, then we have a confirmation that this is the third year of Jesus' public life as we learn from John.

It is also indirectly confirmed in *Mark* 6:39, which says that on the occasion of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes the multitude sat down upon the “green grass.” Hence it was spring in Palestine, perhaps March, just before the Pasch; and that is just what John says explicitly (6:4), mentioning in connection with the same episode, the second Pasch in the course of Jesus' public life.

The incident of the corn the disciples plucked on the Sabbath (*Matt.* 12:1-8; *Mark* 2:23-28; *Luke* 6:1-5) implies a ripe harvest and therefore a period immediately following one of the two first Paschs mentioned by John (the third is not a possibility here), since there is no justification for supposing still another. If we follow the sequence in Mark and Luke, we naturally conclude that this unknown Pasch was none other than the first Pasch mentioned by John (§308). The adjective “second first” (*denteroprwtý*) applied to that



Sabbath in *Luke* 6:1 is in all likelihood not authentic and in any case, we absolutely do not know what it means despite the numerous speculations devoted to it.

## THE DATE OF THE DEATH OF JESUS

179. All four Gospels explicitly and unanimously set the death of Jesus on a Friday (*Matt.* 27:62; *Mark* 15:42; *Luke* 23:54; *John* 19:31) during the Pasch. From John we learn that this is the third Pasch in Jesus' public life.

Now the month *Nisan*, in which the Pasch was celebrated, began with the new moon, like the other months in the Hebrew lunar calendar; and the Pasch, celebrated on the fourteenth day of *Nisan*, coincided with the full moon. Here the field is wide open for astronomical research, to determine what year of the Christian era best fulfills all the conditions we have noted.

The first of these is historical, If Jesus began his public life approximately between October 1, A.D. 27, and August 18, A.D. 29 (§175), and continued it for two years and some months, then his death could not have occurred before the year 29. On the other hand, Jesus could not have been put to death later than his thirty-seventh year. He began his public life when he was about, perhaps a little over, thirty (§176), and it lasted about two years and a half. Hence, even if we take the outside figure in reckoning with that "about thirty," Jesus could not have been more than thirty-seven at the end of his public life ( $34 + 2\frac{1}{2} = 36\frac{1}{2}$  or roundly 37). In any case, the object of our particular scrutiny will be the years between A.D. 28 to 34 which must include that in which Jesus died.

The second condition is based on the apparent disagreement we have already noted (§163) between the Synoptics and John with regard to the date of Jesus' death; according to the former it would seem to have occurred on the fifteenth *Nisan*, according to John on the fourteenth. Hence, any astronomical calculations must consider both these dates.

The last condition is that the day in question must be a Friday, whether it was the fourteenth or the fifteenth *Nisan*.

If we accept the reckonings of the most authoritative modern astronomers<sup>43</sup> we arrive at the following:

A.D. 28: the fourteenth *Nisan* fell on Tuesday, March 30, or Wednesday, April 28, or Thursday, April 29; the fifteenth *Nisan* fell on Wednesday, March 31, or Thursday, April 29, or Friday, April 30.

A.D. 29: the fourteenth *Nisan* fell on Saturday, March 19, or Monday, April 18. the fifteenth *Nisan* fell on Sunday, March 20, or on Tuesday, April 19.

A.D. 30: the fourteenth *Nisan* fell on Friday, April 7, or on Saturday, May 6; the fifteenth *Nisan* fell on Saturday, April 8, or on Sunday, May 7.

A.D. 31: the fourteenth *Nisan* fell on Tuesday, March 27, or on Wednesday, April 25;

the fifteenth *Nisan* fell on Wednesday, March 28, or on Thursday, April 26.

A.D. 32: the fourteenth *Nisan* fell on Monday, April 14, or Tuesday, May 13; the fifteenth *Nisan* fell on Tuesday, April 15, or on Wednesday, May 14.

A.D. 33: the fourteenth *Nisan* fell on Friday, April 3, or on Sunday, May 3; the fifteenth *Nisan* fell on Saturday, April 4, or on Monday, May 4.

A.D. 34: the fourteenth *Nisan* fell on Wednesday, March 24, or on Thursday, April 22; the fifteenth *Nisan* fell on Thursday, March 25, or on Friday, April 23.

Since the day of Jesus' death was a Friday, we may discard the years 29, 31, and 32, in which neither the fourteenth nor the fifteenth *Nisan* fell on a Friday.

The year 28, though it contains a possible Friday, April 30 (15 *Nisan*), is also to be discarded because it is earlier than the historical conditions we have noted seem to warrant.

The year 34 also contains a possible Friday, April 23 (15 *Nisan*), but is equally to be discarded as too late. If Jesus died in 34, he would have been thirty-eight and a half or thirty-nine and a half years old, since he was born about two years before the death of Herod (§173), and hence he would have been thirty-six or thirty-seven years old at the beginning of his public life, which does not correspond too well with our information that he was "about thirty" (§176). Besides, if his public life began in the year 29 at the latest and lasted about two- and one-half years, then his death must have occurred before 34.

The year 33 satisfies the astronomical conditions but we eliminated it for the same historical reasons which cause us to discard 34. Though it makes Jesus' age one year less, it still does not seem very probable that a man of thirty-five or thirty-six would be considered "about thirty" at the beginning of his ministry, and it is still less likely that the latter lasted from 29 to 33.

The only year which remains, A.D. 30, also satisfies all the astronomical requirements and in addition dovetails with the other chronological data we have gathered up to this point. If Jesus was born about two years before the

death of Herod, then he was truly “about thirty” at the beginning of his public life, being according to this count, thirty-two or thirty-three and, after two and a half years of public preaching, thirty-four and one half or thirty-five and a half years old. Finally, his death occurred on a Friday.

180. This is all very clear, but in all honesty, we must admit it is not correspondingly certain. And the lack of absolute certainty is due to the astronomical calculations involved rather than to the historical data and arguments. The calculations quoted above are probably most accurate since they were arrived at by celebrated scientists of our day; the difficulty lies in the fact that we cannot say the same for the calculations on which the Jews at the time of Jesus based their calendar.

In reality it seems certain that in those days the Jews did not yet possess a fixed calendar, but established their principal dates according to their own direct observation of the various astronomical phenomena; these dates were chiefly the first day of the year and of the month. In addition, a day was intercalated, on the same basis, after certain months and a month after every third year in order to make the lunar year correspond more or less with the solar year. The rules for fixing these dates are contained in the treatise of the Mishna called *Rosh hashanah* (New Year) and they are highly empirical. The principal phenomenon considered was naturally the new moon. The whole matter was simplest and easiest when the new moon could be seen immediately from Jerusalem itself. Then the priests assigned to that office had signal fires lit on the peak of the near-by Mount of Olives to announce to the surrounding countryside and thence to the outlying districts that the new month would begin on the following day. But often the new moon was not immediately visible in Jerusalem because of climatic or astronomical conditions, and then they had to wait for messengers from various districts to arrive and announce to the authorities in the capital that they had seen the new moon, the visibility being better where they lived than in Jerusalem. The carrying of this message was considered urgent enough to dispense one even from the Sabbath rest so that it might be sped immediately to Jerusalem. If no messenger arrived, the day spent waiting was reckoned with the previous month as an additional day and the new month began the next day.

It was still more difficult to fix the first day of the year, which, according to the religious calendar of the Jews, had to coincide with the first day of the month *Nisan*. In fact, it was necessary to add a thirteenth month every third year as we have noted, and this was done on the basis of the crops, which had

to reach a certain stage of development. The first barley of the new harvest had to be ripe by the Pasch (14 *Nisan*) because on one day during the feast (16 *Nisan*) a sheaf of it was offered in the Temple as the sacrifice of the first fruits.

It is clear that with criteria such as these the calendar actually followed may have differed quite frequently from astronomical fact, especially since, as the Talmud attests, it sometimes happened that people who had something to gain by the deception falsely claimed to have seen the new moon when they had not.

To return for a moment to the afore-mentioned list of astronomical calculations, there may be a serious question as to whether those for the year 29 correspond with the empirical calendar of the ancient Jews, while so far as historical reasons are concerned it has as much claim to consideration as the year 30. If in the year 29 the appearance of the new moon was mistakenly noted one day in advance, then the fourteenth *Nisan* fell on Friday, March eighteenth, and the fifteenth *Nisan* on Saturday, the nineteenth, and this would be in perfect accord with the evangelical data we possess regarding the death of Jesus.

181. With so much leeway in the data and so much uncertainty in any possible calculations, it is no wonder at all that scholars, even in these last decades, fix the dates for the life of Jesus with the greatest diversity.

The date of his birth has been assigned to almost every year between 12 B.C. and A.D. 1, but the favorites are the years between 7 and 5 B.C.

Several have fixed the ministry of John the Baptist as beginning in the year A.D. 26, namely, the fifteenth year of Tiberius, but the majority assign the greater part of it to the year 28, considering, however, that this year began either on October 1, A.D. 27, or on one of the later dates we have mentioned (§175). This same year is commonly credited with the baptism of Jesus, believed to have occurred a few weeks after the beginning of John's ministry, and also with the beginning of Jesus' own public life about forty days after his baptism.

Some few scholars (who find it necessary to correct the texts of John with manifest arbitrariness in order to be rid of the specific testimony of the three Paschs) have argued that Jesus' public life lasted only one year. The others maintain it lasted two years and a few months or three years and some months. In both cases these indeterminate months are those between the baptism of Jesus and the first Pasch in his public ministry. The champions of

the two-year theory are more recent but somewhat less numerous than those who argue for the three years.

The death of Jesus has also been assigned to a wide variety of dates. Apart from a few reckonings which are sheer fancy — for example, that of Robert Eisler who sets it in the year A.D. 21 — we find a very few scholars who argue for the years 28, 31, 32, 34; all the others take their stand for 29 or 30 or 33. Among the latter, many have favored March 18, 29 (§179, cf. §180, end), and as many more have elected Friday, April 3, 33; still more numerous are those who choose Friday, April 7, in the year 30. The champions of all three years disagree all over again on the specific day of the Hebrew calendar on which Jesus died, some maintaining that it was the fourteenth *Nisan* and others the fifteenth (§§536 ff.).

182. Finally, it will be noted that these findings have been obtained by examining only the data contained in the four Gospels and comparing it with secular documents but that no attention has been paid to Church tradition in this regard. In fact, there is no such “tradition” in the true sense of the term; there are only the individual opinions of various early writers and these are often manifestly absurd and sometimes contradict each other; not rarely they are completely unfounded and only infrequently do they seem to echo earlier and reliable information.

In them the birth of Jesus is very often assigned to some year later than 4 B.C. (the death of Herod) which is plainly absurd. The length of Jesus’ life varies: the authoritative Irenaeus asserts in the passage we quoted (§176) that Jesus actually reached the age of fifty. His public life is usually extended from one to three years (sometimes there are variations in the same writer) but it is also suggested that it was even longer. The date of his death is scattered all the way from A.D. 21 to 58.

We may give some attention, however, to an opinion which places the death of Jesus in the consulship of L. Rubellius Geminus and F. Fufius Geminus, the year 782 of Rome and A.D. 29. This report, which we find already in Tertullian (*Adv. Judaeos*, 8) and perhaps even in Hippolytus (*in Danielelem*, IV, 23, 3), is later echoed by many other documents, which put the death of Jesus under the “two Gemini.” But this report is not without discrepancies either, and above all we find so many other ancient writers who either ignore it or explicitly contradict it that for all practical purposes it has almost no value.

The following outline is offered by way of summary. The historical basis for it is contained in the preceding paragraphs, which, however, clearly point out that we cannot accept the whole outline with complete certainty (except negatively, in so far as the dates excluded are concerned); it has the merit of probability only and this, too, varies with each of the dates.

## CHRONOLOGICAL TABLE OF THE LIFE OF JESUS

Birth of Jesus: toward the end of the year 748 a.u.c., 6 B.C.

Beginning of the Ministry of John the Baptist: toward the beginning of the year A.D. 28 (or between October and December of 27).

Baptism of Jesus and Beginning of His Public Life: shortly after the preceding date; Jesus is thirty-two or thirty-three years old.

First Pasch in the Public Life of Jesus: March-April in the year 28; Jesus is thirty-two and one half or thirty-three and a half years old.

Second Pasch: March-April in 29; Jesus is thirty-three and one half or thirty-four and a half years old.

Third Pasch and Death of Jesus: April 7, in 30, the fourteenth day of *Nisan*; age of Jesus, thirty-four and one half or thirty-five and a half years.

## THE CENSUS OF QUIRINIUS

183. Only Luke, the Evangelist who takes some heed of world history, connects the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem with a census ordered by the Roman authorities in Palestine. This census was the occasion for the journey of Mary and Joseph to Bethlehem and Jesus' birth in that town. Luke's text follows:

"Now it happened in those days, that there went forth a decree from Caesar Augustus that a census of the whole world should be taken. This first census took place while Quirinius was governor of [lit., was governing over] Syria. And all were going each to his own town to register. And so, Joseph also went from Galilee, out of the town of Nazareth into Judea to the town of David, which is called Bethlehem — because he was of the house and family of David — to register together with Mary, his espoused wife, who was with child. And it came to pass while they were there, that the days for her to be delivered were fulfilled, and she gave birth ..." (2:1-7).

Three principal objections have been raised to this account: one concerns the census itself; one questions its possibility from the political standpoint, and the third concerns the manner in which it was accomplished.

As for the reality of the census itself, some object that while we have evidence of a census completed in Judea by Quirinius (Cyrinius), it took place in A.D. 6 or 7 when Jesus was more than eleven years old, and no historical document attests that Quirinius took an earlier census about the time of Jesus' birth, that is, before Herod's death and in the latter's territory.

As for the juridical considerations against the possibility of such a census, there is the objection that while Herod lived his territories were considered those of a king "friendly and allied to Rome" (§11.) and that Rome, therefore, would have had no right to take a census there. This was not the case on the occasion of the census of A.D. 6-7, because by that time Archelaus, Herod's son, had been deposed by Augustus and his territories had come under the direct rule of Rome,

The third objection is that, according to Luke, the census was taken in the manner of the Jews, everyone being obliged to go to his place of origin to be registered (§240). The contention is that it is impossible that the Roman authorities, who ordered the census, should have followed what was for them an unusual procedure instead of the customary Roman method, which —for the collection of the *tributum capitis* and the *tributum soli* —was to register the individual according to where he lived and where he owned property.

How much foundation is there to these objections? Let us briefly examine this old question in the light of historical documentation alone, especially the first and principal objection that there was no census before the death of Herod.

184. Luke is the only one who explicitly mentions a census to be taken by order of Augustus in "the whole world" or, practically speaking, the Roman Empire; that is true. But if other documents do not explicitly record what Luke reports, that does not make Luke wrong. The argument from silence, as everyone knows, is the weakest and most unreliable argument there is in the field of history. Among the innumerable examples we might mention, it is sufficient to note one involved in our problem, and that is the census taken by Quirinius in Judea in A.D. 6-7. This later census is reported only by Flavius Josephus, and though it betrays some logical and chronological incongruities its reality is ordinarily not called into question.

Besides, this silence, which is supposed to prove so much, is not, after all, complete, for there are many other indications which lead us to believe that there existed some plan for a general census. Augustus, excellent organizer

and administrator that he was, had made out a real memorandum for his own private use, which was almost a complete picture of the manpower and financial strength of the empire. At his death, according to Tacitus, there was found a *Breviarium imperii*, written entirely in his own hand, in which were “entered all the public revenues, the number of [Roman] citizens and of allies under arms, the condition of the fleet, of the allied kingdoms, the provinces, the imposts, tributes, needs, and grants” (*Annal.*, I, 11). Now, where would Augustus have gotten all this information without various censuses, calculations, investigations, or similar measures?

And in reality, we do have evidence of such measures. Augustus himself, in the famous *monumentum Ancyranum* (in Ankara), asserts that he had had a census of *cives romani* taken three times, in 28 B.C., in 8 B.C., and in A.D. 14. We know from other sources that the census was taken in Gaul in 28 B.C. and it is very probable that it was also taken in Spain about the same time. In addition, recently discovered papyri indicate that there was a regular census in Egypt every fourteen years, and the earliest for which we have almost certain testimony is that of A.D. 5-6; after that those of A.D. 19-20, 33-34, 47-48, and on down to the end of the third century are all attested. All this shows that Augustus’ plans included a general census although it was not carried out simultaneously in all parts of the empire, and also that he had been accomplishing it gradually for some time when Jesus was born.

Now let us consider the Quirinius mentioned by Luke.

185. Roman historians also speak of the senator P. Sulpicius Quirinius. He was born in Lanuvium, near Tusculum, and his intelligence and industry had carried him up to high offices in the empire. He had governed Crete and Cyrene, and “his military energy and his zeal in various missions had merited the consulship for him under the divine Augustus; then for stripping the Homonadenses in Cilicia of their fortresses he received the tokens of a triumph, and was made adviser to Caius Caesar when the latter ruled Armenia” (Tacitus, *Annal.*, III, 48).<sup>44</sup> His consulship is to be ascribed to the year 12 B.C., and it was from 1 B.C. to A.D. 3 that he attended the young Caius Caesar, Augustus’ nephew. But the consulship also opened the way to the office of *legatus* in an imperial province (§20); and in fact, we find Quirinius governing Syria as its legate during A.D. 6-7, when, after Archelaus had been deposed, he came to Judea to take up the afore-mentioned census with the procurator Coponius (§24, §43).



This particular term as legate in Syria, however, has no connection with the birth of Jesus, since it did not begin before A.D. 6 when Jesus was about eleven years old. After all, Luke himself shows that he is well acquainted with the census of A.D. 6-7 and its bloody consequences (cf. *Acts* 5:37), and therefore he certainly is not confusing it with the census at the time of Jesus' birth. Was there, then, another census before the years A.D. 6-7? And was this previous census carried out by Quirinius?

Some scholars, both Catholic and Protestant, have answered these questions with a particular translation of the passage in *Luke* 2:2: αὕτη ἀπογραφὴ πρώτη ἐγένετο ἡγεμονεύοντος τῆς συρίας κυρηνίου. Previously (§183) we translated this: "This first census took place while Quirinius was governing in Syria," which is the usual way. But the scholars in question translate it: "This census took place before [that taken] while Quirinius was [governing over] Syria." This does solve the question: the census taken at the time of Jesus' birth is different from and prior to that taken by Quirinius in A.D. 6-7, although we are not told how much earlier it was accomplished. This translation of the Greek adjective to mean "anterior" "preceding," is certainly possible and there are examples of it in the Gospels themselves (cf. *John* 1:15, 30; 15:18) as well as in the papyri and elsewhere. We cannot deny, however, that it is unusual and is in reality prompted by the desire to avoid the historical-chronological difficulty in the passage. If, on the other hand, we accept the natural and usual translation instead and face the difficulty squarely, can we find any other way to solve it?

To have Quirinius taking the census at the time of Jesus' birth, we must find that he was already legate in Syria at that time or at least that he was in charge of some important mission there and consequently invested with special authority. There is some very significant evidence in this regard.

186. A comparison of a fragmentary inscription found in Tivoli in 1764 (now in the Lateran Museum) with an inscription of Aemilius Secundus found in Venice in 1880 provides sufficient basis for the conclusion that Quirinius had previously been legate to Syria at some undetermined time which was certainly a few years before the Christian era. If he was consul in 12 B.C., we must set this first term as legate after that year; but how long after?

An inscription found in 1912 in Antioch of Pisidia tells us that Quirinius was an honorary duumvir of that particular Roman colony, and this would lead us to believe that he was governing Syria when the inscription was made; but we

cannot fix the date of the latter in any definite year. On the other hand, we must also consider three persons whom Flavius Josephus mentions as legates to Syria between 9 and 1 B.C., though he does not tell us exactly how long they remained in office. They are M. Titius, mentioned for a year falling between 10 and 8 B.C.; Sentius Saturninus, from 8 to 6 B.C.; Quintilius Varus, from 6 to 5 B.C. In the year 1 B.C., the legate to Syria was Caius Caesar, the nephew of Augustus. For the remaining years in this last decade before the Christian era (3-2 B.C.) we have no explicit information, just as we have none for the length of M. Titius' term in office. Hence Quirinius may have been legate to Syria for the first time in one or the other of these two intervals, either in 3-2 B.C., or immediately before or immediately after the legateship of M. Titius, that is, after 12 B.C., in which he was consul, but before 8 B.C. when the legate to Syria was Saturninus.

If we suppose that Quirinius was legate from 3 to 2 B.C., then the question of the census is still unsolved, because Jesus was born before 4 B.C. There remain, therefore, the years between 12 and 8 B.C. which we must consider as a possibility.

But we have other information regarding the same Quirinius, which possibly offers a different solution to the whole problem. The campaign against the Homonadenses, mentioned only incidentally by Tacitus, is treated more fully by Strabo (XII, 6, 5), who tells us that Quirinius undertook the campaign to avenge the death of King Aminta, who had been killed by the Homonadenses, brigands of Cilicia. Since Cilicia was under the province of Syria, we again come to the conclusion that when he conducted this campaign Quirinius was either legate to Syria or had special authority there because of it. But when did the campaign take place? We have no definite answer to this question either. There is a considerable degree of probability, if not certainty, that it took place between 10 and 6 B.C.

Another bit of evidence, negative but important, is incidentally furnished by Tertullian. This worthy jurist, who was in an excellent position to have firsthand knowledge of the Roman census scrolls, refers us with assurance to the census taken under Augustus in Judea by Sentius Saturninus as that accomplished at the time of the birth of Jesus: "But it is also the fact that there was at that time in Judea under Augustus a census taken up by Sentius Saturninus, from whose records they could have ascertained his nationality" (*Adv. Marcion.*, IV, 19).<sup>45</sup> The mention here of Saturninus instead of Quirinius

is entirely unexpected and in itself shows that Tertullian is not quoting from Luke but has obtained his information from imperial documents, perhaps the official records. The importance of this data, negative though it is, is extremely great because, as we have already noted, Saturninus was legate to Syria shortly before or shortly after Quirinius.

187. Having examined all the available evidence, we find two solutions possible.

We may suppose that Quirinius was legate to Syria for the first time between 10 and 8 B.C. Toward the end of his term he announced the census and, precisely because it was the "first," it encountered difficulties in Judea which protracted it so long that it was completed by his successor Sentius Saturninus. Among the Jews, who had been forcibly impressed by it, this census passed into history under the name of Quirinius, who began it, and Luke adopted the Jewish designation. Among the Romans the same census was recorded under the name of Saturninus, who finished it, and Tertullian followed the Roman designation. It may even be that in the beginning Saturninus was Quirinius' assistant in getting the census under way. Later, in fact, in the census of A.D. 6-7, the procurator Coponius was also Quirinius' assistant (§24), and the commemorative inscription of Aemilius Secundus (§186) reads that he took the census of the city of Apamea by order of the same Quirinius (certainly during his first term as legate). Then Saturninus succeeded Quirinius as legate and finished the census alone.

We might arrive at a similar but less probable conclusion by reversing the sequence, that is, by assigning Saturninus' legateship to 8-6 B.C. and that of Quirinius to 3-2 B.C. In that case, we would consider that Jesus was registered actually in the census of Saturninus but that the whole census was attributed to Quirinius, who finished it.

The alternative solution is based on the fact that in the same Roman province along with the imperial legate there were sometimes other high officials with special duties and that both the legate and these officials were indiscriminately called "governors," *hgemonez*. Syria itself furnishes the certain proof of this custom. Flavius Josephus more than once mentions our Sentius Saturninus and at the same time a certain (procurator) Volumnius, and he calls them both "governors," *hgemonez*, of Caesar (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVI, 277) or of Syria (*ibid.*, 344), or "prefects," *epistatountez*, of Syria (*ibid.*, 280). About 63, Nero named Cizius or Cincius (perhaps Cestius) legate to Syria,

but left the former legate Corbulo in the same province as military commander with extraordinary powers, because he was an expert strategist with actual field experience against the Parthians (Tacitus, *Annal.*, XV, 25, cf. 1 ff.). Similarly, during the last war against Jerusalem, the legate to Syria was Mucianus, but Nero gave the military command to Vespasian. An African milestone of A.D. 75 names two legati Augusti, specifying that one of them was in charge of the census and the other was the military commander.

Since it is certain that there could be two or more “governors” ἡγεμόνες in a province at the same time, we must note that Luke says the census was taken while Quirinius was “governing,” ἡγεμονεύοντος, in Syria; yet he does not say that Quirinius was directly responsible for it as the Vulgate seems to imply (*descriptio . . . facta est a praeside Syriae Cyrino*), nor does he specify the nature of Quirinius’ “governing,” that is, whether he was the civil-military governor, or a military governor only. It could be, therefore, that at the time of Jesus’ birth the regular legate to Syria was Saturninus, while Quirinius was the military commander directing the war against the Homonadenses. The powers granted to Quirinius for the prosecution of the campaign permitted him to take the census in the province in which he was fighting and the regions subject to it.<sup>46</sup> If this is the case, then Tertullian attributed the census to Saturninus, the ordinary legate; Luke attributed it to Quirinius, either because he actually ordered it by virtue of his military powers, or because he was so well known for his second census, which marked the definitive subjugation of Judea.

188. These two solutions have their respective degrees of probability, but they are neither clear nor definitive. The point on which they remain annoyingly vague, because we lack sufficient documents, is precisely the chronological one, which is the most important so far as Jesus’ birth is concerned.

We are certain of Quirinius’ campaign against the Homonadenses, just as we may consider it almost certain that he was legate to Syria for the first time before the beginning of the Christian era. But in what years exactly did these events occur? As we have seen, there are various but only approximate answers to this question, and they do not give us any solid working basis for establishing the dates of Jesus’ birth and life.

Two other objections have been raised to Luke’s account (§183), but they are far less important. Could a representative of Rome take a census in the

territories of Herod, a “friendly and allied king”? Whatever the purely legal aspects of the question, in actual practice it was entirely possible and extremely natural, given the absolute subjection which bound Herod to Augustus. Considering Herod’s servile attitude toward the emperor, especially in the last years of his life (§11.), it is not even to be thought of that he would offer any opposition the day the omnipotent lord of the Palatine should decide for reasons of general policy to take the census in the territories of his most humble servant.

The fact that Jewish instead of Roman procedure was followed in taking the census does not constitute a difficulty so much as it confirms the historical accuracy of Luke’s account. The Romans, it is true, had their own way of taking the census, but they were also experienced politicians, and so they knew very well how to avoid unnecessary difficulties and how not to offend needlessly the sensibilities of the peoples they subjected. Rome was fully aware that registering a foreign people, especially for the “first” time, was a dangerous undertaking, for it represented the official test of the subjection of that people. To quote one example alone, the census in Gaul, begun in 28 B.C. by order of Augustus, provoked such serious revolts that it had to be suspended for the time being, and it was undertaken twice later, first by Drusus and then by Germanicus. Rome, therefore, probably foresaw the certain deep resentment and discontent that would result from a census of the Jews, who were tenaciously attached to their own traditions for religious and patriotic reasons. In those circumstances, it would have been senseless to increase the difficulty by following the Roman procedure. Rome did not insist upon empty formalities; it made little difference whether the census was taken in the Roman way or the Jewish way provided it was taken, and elementary prudence counseled the Jewish procedure for this “first” census especially.

After all, we do not know whether or not in the second census, taken by Quirinius in A.D. 6-7, the Roman method was followed; it may be that it was, but it is equally possible that the Jewish procedure was used instead. In addition, it is evident from the papyri that in Egypt the Romans ordered the citizens who happened to be outside their own districts to return to them for the census, which is another point in favor of Luke’s account.

## CHAPTER XII: The Physical Appearance of Jesus

189. TRUSTWORTHY sources tell us absolutely nothing about Jesus' physical appearance. Some have espied a hint in the episode of the publican Zaccheus, who, when Jesus arrived in Jericho, "was trying to see Jesus [to find out] who he was, but could not on account of the crowd, because he was small of stature. So, he ran on ahead, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was going to pass that way" (*Luke 19:3-4*). These words have led to the conclusion that Jesus was small of stature. The interpretation, proposed about three centuries ago, is sheer nonsense and absolutely unfounded although Robert Eisler recently revived it (§181). In fact, it is clear that the subject throughout the entire passage is not Jesus but Zaccheus; hence it was the latter who was "low of stature" and for that very reason climbed up the sycamore tree. After all, a higher perch would not have helped him very much if he were trying to see a small man hedged in by a large crowd.

190. Neither the art nor the literature of later Christianity resigned itself to this lack of information.

So far as art was concerned, a very serious obstacle to the production of a true and historical portrait of Jesus lay in the fact that he was born, lived, and died in Palestine, where Jewish orthodoxy forbade picturing living beings in any way for fear of idolatry. The first generation of Christians were in overwhelming majority of Jewish origin, and hence could have no wish or motive to hand down an image of Jesus. If, on the other hand, Jesus had lived outside of Palestine and if the majority of the earliest Christians had been Greek or Roman, it is not improbable that some portrait of his physical appearance would have been preserved from those early times. The oldest representations of Jesus extant are those in the catacombs (second and third centuries) in the Occident, and the Byzantine paintings in the Orient (fourth century), which do not reproduce his features as they were but are clearly imaginative and compounded of ideal characteristics.

The earliest descriptions of Jesus in literature are equally ideal and fall into two completely different groups. The characteristics in both cases derive from passages in the Old Testament which refer to the Messiah, though these present him under different aspects. One of the prophecies of the servant of Yahweh asserted: "There is no beauty in him, nor comeliness: and we have seen him, and there was no sightliness, that we should be desirous of him"

(*Isa.* 53:2); on the other hand, a messianic hymn, resembling in form a mystic epithalamium, exclaimed: "Thou art beautiful above the sons of men; grace is poured [out upon] thy lips" (Ps. 44 [45]:3).

Unquestionably texts of this kind were not concerned with the physical features of the future Messiah; they were simple allegorical expressions foreshadowing, the former his sufferings and the latter his triumphs. However, we do not lack Christian writers who took them literally and claimed them as descriptions of Christ's appearance. Hence, he was believed to have been handsome or ugly depending on the quotation favored.

191. Those who argue that Jesus was ill favored are in general the earliest writers, but usually they derive implicitly or explicitly from the above-mentioned passages in *Isaias*, thereby suggesting the suffering Messiah rather than Jesus' actual features, and so it is not always possible to determine their real thought. St. Justin said Jesus was ugly (αἰδῆς in the *Dial. cum Tryph.*, 88; cf. 100, 85); Clement of Alexandria called him homely (οἰν αἰσχροῦ, in *Paed.*, III, I); according to Tertullian he was without beauty *nec humanae honestatis corpus fuit* (*De carne Christi*, 9; cf. *Adv. Marcion.*, III, 17; *Adv. Judaeos*, 14, etc.); the Syrian St. Ephrem says he was three cubits or little more than four and a half feet tall (in Lamy, *S. Ephrem syri hymni et sermones*, t. IV, col. 631). Origen quotes the pagan Celsus' objection that Jesus was small, ill favored, and unattractive (*Contra Celsum*, VI, 75) but does not seem to disagree with his adversary very much on this point. In any case, he records also the curious belief of certain Christians that Jesus seemed ugly to the impious and beautiful to the just in turn, and he confesses that this does not seem incredible to him (in *Matth.* series, 100; in Migne, P.G., 13, 1750).

More numerous, but more recent, are those who argue in favor of Jesus' comeliness, like Gregory of Nyssa, John Chrysostom, Theodoret, Jerome, etc. The basis of their opinion also is usually the passage from the Psalm quoted above and is therefore ideal rather than historical.

Up to this point the various statements have been vague, indicating only a generic ugliness or beauty. The detailed descriptions begin later, and in them Jesus is always handsome.

192. The anonymous pilgrim of Piacenza who visited Palestine about 570, saw in Jerusalem the stone on which Jesus was standing "when he was brought before Pilate for judgment; on it there remain his footprints. A foot shapely, short, and slender; for he is portrayed as of average height, with

pleasing features, hair slightly curling and graceful long-fingered hands, in the likeness painted while he yet lived, and placed in the praetorium itself” (Geyer, *Itinera Hierosol.*, p. 175).<sup>47</sup>

About 710, Andrew, the metropolitan of Crete, speaks of the portrait of Jesus which tradition says was painted by Luke, and adds: “But the Jew Josephus also narrates that the Lord was seen in the same manner: with eyebrows meeting (sunofrun), with beautiful eyes, with a long face, somewhat stooped (epikufon), of good height (euhlika), as he certainly appeared while he dwelt among men; similarly [he describes] also the appearance of the Mother of God, as it is seen [in the image] which some call Romana” (fragment in Migne, P.G., 97, 1304).

This description is surely derived not from the “Jew Josephus” (Flavius) but from an earlier Byzantine tradition, and seems to reflect somewhat the other notion that Jesus was ill favored (i.e., in the adjective “somewhat bent,” here interpreted favorably). In any case, the main features in this description are repeated in subsequent tradition, which blends them with other details borrowed from unknown sources or from pure fancy alone.

In Constantinople, about 800, the monk Epiphanius felt qualified to assert that Jesus was about six feet tall, with blond, slightly wavy hair, black eyebrows not completely arched, gray-green eyes, and a slight tilt to his head so that his figure was not completely straight (mh panu orqion); his face was not round but somewhat long like his mothers, whom he resembled in every way (*Vita Deiparae*, critical text in Dobschuetz, *Christusbilder in Texte u. Untersuch.*, N.F. III, vol. 18, p. 302).

On the other hand, Jesus was only three cubits tall (a little more than four and one half feet) according to the *Synodal Letter of the Bishops of the Orient*, dated 839 (in Dobschuetz, op. cit., p. 303-304; cf. Migne, P.G., 95, 349), and according to the discourse of an anonymous Byzantine on the portrait of the Virgin (in Dobschuetz, op. cit., p. 246 last line); nevertheless, these documents maintain that Jesus was beautiful, though they mechanically repeat details scattered through the other descriptions we have quoted.

193. Still later, the same details came to the West and were fused, among other things, in the *Golden Legend* of Jacopo de Voragine of the thirteenth century. The so-called Epistle of Lentulus was composed about the same time; it enjoyed great vogue in the West between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and claims to have been sent to the Roman Senate by a legendary



predecessor of Pilate, named Lentulus. It contains the following description, the beginning of which evidently derives from the famous *testimonium flavianum* (§91) and toward the end is reminiscent of the preceding descriptions: "At that time there appeared, and now still lives, a man (if it be right to call him man) of outstanding character named Jesus Christ, who is called by the populace a prophet of truth, but whose disciples call him son of God; he raises the dead and heals (all manner of) sicknesses. He is a man of moderately tall stature, good looking, with features to command respect, who can be loved or feared at sight. His hair is of the color of early hazel nuts, falling straight to about the ears but from the ears curling in ringlets, rather darker and more lustrous, flowing free about the shoulders, and parted in the middle after the manner of the Nazarenes; his forehead smooth and serene, his face without spot or wrinkle, graced with a ruddy glow. His nose and mouth are altogether faultless, his beard full and of one color with his hair, not long, parted slightly at the chin. His gaze is frank and deliberate, his eyes bright, lively, and of a gray-blue color. Terrible in rebuke, he is gentle and amiable in teaching, joyful but grave withal; he has been known to weep, but never to laugh. Tall and erect in bearing, he has hands and arms to please the beholder; in speech he is grave, sparing, and reserved. Such is he as befits the words of the prophet, 'Beautiful above the sons of men' (Dobschuetz, op. cit., p. 319).<sup>48</sup>

This last description is certainly edifying, written as it is by the supposed pagan Lentulus, but it is based on the very *Psalms* (44 [45] :3) which we quoted above as the principal source of the Christian current which argued for the physical beauty of Jesus.

Meanwhile, the entire Christian Middle Ages were convinced that in those descriptions and in the pictures connected with them, they possessed the true image of Jesus, which was given a name in part Byzantine, the *vera icone*, and which the people personified in Veronica:

*Like him who peradventure from Croatia  
Comes to look on our Veronica,  
Nor fills his long desire with gazing  
But says in thought the while it is displayed:  
My Lord, Christ Jesus, true God of true God,  
Now was thy semblance truly like to this?*  
(Dante, *Par.*, XXXI, 103-108.)

Little, old and white, the snow-haired pilgrim  
Leaves the sweet place where all his life was spent  
And his loved ones, hushed now in bewilderment  
And worry for the father gone from them;  
Then drags the burden of his aged frame  
Through life's last days, in willing banishment.  
Sped surely forward by his firm intent  
Though years conspire to break him, miles to lame.

To Rome he comes, borne on by quick desire  
There to see His likeness whom above  
He hopes once more in Heaven to behold . . .  
(Petrarch, *Canzoniere*, XII.)

## CHAPTER XIII: The Rationalist Interpretations of the Life of Christ

194. THE sources for the life of Jesus — the Gospels, generally speaking — derive their incomparable historical importance from the subject which they treat and their manner of treating it. Their subject is the origin of the greatest religious current of thought and at the same time the most radical innovation that has ever appeared in the history of the human spirit, namely, Christianity. Their treatment of it is not polemical and proceeds with no show of erudition; it is the plain and simple exposition of a few biographical facts concerning the Founder of Christianity and of only a few more facts regarding the essentials of his doctrine.

But though the information in the Gospels is not abundant, it has a quality which clearly distinguishes it from any of the information that has come down to us about the other founders of great religions. Some of them, like Buddha and especially Zoroaster, are today only vague and shadowy figures in history whose features fade into the misty distance. The sure data we possess about them comes from places and times far removed from its subject; from it we can conclude with certainty that these respective persons did exist historically and we can determine the approximate period in which they lived, but we can derive little more from it than this general outline. Their true features are today hidden beneath a more or less heavy veil. On the other hand, while they do not at all pretend to exhaust their subject, the Gospels give us information concerning the life and teaching of Christ which is accurate, circumstantial,

and embraces minute details; most important of all, it claims to derive directly from the immediate disciples of Jesus, his companions for a long time and therefore well acquainted with the men and things described, or at least from informants who were only slightly younger and had enjoyed long familiarity with those same disciples.

Besides, what the Gospels really do in treating the life and teaching of Jesus is to unfold a tapestry of miraculous events of which he is the hero. Now, it is true that at the beginning of other great spiritual movements we also find wonderful facts of various kinds and historically undisputed reality, like the mysterious *daimonion* who secretly guided Socrates in his regeneration of Greek philosophy, or the barely credible feats of Alexander the Great which inaugurate a rampantly triumphant Hellenism; but while things of this kind are wonderful, they are not miraculous. The psychological phenomenon in Socrates' case does not seem to intrude upon the physical world properly so-called, and the feats of Alexander, however much they surpass the ordinary level of human enterprise, do not contradict the physical laws of nature. Even if we confine ourselves to the strictly religious field, we find that there have been founders of powerful religions, like Mani and Mohammed, who worked no miracles at all, according to the most reliable documents, and made no claim whatever to the title of wonder-worker. Instead, the Gospels, while they describe Jesus as one to whom far-famed military or political exploits were completely foreign, do attribute to him every kind of physical miracle, from his conception even to beyond his death, miracles which he wrought on himself and on other men, on living beings and on inanimate objects. In addition, they intimately associate these miracles with his mission as founder of a new religion, in fact they present them as the proof of this mission.

There are three inseparable consequences to all this: in the first place, the actions and words of Jesus which we know from the Gospels have been communicated to us by persons who were either contemporaries and friends of his or who were at least only a little younger and, in any case, excellently informed; second, these informants testify to strictly miraculous facts; third, these miracles were wrought to prove Christ's religious mission.

The passage from one to the other of these three points is natural and spontaneous. If anyone reading the Gospels accepts the first, then he inevitably accepts the second and just as inevitably arrives at the third unless he finds some way to break one of the links in the chain. If the chain is not broken, then the reader must logically accept and make his own the religion

preached by Jesus. This, after all, is the professed purpose of one of the Gospels, which concludes with the words: "But these [things] are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing, you may have life in his name" (*John* 20:31).

195. The history of the studies made through the centuries on the life of Christ is, in substance, the history of the tests by which the strength of each of these three links in the chain has been tried. Are our gospel informants truly authoritative as to questions of time and place? Is the testimony for the extraordinary facts which they narrate truthful and objective, and are these facts genuinely miraculous? Do these facts really prove the authenticity of Christ's religious mission?

Naturally, various periods, depending on their own particular character, have placed the emphasis more on one than on another of these three points, but they have not gone beyond them nor would it have been possible to do so. The third and last point has been debated least, both because it is philosophical rather than historical in character and because, once the first two points have been accepted, it, too, is almost inevitably accepted since it is their direct consequence. Hence, in past centuries as well as in our own time, the heaviest controversies have been waged over the first two questions, though today, dominated as we are by the methods of historical criticism, the one discussed most is the first, namely, the question of the historical validity of the evangelical sources of information.

The early Christian writers accepted the Gospels as holy and inspired books and felt no need whatever to give special or particular proof of their historical authority unless it was attacked by non-Christian writers. For them, ordinarily, the Gospels were books for theological speculation or for exhortation and edification. There were times, however, when some need for apologetics did call their attention to the purely historical value of the Gospels. Even before St. Augustine wrote his *De consensu evangelistarum* in 400, the credibility of the gospel narratives had been attacked by Celsus, whom Origen answered, and later by Porphyry, who was answered by several Christians. Unfortunately, the writings of these two pagan philosophers have not come down to us, but from the indirect information we possess we can arrive at an approximate notion of them.

A little before 180 Celsus published his *True Discourse*, which is for the most part an attack on the Christians and to a lesser extent an attack on Christ. Celsus takes care to point out that he is well informed on his subject, for he keeps repeating confidently to the Christians: "I know all [about you]." He has, in fact, read the Gospels and quotes them in his discourse, regularly attributing them to the disciples of Jesus. Despite this, he accepts in the Gospels only the facts which suit his argument, such as Christ's fatigue and hunger, his lament in the last agony, his death on the cross, and the like, which in his opinion are completely unbecoming to a god. On the other hand, he substitutes for the other biographical data the indecent anti-Christian calumnies already being circulated by the Jews; he often alters the character of the episodes, sometimes twists the words he quotes, and generally showers abundant ridicule on his hated subject in a manner which anticipates in many ways the method of Voltaire. But his historical arguments are actually only secondary; his real and fundamental argument is philosophical. Celsus is trying to buttress the political unity of the Roman Empire against the advancing threat from the barbarians, and he considers the idea of a god made man indisputably absurd and the gospel narrative consequently false. Hence the Christians, if they wish to be reasonable, must abandon this nonsense and return to the traditional gods of the empire.

Porphyry, the disciple of the Neo-Platonist, Plotinus, is more solid than Celsus. His fifteen books *Against the Christians*, which appeared toward the end of the third century, are more moderate in tone (judging from the fragments extant) and entirely concerned with the contradictions or historical improbabilities which he finds in the Gospels. But as in Celsus, the strongest objection is made on the basis of philosophical principles: "Can a god suffer? Can a dead man come to life?" The negative answer which these questions evidently require, according to Porphyry, settles the rest of the problem for him as well. Any interpretation of the Gospels would be preferable to that which accepts the suffering of a god or the resurrection of a dead man.

When the empire became officially Christian, not only did no new writings appear to challenge the historical authority of the Gospels but those already published disappeared; the books of Porphyry, for instance, were officially banned by decree of the court of Byzantium in 448. But the gross Jewish slanders which Celsus had exploited and which were later gathered into the libelous *Toledoth Jeshu* (§89) continued to circulate both orally and in written form in Hebrew.

196. The Protestant Reformation did not directly disturb the unanimous judgment of Christianity regarding the historical authority of the Gospels; in fact, it seemed to fortify it. Since the Reformers rejected the authority of all Church tradition and of the living magisterium of the Church and admitted no revelation except that which was written, they were in no position to question the historical validity of the one source of such revelation. But the Protestant bulwark was an apparent defense only and proved in actual fact to be deceptive and disastrous; for it was the Protestants who launched the first attacks on the Gospels and have continuously renewed them down to our own day, constantly shifting their battle positions but scrupulously applying a basic principle of the Reformation, namely, that of private interpretation.

But as in the case of the early pagan critics, many of whose attitudes were in fact unconsciously copied by the new times, this change in the Protestant position was decisively influenced by various philosophical currents. The first to break away from the orthodox Protestant concept were the followers of English Deism, which, among other things, identified supernatural revelation with natural reason. Various studies made on that basis, especially with the intent to eliminate the supernatural element from the evangelical miracles (Woolston, 1730; Annet, 1744) did not attract much notice, but constituted nevertheless the seeds of future criticism.

French Philosophism traveled the same road to a certain extent. It was inevitable that the Encyclopedist Voltaire should busy himself with the Gospels, and as usual he has recourse to belittling sarcasms and subtle sophistries. In his innumerable writings, but especially in *La Bible enfin expliquée* (1776) and *L'Histoire de l'établissement du christianisme* (1777), he treats Jesus as a vain impostor and St. Paul as a mad demoniac; he revives the old calumnies of the Toledoth Jeshu and, jumbling them with legends from the apocryphal gospels, he uses them to contradict the facts in the canonical Gospels.

197. But the paltry results achieved by English Deism and French Philosophism were far surpassed by German Illuminism (*Aufklärung*). This was no less hostile than the other two schools to every idea of the supernatural, and it had bloomed besides in the very same soil that produced the Reformation and the principle of private interpretation. While Voltaire in France was wasting his time in gross and disconnected buffooneries, scholars in Germany were completing more organic and complicated attacks.

Just before his death (1768), H. S. Reimarus, a professor of Oriental languages in Hamburg, had finished an *Apologia for the Rational Worshippers of God*, a full four thousand pages long, but he never had the courage to publish it. Lessing, then librarian in Wolfenbuettel, published seven lengthy extracts of this work (in 1774, 1777, and 1778) as *Anonymous Fragments*, the last two of which were entitled respectively *On the Story of the Resurrection and Concerning the Aim of Jesus and His Disciples*. In these extracts, Reimarus launches a systematic attack first against every idea of the supernatural, then against Old Testament revelation, and finally against the whole gospel narrative. According to him, Jesus was a fiery political agitator who wanted to provoke a popular uprising against the Roman masters of Palestine. When the rebellion collapsed with his crucifixion, his followers disguised his real purpose and paraded him as a purely religious and spiritual leader. Hence, they stole his body, saying that he had come to life again and that his death had served to redeem mankind. The four canonical Gospels are nothing but the official consecration of this chain of disillusionment and fraud, because the Christians "are nothing but parrots who repeat what they hear."

Even in the fatherland of Illuminism, however, an interpretation of this kind, quite apart from its manifest anti-Christian fanaticism, was or seemed too childishly simple to meet with much approval. In reality, while it subtracted the "irrational" miraculous element from the gospel story, it introduced instead an equally irrational disproportion between cause and effect, for it made all of Christianity derive from a mass of delirious fancies and quackeries. This in itself would have constituted a "miracle" from the standpoint of the most elementary historical principles, no less difficult to accept than the miracles in the Gospels. Hence the *Anonymous Fragments* of Wolfenbuettel did nothing but blaze a false trail in the anti-supernatural interpretation of the gospel story, and they provoked several counterattacks from the Protestant camp.

Among the latter, that of J. S. Semler (1779) is worthy of note. He is known for his studies in biblical philology and especially for his application of the method of "historical criticism" to the Gospels. This method, also inspired by English Deism, found in the Gospels a synthesis of various spiritual currents, discovered in Jesus' preaching the many "adaptations" he regretfully made to suit the prejudices of his contemporaries, and proceeded besides to detailed physico-natural interpretations of the gospel miracles.

198. This last was also the road taken by H. E. G. Paulus, a professor at Heidelberg, who followed it out to its logical conclusion. Since Reimarus had failed in his attempt to reject en masse the miraculous events in the Gospels, Paulus accepted them in their entirety, but tried instead to divest them of their supernatural character with a completely naturalistic interpretation. That is, he distinguished in the gospel narrative between the substance of the fact related and the respective Evangelist's judgment concerning it. The fact was objectively true, at least in substance, but the Evangelist's opinion was mistaken and it was necessary to correct it.

Hence, with regard to the episode in which Jesus walks on the water, for instance, Paulus thinks that he was walking on the beach instead or that at the most he walked into the water a foot or so in order to come nearer the disciples' boat. As for the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, Jesus and his disciples merely shared the food they had brought with them with others who had brought none, and their example was powerful enough to compel the rest of the crowd to do the same thing. The cures of the blind and the deaf were due to special eye waters and powders the properties of which Jesus knew. The resurrection of Lazarus and of Jesus himself were simple awakenings, because neither was truly dead but only in a coma which the complete rest of the sepulcher served to cure, and so on. Jesus' miracles, in short, were either charitable acts or medical cures or fortunate accidents, and in any case, they were always perfectly natural happenings.

This method of criticism, explained by Paulus in his *Commentary of the First Three Gospels* (1800-1804) and *Manual of Exegesis* (1830) and applied in his *Life of Jesus* (1828), was intended to provide a "rational" explanation of the facts narrated in the Gospels. Hence the name "rationalism" applied to the method itself, the true founder of which, however, was Semler, while Paulus was responsible only for its wider diffusion. (Today many of the scholars who deny the supernatural still call this one method "rationalism" though "naturalism" would be a more accurate term, given the manner of their procedure. Catholic scholars understand the term "rationalism" in the more general sense as the method which rejects the supernatural.)

It is to be noted that Paulus was easily satisfied with regard to the origin of the Gospels; he attributed them without question to the authors named by tradition. After all, his surrender on this point is easy to explain. It was important to him to have "facts" certified by very early writers; then he could



take care of ridding them of old “judgments” by his particular method of sifting them.

199. Paulus’ method was striking not for its ingeniousness but for its ingenuousness, and such colossal ingenuousness provoked an immediate reaction.

In 1832 Schleiermacher was giving the university lectures from which, his *Life of Jesus* (1864) was later taken and published posthumously. This work is philosophical rather than historical and represents a compromise between orthodox Protestantism and the denial of the supernatural. At that same time, D. G. Strauss was working out another system completely opposed to that of Paulus although his purpose was also to eliminate the superhuman from the Gospels. Strauss is singularly sincere and straightforward on this point and openly confesses that if the Gospels are completely historical sources, then the miraculous cannot be erased from the life of Jesus; if, on the other hand, the miraculous and the historical are incompatible, the Gospels cannot be considered historically valid. Strauss thought that to try to eliminate the superhuman element from the Gospels with the naturalistic-rationalist method of Paulus was awkward and stupid, and his criticism was so sensible and compact that it wrote the death sentence of the method. He thought it possible to achieve the same result with an idealist-rationalist method, that is, he had recourse to the “myth” theory, inspired by the philosophy of Hegel, which he developed in his *Life of Jesus* (first edition, 1835-1836).

According to Strauss, the myth is a purely ideal concept, which finds expression as historical fact pertaining to the life of Jesus. Hence the value of the myth is not in the “fact” narrated but in the “idea” enclosed within that apparent fact, hidden within it in accordance with the imaginative symbolism of the ancients. Strauss does not apply the myth theory unreservedly, however, for he did not at all question the historical existence of Jesus and the principal facts of his life; but in the Gospels the “myth,” created under the influence of the messianic ideas in the Old Testament, is interwoven with historical fact and it is the duty of the critical scholar to distinguish between them.

Strauss’ criteria for this distinction are mainly the following. In the first place —as we should expect — anything of a miraculous nature or contrary to the laws of historical evolution is to be considered mythical

along with all events pictured as corresponding to previous religious concepts (that is, events which claim to fulfill prophecies or messianic expectations, etc.). The poetic passages and discourses of notable length also reflect the myth as do the passages which differ from other accounts of the same subject. If we apply these norms together with other secondary ones, it is clear that we can save little or nothing from the Gospels as historical documentation of the life of Jesus. In fact, the results of Strauss' *Life of Jesus* are almost entirely negative, except that he does admit in general the historical existence of such a person and accept a few particular passages. As for all the rest, the Jesus of the Gospels is not a historical Jesus but an ideal Christ fashioned by the collective imagination of the first generations of Christians from a few historical facts which they unwittingly and unintentionally worked into this mythical figure.

Strauss made no particular study of the origin of the Gospels, accepting in their entirety the prevailing opinions of the Protestant critics of his day, namely, that the three Synoptics, the oldest of which is Matthew, represent a tradition contrary to the fourth Gospel, and that the latter cannot be used as a historical source for the biography of Jesus. But Strauss' theory in itself required, between the death of Jesus and the composition of the Gospels, an ample lapse of time for the development of these myths since it would certainly have been impossible for them to be worked out within the space of a few years. Consistent with his theory, Strauss assigns the composition of the Gospels to the very late second century. He does not choose this date on the basis of historical or literary evidence but simply because his theory requires it, and he quite honestly confesses that the latter would collapse completely if the Gospels were composed during the first century.

In the later edition of his work, Strauss at first tempered somewhat his various negations and then returned to his former position. His new *Life of Jesus for the German People*, published thirty years later (1864), was less radical and presented a portrait of Jesus closer to the liberal Protestant concept of him.

200. Though it provoked loud protest, Strauss' theory made a lasting impression mainly because of his expedient of an idealized Christ, a principle which subsequent Protestant criticism never substantially abandoned. But if we examine the details of this theory more closely, we see immediately that it derives too much from philosophical preconceptions and too little from historical fact.

Is all that busy and unconscious transformation from fact to myth, accomplished in the collective mind of the first Christian generations, consistent with what we learn of the latter from the earliest documents we possess? And if the Gospels did emanate from the imagination of those first generations, then would it not be necessary for us to consider first their mentality in order to judge properly the historical importance of the Gospels that emanate from them? Is it not usual to study first the Florence of 1300, her political and cultural background, the *dolce stil novo* and the personal vicissitudes of Alighieri, and then in the light of these things to interpret and pass judgment on the *Divine Comedy*? Now, Strauss completely ignored all such preliminary study; it is as though he uprooted the four canonical Gospels from the spiritual world which had produced them and then shut himself up within them, armed only with his own philosophical theories.

In the meantime, Strauss was opposed by F. C. Baur, who had been his teacher and who founded the new school of Tübingen (distinct from the older one which had defended the position of orthodox Protestantism against the Deists). Since 1825, he had been publishing studies of a general philosophico-religious nature, based on the theories of Schleiermacher, and from 1835 on he made the history of the first Christian century the special object of his researches without, however, squarely facing the task of a biography of Jesus. His findings were explained in numerous writings and especially in *Paul the Apostle of Jesus Christ* (1845). Then he abandoned Schleiermacher and, becoming (about 1830) a no less ardent Hegelian than Strauss, he used Hegel from then on to animate history which — as he openly confessed — was "eternally dead and dumb" for him without philosophy. From Hegel he borrowed the principle of the "triple process," consisting of *thesis-antithesis-synthesis*, which he rigidly applied to the history of apostolic Christianity.

The *thesis* was here represented by the Petrine faction, which derived from Peter, supported by James and John, and embodied the separatist Jewish-Christian tendencies; the *antithesis* was represented by the Pauline faction, which stemmed from Paul and embodied the universalist Hellenistic-Christian tendency. From the conflict between thesis and antithesis rose the synthesis, represented by the Catholic Church, which was the compromise that reconciled the two tendencies, partially absorbing both of them. The Petrine current insisted on the Judaic idea of the Messiah and the observance of the detailed precepts of the Jewish Law; the Pauline insisted on the universality of salvation and on faith. The Catholic Church, against the pressure of Gnosticism

and the other heresies of the second century, absorbed the two, fusing and tempering them in the process.

201. This theory of "tendencies," no less than the mythical theory of Strauss, required a long period of time for the conflicting currents to develop and produce the writings which represent them. Since among the earliest Christian documents there are several which do not coincide with this theory it is first necessary to offer some explanation for them as well. And Baur is still consistent; he fixes the composition of the Gospels at a later date and rejects the unmanageable writings as unauthentic.

According to his hypothesis, *Matthew* was composed no earlier than the year 130 and was based on a writing that favored the Petrine faction, namely, the *Gospel according to the Hebrews* (§96), altered somewhat to conciliate the Pauline faction. The Gospel of Luke, on the other hand, which can date back no further than 150, was based on a Pauline writing, the *Gospel of Marcion* (§136), also altered, naturally to suit Paul's followers. *Mark* derived how. both of these and hence is later and neutral; though it borrows from the two preceding Gospels it omits their respective controversial passages! The fourth Gospel belongs to a period when the quarrels between the two tendencies had subsided, that is, about 170, and so is free to soar through lofty theological speculations. The *Acts of the Apostles*, composed after 150, represent a reconciliation between the Petrine and the Pauline currents of thought.

Of Paul's fourteen *Epistles*, ten are not authentic for the reason, principally, that they do not reflect the conflict between the two tendencies. The only authentic Epistles are those to the Galatians and the Romans, and the two to the Corinthians.

Properly speaking, Baur's theory shifted the field of research and proposed new principles and criteria for it. Many scholars gathered about the master, and for about fifteen years they zealously followed his method in the *Theologische Jahrbuecher* (1842-1857). Of especial note among them were Zeller, Schweigler, and Kostlin, all of whom Baur had taught personally, besides Hilgenfeld, Volkmar, and many others. They did not fail, however, to meet with violent opposition. It came from more than one Protestant camp and was fostered by the political authorities. In fact, the disciples were disheartened after a while and began to abandon their teacher. By the time Baur died, in 1860, the school of Tübingen was practically dispersed.

202. Most of the attacks on Baur's theory naturally came from the Protestant conservatives, captained by Hengstenberg, who accused Baur of destructive radicalism. But the most interesting attack for those concerned especially with the logical development of ideas was that launched by a man of almost the same name, Bruno Bauer (1809-1882), with whom were associated several Dutch scholars. The latter, in fact, accused Baur, not of being radical but of being too conservative and stopping illogically at the halfway mark.

Bauer, also a disciple of Hegel, accepted many of Baur's premises as well as Strauss' verdict that the fourth Gospel had no foundation in history and represented a later flight of mysticism. But he went still further and inquired whether the same verdict should not also include the three Synoptics, which Strauss had saved in part. Shortly before (in 1838), Weisse and Wilke had independently arrived at the conclusion that *Mark* is earlier than *Matthew* and *Luke*, while Strauss as well as Baur had accepted the old idea that *Mark* was a summary of them both. Bauer accepted *Mark* as the oldest of the Synoptics, considering it the source of the other two, and therefore lumped their testimony in this Gospel alone. This being established to his satisfaction, he denied that there was any essential difference between the fourth Gospel and the one independent Synoptic (*Mark*) as historical documents; both contain more or less abundant data, differing somewhat in tone but historical in appearance only. Whatever others believed the first generations of Christians had accomplished — whether they unconsciously created a myth as Strauss would have it or whether they consciously developed into two conflicting factions as Baur maintained — Bauer believes to be the work of the first Synoptic Evangelist alone, which was then amplified by the other three. Once he had outlined this theory, though not without some uncertainties and reservations, Bauer first questioned and finally denied the historical existence of Jesus. Thus, he reversed the process of Strauss, for he considered that the evolution of the myth was not the creation but the creator of the Christian community.

In 1842, as a result of his writings on the fourth Gospel (1840) and the Synoptics (1842), Bauer was forbidden to teach. This embittered him and he at first devoted himself to political history, but only to return once more to his former subject with increasing radicalism. He denied the authenticity of all of St. Paul's Epistles, including the four which Baur had spared, and ended by

working out a fantastic reconstruction of early Christianity, which he treated as a fusion of Stoicism and Hellenistic Judaism.

Bauer did not, and practically speaking could not, found a school, but this is of little importance. Very important, however, is the question of whether or not his theory is logically consistent with the principles on which he bases it. That is, given the general philosophical and critical principles postulated by Strauss and the Tübingen school as well as by Bauer, we may well ask whether the latter is not really the most logical follower of Strauss or the most consistent of the Tübingenese.

203. After its experience with Strauss and the Tübingen school, which marked a truly new point of departure in studies on the life of Christ, Protestant criticism entered upon a long period, partly of adjustment and partly of compromise. When the storm aroused by these two schools had somewhat cleared, orthodox Protestantism distrusted on principle every new and original theory because recent experience had shown that such theories shattered the very foundations of its creed, based as it was on the written word of God alone. On the other hand, Protestant theologians were certainly not disposed to retreat to the old Lutheran positions and limit themselves simply to treating the New Testament as a book inspired by God and the first of all theological works. These old positions had been undermined and rendered practically untenable not so much by the work of Reimarus, Paulus, Strauss, and the Tübingenese, as by the influence of Illuminism, of Kant and Hegel, and of the other philosophies that had grown up in the country of Luther.

Add to this the fact that, coincident with the decline of the Tübingen school, the critical studies of the origins of the Gospels were entering a new phase. If not in theory, at least in practice, the fourth Gospel was now discarded as a historical source as it had been by Strauss and the Tübingen school. But while the latter had set *Mark* last in order of time, scholars now began to place this shortest Synoptic first in the series of three (as Bauer had done) to make it serve, with the *Logia* of Papias, as the source of the other two (§148). Many critics besides supposed that there had been a *Proto-Mark*, an older version of the *Mark* we know today; some supposed a *Proto-Luke* and even a *Proto-John*, but without encountering any success.

Now, this new view of the origins of the Synoptics also pushed their respective dates back. There was no longer any talk of the late second century

as the period of composition (where Strauss and the Tübingen school had set it); all were dated back to the first century and some writings as far back as the year A.D. 60. Having established this much, Protestant criticism now had a solid basis on which to reconstruct the historical biography of Jesus without colliding too squarely with orthodox Lutheranism. When the dates for the Synoptics were set back, the theories of Strauss and Baur collapsed completely (as those authors, after all, had hypothetically granted); the three or four decades elapsed between the death of Jesus and the first writings gathered in the Synoptics represented certainly too brief a period for that whole laborious evolution of “myths” and “tendencies” on which these two theories were based. Finally, new and extremely detailed studies on the respective characteristics of the Synoptics made it possible to assert that they derive in large measure from accounts of actual eyewitnesses and that, while each has a different aim and flavor, they in no way reflect that complex sum of conflicting “tendencies” which had been ascribed to them. These conclusions, based on internal evidence, also served to strengthen the new foundation Protestantism had set up on which to build its historical biography of Jesus.

But these same conclusions were something of a boomerang. They were undoubtedly acceptable to orthodox Protestantism, but did they not make it more difficult perhaps to interpret the Gospels “rationally”?

Whether it was admitted or not, the chief purpose of all the theories from Reimarus on —leaving aside the ancients, Celsus and Porphyry — was to divest the gospel content of every supernatural and miraculous element. Now instead, these latest conclusions endowed that content with new prestige because of the antiquity and objectivity of the informants responsible for it, and this in turn functioned as a bulwark of defense for the supernatural. Nor are we to suppose that the Protestant theologians of the country of Kant and Hegel were in general more kindly disposed toward the supernatural after the bankruptcy of the various theories from Reimarus to the Tübingen school. There were scholars not unfriendly to the supernatural, it is true, but their writings had more influence on the Protestant believers and their pastors than on the critics and universities, while the majority tried to effect a compromise between the findings of the criticism closest to tradition and the lay dogmatism of the reigning philosophy.

The result was a theologico-historical trend which found expression in a number of studies, differing according to individual temperaments but all

bearing the title of the liberal school, named from the political term then in fashion.

204. The liberal school betrays the characteristics of all periods of transition and compromise. It abandons the clear and definite positions of a Reimarus or Paulus, although practically speaking it accepts their various conclusions; it shies away from the logical deductions of Bruno Bauer but it borrows many of his principles. It usually avoids declaring any basic principles and then gives evidence of applying them without saying so. When confronted by definite problems born of the explanation of specific facts, it prefers to walk around them, not committing itself on the facts in question but dwelling instead on the opinions concerning them in ancient times. It projects modern ideas and feelings into the past and says many things a historian finds completely unnecessary; then it fails to state other things clearly asserted in the historical documents it has itself reaccruited simply because it considers them opposed to modern ideas and sentiments. The liberal school certainly does not lack erudition, but we may justifiably ask whether it does not lack candor. In 1906, the Protestant radical, Schweitzer, who wrote the history of these studies, deplored the fact that contemporary theology was not "completely sincere" (*ganz ehrlich*, in *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*, p. 249).

The biographies of Jesus and especially the critical studies on the Gospels which saw the light during this period were numerous and varied in tone. The conservative right is represented by Zahn and in part by Bernard Weiss; H. J. Holtzman is conspicuous in the center, and in the radical left wing are Schenkel, Beyschlag, Weizsacker, Wellhausen, etc. The approach in the biographies (Keim, 3 vols., 1867-1872; Bernard Weiss, 2 vols., 1882; Beyschlag, 2 vols., 1885-1886) or in the various studies of literary criticism is mainly psychological; Jesus is portrayed therein as a teacher who taught nothing more than a new moral doctrine founded entirely upon the feeling of the Fatherhood of God. The kingdom of God which he proclaimed was a purely spiritual and inner thing or, at the most, it had a vague eschatological significance difficult to define. The least conservative gladly temper or even discard altogether Jesus' assertions regarding Messiahship. The epithet "Son of man" is often interpreted as referring to human nature in the abstract or even as the speaker's own way of referring to himself. The other title, "Son of God," can have only a figurative meaning deriving from the concept of the universal Fatherhood of God. The supernatural qualities Jesus claims for



himself as well as the miracles claimed for him by the Gospels are freely ignored.

These ideas — though with numerous and sometimes sharp individual differences — are those most commonly held by the Protestant liberals. On the latter, Renan, who cannot be considered in the least suspect, passes the following judgment (he is referring to two of them, but his opinion may easily be extended to the rest): "They admit certainly a real and historical Jesus, but their historical Jesus is not a messiah or a prophet or a Jew. They do not know what he wanted; they understand neither his life nor his death. Their Jesus is, in his own way, an eon, an impalpable, intangible being. Pure history does not know any such being."

205. The chair of eminence in the liberal school belongs to Adolf von Harnack (1851-1930) for his numerous works, both on the New Testament and on the rest of early Christian literature, a good portion of which have permanent value. He maintains that the *Logia*, from which the Gospels of *Matthew* and *Luke* derive, are the work of the Apostle Matthew and were composed about A.D. 50 or even earlier. The Gospel of *Mark* he considers to be a little later; the Gospel of *Luke* as well as the *Acts of the Apostles* were written by the physician Luke, the disciple of Paul, no later than the year 63. The fourth Gospel is the work of John the Presbyter (§158), who followed in this writing the tradition of John the Apostle.

In his widely circulated book on the *Essence of Christianity* (1900), Harnack summed up his views on the life and teaching of Jesus, agreeing in large measure with those of the liberal school. At the heart of Jesus' doctrine was the idea that God was revealing himself as the universal Father, as a result of which there developed in Jesus a consciousness that he was the Son of God and therefore the Messiah. Yet, "how he arrived at the realization of his power and a consciousness of the duty and mission which were the consequence of that power is his secret and there is no psychology which can explain it." Harnack arranged Jesus' miracles in five groups in an attempt to eliminate them one by one with methods which recall Paulus and Strauss. There are (1) the miracles which are magnified natural events, (2) miracles which are mere concrete translations of precepts, parables, or various psychological processes, (3) miracles imagined to be the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies, (4) miracles wrought by Jesus' spiritual power, and (5) miracles which do not fit into any of these categories and cannot be explained. In any case, Jesus' true religious doctrine, utterly devoid of dogma, was preserved

pure and genuine only through the apostolic era. Later it came under the direct influence of Hellenistic philosophy and this produced the dogmas and superstructures of speculation which have risen to cover it.

(Figure 29, Figure 30, Figure 31, Figure 32)

206. Ernest Renan (1823-1892), whose fame was very great in the Latin Catholic world but rather limited in German Protestant circles, does not belong to the liberal school; he claims rather to be opposed to it. His famous *Life of Jesus*, which was part of the *History of the Origins of Christianity*, appeared in 1863; the thirteenth edition, which appeared in 1867 with some modifications, became the definitive one from which all the later innumerable editions and translations were taken.

Renan was relatively conservative in the matter of sources: *Mark* represents “the primitive type of Synoptic tradition and the most authoritative text” since it derives from Peter’s preaching, although the modern version we possess does not correspond exactly to the original; *Matthew* is made up of the authentic *Logia* of the Apostle Matthew, to which was added a collection of biographical information concerning Jesus; the third Gospel and *the Acts* were written by Luke sometime after the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70. As for the fourth Gospel, Renan departs from German criticism and modifies his ideas somewhat. In the first edition he attributed it to the Apostle John, at least so far as its content was concerned, but in the thirteenth edition he considered the author to have been a disciple of John; in both cases, however, he assigned a particular historical value to this Gospel (in complete contrast to German criticism) although he did not consider the discourses contained in it authentic.

Despite the fact that Renan’s criticism is relatively moderate, its practical consequences are even more negative than those of the liberal school and almost as much so as those of Strauss. In fact, we know nothing certain about Jesus except “that he existed. That he was from Nazareth in Galilee. That his preaching cast a veritable spell and that he left certain aphorisms in the memory of his disciples, which profoundly impressed them. His two principal disciples were Cephas and John, the son of Zebedee. He aroused the hatred of the orthodox Jews, who succeeded in having him put to death by Pontius Pilate, then procurator of Judea. He was crucified outside the gate of the city. It was believed shortly afterward that he had risen from the dead.... Beyond this, doubt enters in.” This doubt, besides, is to be extended to such

fundamental questions as the following: "Did he believe himself to be the Messiah? . . . Did he imagine that he worked miracles? Were any attributed to him while he was alive? . . . What was his moral character?"

This basic skepticism, however, did not prevent Renan from writing a voluminous enough biography, taking his material from a variety of sources. Contrary to the German biographies, which were fashioned in libraries by students who had never seen either the places or the customs associated with Jesus, Renan's *Life* was written while he was directing an archeological expedition in Phoenicia in 1860-61, which afforded him the opportunity to visit Palestine. During this visit, the gospel story, "which from a distance seems to move through the clouds of an unreal world, took on such form and consistency that I was astounded. The startling accord between texts and places, the wonderful harmony between the evangelical ideal and the landscape which frames it were a revelation to me. I had before my eyes a fifth Gospel."

In reality, Renan did not use this "fifth Gospel" very much insofar as historical geography and much less archeology were concerned (the latter, after all, was then just in its beginnings), and when he did use it, he did not escape serious errors. In any case, one visiting Palestine since then, that is, after the completion of numerous and important excavations, and doing so besides at greater length and with more ease and comfort than was possible in Renan's day, might certainly find a great many things there, but not a "fifth Gospel," at least if he is a man of calm and unexcitable fancy. The fact is that Renan looked at Jesus' country with the eye of an artist rather than that of a historian and mistook the mere projections of his own thoughts and feelings for objective fact. Thus, when he exclaims: "To understand this it is necessary to have been in the Orient!" he is actually using an argument which in his day the majority of scholars were not able to contest, while almost always he is airing some idea he himself has imported into the Orient.

207. After all, his method of treating his "fifth Gospel" is similar to his mode of treating the other four. Since in his opinion the only certain data regarding the life of Jesus was that very brief information we have just quoted, there was nothing to do but reconstruct the psychological portrait of Jesus. This gave Renan a great deal more material to work on, material very well suited to the character with which he had vested his subject.

In reality, “some wish to make Jesus out a wise man, others a philosopher, others a patriot, others a man of goodness, others a moralist, others a saint. He was none of these things. He was a spellbinder (*charmeur*).” This “spellbinder,” nevertheless, founded a religion; in fact, not a religion but the religion. “Jesus has founded religion in humanity as Socrates founded its philosophy.... Jesus has founded the absolute religion, excluding nothing, defining nothing, except feeling.” To be more specific, we find that “a pure cult, a religion without priests and external rites, based entirely on the sentiments of the heart, on the imitation of God, on the immediate relationship between the conscience and the heavenly Father, were the consequences of such principles,” that is, the principles preached by Jesus. As anyone can see, what we have here is substantially the same portrait of Jesus as that sketched by the liberal school, which Renan censured. A few decades later Harnack presents a quite different picture (§205).

Renan considers that the ideas attributed to Jesus concerning himself and the fundamental points of his mission largely confirm this theory: “Jesus never voiced the sacrilegious idea that he was God....” — “He is the son of God; but all men are or can become so in varying degree. All men must every day call God their father.... The title ‘Son of God,’ or simply ‘Son,’ became for Jesus a title similar to ‘Son of man,’ and, like the latter, synonymous with Messiah....” — “The title which he preferred was ‘Son of man; this title was apparently a humble one but it was associated with the messianic hopes. That is the name he used to refer to himself: hence on his lips the words ‘Son of man’ were synonymous with the pronoun ‘I,’ which he was reluctant to use.”

As for the supernatural and miraculous element in the Gospels, Renan clearly states his approach in the very beginning: whoever studies these documents “must not be preoccupied about edifying or scandalizing anyone, about defending or refuting dogmas.” Shortly after this declaration, however, he asserts the following axiom and endows it with all the authority of a lay dogma: “That the Gospels are in part legendary is evident because they are full of miracles and the supernatural.” On the other hand, he affirms that “it would be a lack of good historical method if, in paying too much heed to our own antipathies ... we should try to suppress the facts which in the eyes of his [Jesus’] contemporaries seemed the most outstanding,” that is, miraculous. It is, in fact, not out of the ordinary that miracles should be attributed to an innovator in religion like Jesus; “it would have been the greatest miracle of all if he had not performed any.” In any case, the Jesus of Renan, under the

pressure of circumstances, “became a wonder-worker only very late and then very unwillingly”; “... we may well believe that he did not have the reputation of wonder-worker but that it was forced on him: if he did not object very much to accepting it, nevertheless he did nothing to foster it.”

The practical conclusion of Renan’s work is the rejection of all the miracles. He uses whichever of the preceding methods is convenient, either Strauss’ or Paulus’, sometimes Reimarus’, which he applies together with his own canon that “it is necessary to coax the texts gently.” In the first place, “out of every hundred supernatural accounts, eighty are entirely the figment of the popular imagination.” He eliminates the other twenty usually by pointing out that Jesus’ very gentleness acted as an excellent drug, for “the presence of a superior man, who treats the sick man gently and assures him of his cure with some visible sign, is often a definite remedy.” Cases like the resurrection of Lazarus naturally cannot be attributed to the efficacy of this “drug”; to explain it Renan offers the hypothesis that Lazarus was suffering from a temporary syncope, and then that his sisters were guilty of a trick, and finally he adds the theory that there was some misunderstanding (§493). In short, so far as the question of the evangelical miracles is concerned Renan is closer to the reprehensible liberal school than he thought.

The incomparable charm of Renan’s style assured his *Life* a worldwide circulation which the massive and labored German “Lives” never even remotely attained. Learned Germany, nevertheless, which before 1870 had seemed to Renan “a temple in which all is pure, elevated, moral, beautiful, and moving,” was more or less ungrateful toward this admirer of hers beyond the Rhine; she did not take his masterpiece at all seriously and serenely went her own way.

208. In 1901, W. Wrede produced an effective attack against the reigning liberal school with his study on the “Messianic Secret” in the Gospels.

The interpretations of this school were based chiefly on the Gospel of Mark, which it considered the oldest and most primitive and therefore the most faithful presentation of the historical Jesus. It found that he preached a completely internal and personal religion but he did not concern himself — as the other Gospels take special care to assert — with founding a stable external society; he did not look to a visible kingdom of God and much less did he attribute to himself any supernatural origin. Wrede demonstrated that if the Jesus portrayed in Mark is historical under certain aspects, from another point

of view he is no less "supernatural" than the Jesus of the other Gospels, for he also has a divine mission and the full consciousness of his messiahship from the very beginning. Hence Wrede supposes that in Mark the Jesus of dogma had already been superimposed on the Jesus of history, and the fusion of the two conflicting personalities had been obtained by the artifice of the "secrecy" Jesus supposedly maintained for a certain time regarding his messianic character.

Now, this partial return to the negative conclusions of Bruno Bauer threatened the little bit of objective basis which the liberal school still granted the historicity of Jesus and at the same time considered very important. But the same school found it all the more difficult to defend itself from this new attack since Wrede's study (unlike Bauer's) certainly did not lack logic and consistency and since for the most part he started from the same philosophical principles and used the same methods of criticism that the liberals did.

209. But when Wrede's work appeared, still another tendency, which was to force the liberal school to the wall, was already well defined and rapidly gaining ground.

In 1892, John Weiss, the son of the liberal conservative Bernard Weiss (§204), had published a short study called *Jesus' Preaching on the Kingdom of God* (republished in a much longer edition in 1900). This placed most of the emphasis on an element which the preceding studies on the life of Jesus and early Christianity had considered only incidentally or superficially, and that was the eschatological element. Hilgenfeld (1857), Colani (1864), Weiffenbach (1873), Volkmar (1882), and Baldensperger (1888, 1892, 1903) had already given some study to Jewish eschatology, and all of them except the first had tried in various ways to solve the problem of the relationship between the teachings of Jesus and contemporary apocalyptic literature. John Weiss took up this same question and solved it by maintaining that the quintessence of Jesus' doctrine is to be found in the eschatological concepts of the Jewish apocalyptic writings of his time.

Weiss said in substance that the historical Jesus was not the Protestant minister, enlightened by Illuminism and nourished on Kant's philosophy, whom the liberal school had depicted. He was the child of his time, shared its ideas and aspirations and even borrowed the expressions born of those aspirations. Now, at the time of Jesus, the Jewish world was feverishly

awaiting the grandiose intervention of God, who, at one blow, was to destroy the empire of evil that had been established on the earth and erect in its stead a reign of justice, peace, and happiness. This was the "kingdom of God" to be established by the "Son of man," the concept of which is already foreshadowed in the canonical book of Daniel and further developed in the later apocryphal, apocalyptic writings. In short, it was this same kingdom which was also the object of Jesus' preaching, but he could not and did not wish to found such a "kingdom of God." He merely announced its imminence as a sudden and grandiose palingenesis. Nevertheless, when he perceived that his message was rejected by his Jewish contemporaries, he became persuaded that his death would hasten the advent of the kingdom and would be for him the bridge to messianic glory, and hence that he himself, as the "Son of man" and Messiah, would return on heavenly clouds to judge the wicked and the just and to inaugurate the eternal kingdom of the latter.

Imbued and burning with this hope, Jesus also preached a moral doctrine; but it represented a provisional morality entirely dependent upon the imminent palingenesis and comparable to the temporary rule imposed by the moment on people in a sinking ship or burning building. According to Jesus, in fact, the whole world was sinking and burning. The true and lasting morality, which he never actually preached, was to be that of the future kingdom.

210. Weiss' little book made a great impression on scholars; but the seed he had sown did not begin to sprout until a few years later, perhaps because at first no one had the courage to follow his hypothesis out to its logical conclusion. In reality, it completely effaced the usual oleograph of Jesus as a spiritually inclined moralizer which the liberal school had produced, only to substitute for it the portrait of a genuine ecstatic, or, as the current euphemism had it, of an "illuminate."

In the same year in which Wrede's study appeared, there was also published a *Sketch of the Life of Jesus*. Its author, A. Schweitzer, also began by searching into Jesus' reticence regarding his messianic mission and future Passion, in part contradicting the findings of Wrede and in part developing and integrating them. Later (in 1906) Schweitzer resumed and greatly enlarged upon the fundamental idea of the Sketch in a history of research on the life of Christ entitled *From Reimarus to Wrede*, a new edition of which appeared in 1913. In the latter work the author, after a keen and learned examination of the preceding theories, champions the eschatological hypothesis.

While Weiss discovered the eschatological idea in Jesus' teaching only, Schweitzer finds it to be the animating principle of all his life and conduct. This, he thinks, explains the dual and contrasting presentation of Jesus Wrede noticed in *Mark*, which may be considered to reflect the eschatological preacher and the eschatologist in action. Jesus, the eschatologist in action (corresponding to the "supernatural" Jesus in *Mark*) is convinced of his own messianic identity, but at first wishes to shroud it in "secrecy" because it was a widespread opinion that the expected messiah was to accomplish his earthly career unknown and despised. Hence, he too had recourse to parables, preaching the truth, but in a manner which could not be clearly understood. The kingdom, meanwhile, is slow in coming; it does not materialize even when Jesus sends the Apostles on a missionary journey through the cities of Israel (*Matt.* 10:23). Then he becomes convinced that the supreme "test" required by God before he will send his kingdom is not to be undergone by the whole people but is reserved to him alone, and in this belief, he sets out for Jerusalem to face death, certain that his execution will bring about salvation by eliciting the advent of the kingdom. Before his final judges, Jesus openly reveals his secret, affirming that he is the Messiah, and for this he is condemned to death.

In 1903 the substance of this theory had already been so trenchantly defended by a scholar then in the Catholic camp, that he considered it a *conditio sine qua non* for asserting Jesus' historicity: "If it is certain that everything in the Gospel which expresses or supposes the imminent judgment of God does not derive from the Savior, then the whole Synoptic tradition must be abandoned. Christ's preaching in the first three Gospels is nothing but a warning to prepare for the universal judgment which is about to take place and the Kingdom which is to come.... The Gospel was the Gospel, the 'good tidings' only because it heralded this event. I shall go even further and state without fear that Jesus was condemned to death for this reason alone. If he had predicted only the reign of charity, Pilate would not have seen any serious difficulty in it. But the idea of a messianic kingdom [royaume], however spiritualized it may be in Christ's Gospel, could not but imply a revolution in human affairs in the near future as well as the royalty [royaute] of the Messiah. Take from the Gospel the idea of the great event and of Christ the King and I defy you to prove the historical existence of the Savior, for he will have divested his life and his death of all historical significance" (A. Loisy, *Autour d'un petit livre*, pp. 69-70).



Schweitzer's theory, fully worked out on the basis of the agreement between Jesus' teachings and actions ("consequent eschatologism") overturned the positions the critics had held till then, and a number of them accepted it as the true solution of the problem of Jesus, now attained at long last. In slow and conservative England, it encountered warm and unexpected approval. In Catholic countries it was widely circulated by the Modernists, who gave it cordial welcome. Loisy, the principal representative of the latter, did not accept the theory in its entirety (Schweitzer criticized him for it) but he borrowed many of its features, especially those concerning Jesus' teaching, and used them to contradict the findings of Harnack in the famous little treatise *L'Evangile et l'Eglise* (1902), which he later defended in *Autour d'un petit livre* (1903). He then methodically applied the same principles in his commentaries on the fourth Gospel (1903), which he denied had any historical value, and on the Synoptics (1907-1908). His works had a much wider circulation in Latin countries than in the German.

211. When the first flush of enthusiasm had passed, criticisms of this new theory also began to make their appearance.

The first was directed against the method the new theory applied to the evangelical sources, a method extremely similar to that of the liberal school even though it was guided by different norms. The liberals had skimmed blithely over all that the Gospels reported not only concerning Jesus' miracles but also regarding his affirmations that he was the Messiah, a supernatural being, the Son of God, etc. All this was to be interpreted as having some harmless, transitory meaning or it was to be treated as so much extra foliage draped on the figure of Jesus by later Christian generations and as such to be stripped off and thrown away. Now the eschatologists did the same thing except that they stripped off and threw away almost all that the liberals had kept, and zealously kept what the liberals had discarded. They took the same road but they traveled it in the opposite direction.

In reality, if the Gospels claim that Jesus preached the imminent kingdom of God, they at the same time and with equal emphasis attribute to him the intention to found a definite religion, to establish a permanent visible society, to place at the head of it persons whom he himself had chosen, to prescribe for it definite religious rites to be scrupulously observed in the future, to furnish it with a completely new moral code quite distinct from any other, to have formed his disciples with the specific aim of providing for the limitless diffusion of his society — in short, to have done these and many other things

which point inevitably to a stable and permanent visible society. Now, it is obvious that a person who, like the Jesus of the eschatologists, is expecting from day to day and hour to hour the total destruction of the entire world has neither the time nor the inclination to look so far into the future as to worry about what is going to happen in the generations to come and go about founding a society for them; nor will those generations and that society ever come into being because tomorrow the world is going to fall to pieces.

This elementary consideration was frankly admitted by the eschatologists themselves, but, consistent with their accepted principles, they rid themselves of the difficulty by lopping off and throwing away all the Gospel statements in question. There was nothing in them, they said, which could truly apply to the historical Jesus; early Christianity had made them up and falsely attributed them to him. Nor was this trimming process limited only to detached sayings and maxims of Jesus. Also cluttering up the way were the parables which Jesus used so frequently in his preaching and which more or less explicitly reflected the idea of permanence and stability he predicted for his institutions. Hence the parables were subjected, especially by the radical liberal Juelicher, whom Loisy followed (note [145](#)), to a methodical process of dissection. Once he had isolated to his satisfaction the original nucleus attributable to Jesus in each parable, he rejected the afore-mentioned prophecies of permanence as fancies spun around it by later tradition.

In conclusion, the eschatologists, like the liberals, “extracted” from the Gospels their own particular picture of Jesus and rejected all the features which, though admittedly portrayed in the Gospels, had no place in that picture. Now, what guarantee was there that the selection made by the eschatologists was any less arbitrary and subjective than that of the liberals?

212. The first criticism of the method employed by the eschatologists was followed by a more serious one of the historical arguments they marshaled. Since the prop and mainstay of the eschatological theory were the apocalyptic ideas prevalent at the time of Jesus, the latter became the object of new and more accurate research. The problem was whether the Judaism of Jesus’ time was truly and completely convulsed by the expectation of the imminent end of the world and a total palingenesis; whether these ideas, attested here and there by the apocrypha quoted, represented the common and prevailing state of mind or whether they are to be attributed to a numerically and spiritually weak minority; whether side by side with these ideas, which could represent

the extreme left, there were not others to be assigned to the center or the right.

The eschatologists had confined their investigations to the apocalyptic apocrypha (§84 ff.) almost completely neglecting the vast body of rabbinic tradition, the earliest of which is contemporary with, or prior to, the Christian Era. The incompleteness of their research was very damaging, especially since the new studies were bringing out ever more clearly the similarity between Jesus' didactic methods and those of the rabbis who were his contemporaries; consequently, to learn the thought of these latter the great sea of rabbinic writings was plumbed to the depths. All the researches in this field were surpassed by the voluminous commentary on the New Testament by (Strack and) Billerbeck (Vols. I-IV, 1-2; 1922-1928), which illustrates the individual passages in the New Testament with related texts from the Talmud, the *Midrashim*, and other rabbinic writings, and includes separate excursuses on the most important questions. It is easy to understand why this commentary was accorded a very cold, almost hostile reception by the eschatologists.

These new contributions proved that the eschatological theory had simplified and generalized too much. It is true that some of the apocrypha, like the *Assumption of Moses* (about A.D. 10), made no distinction between the kingdom of God, messianism, and eschatology, and expected them to be violently fulfilled from one minute to the next in the midst of a universal catastrophe. But these visions were the property and comfort of people who were floundering spiritually and despaired of any relief from the political order, who saw no way of escape from the utterly wretched circumstances of contemporary Judaism except in a total destruction to be followed by a palingenesis. But the very radical nature of these hopes in themselves would lead us to suppose that they did not represent the common and prevailing view; the latter, in fact, is reflected in the other apocrypha and especially in the *maxims* of the Talmud and the Midrash. The majority believed that the present world or "age," completely wicked and wretched, was to be actually supplanted by a future one of justice and happiness, called in Hebrew the "age to come"; but this future age was not the era of the Messiah, as Israel had believed in the past and as the fieriest political messianists continued to believe. It was the reign of individual retribution after death, the glorious heavenly kingdom into which the faithful Israelites would be received after their resurrection and last judgment.

The era of the Messiah, one of glory and triumph for Israel, was a kind of bridge between the two conflicting “ages,” the present and the future. In any case, the messianic triumph was something completely distinct from the future “age” and belonged strictly to the present “age,” constituting a specific era in the latter, the era of the “days of the Messiah.” The opinions regarding the length of this period varied from that of Rabbi Aqiba, who restricted it to forty years, to that of Rabbi Abbahu who stretched it through seven thousand, but the common belief was that it would last two thousand. The messianic period was always considered a strictly historical and earthly era, however, and not an eternal and ultramundane one, although for the Israelites who should witness it, it would institute a kind of relief from the present wicked “age” and a prelude to the future blessed “age.”

213. Now, when we compare the rabbinic concept of the messianic age — and this was the prevailing one at the time of Jesus — with what the Gospels relate concerning his preaching on the subject, we find no similarity at all from the moral-religious standpoint but there is a parallel division of time. Jesus also contrasts the present ‘age’ of evil with the future “age” of glory, in which the elect, after their resurrection, will participate in the heavenly kingdom prepared for them by the Father. But he clearly distinguishes this future “age” from the messianic era; the latter belongs to the present “age”; its cycle will be completed on this earth and it will last for an indefinite length of time. Though indefinite, however, this period will certainly be a long one because to preserve his messianic society in enduring stability, Jesus imparts the norms we have noted, which are to bind throughout an indeterminate future.

This is also the concept shared by the common people, for on a solemn occasion in the course of Jesus’ messianic activity, they acclaimed him publicly as he entered Jerusalem: “Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes! Hosanna in the highest!” (*Mark* 11:9-10). It is evident from these cheers that the populace was expecting from Jesus even a political kingdom (cf. *John* 6:15) — and this could not have been further from his thoughts (cf. *Acts* 1:6-8) — yet the concept here expressed is of a visible, earthly kingdom in this world, not an invisible, heavenly kingdom in the next. Undoubtedly the belief of the populace accorded with that of the Scribes and Pharisees who were its recognized teachers, and not with that of the apocalyptic extremists and Zealots (§83) who, in complete despair over the present ‘age,’ were awaiting a palingenesis in the miraculous descent of the heavenly one.

These and many other objections to the eschatological theory, based on historical documents, elicited innumerable replies and discussions and dampened somewhat the initial enthusiasm with which it had been greeted. It is still the predominant theory today, however, and no new, systematic hypotheses have been worked out to take its place.

214. Meanwhile, instead of concentrating on the life and teaching of Jesus himself, other scholars were beginning to give special attention to early Christianity and particularly St. Paul.

It was by now firmly established — contrary to the claims of early Lutheranism — that all we know about Jesus has been handed down to us in the tradition of the early Church and that the Gospels themselves are nothing but the written documentation of that tradition (§112). It therefore seemed necessary to investigate how that spiritual world which bequeathed us the Gospels had been formed, to determine which elements were native to it and which had been imported from abroad, and how much that seemed typically Christian might possibly have been the eventual fruit of foreign ideas that had filtered into Palestine. This new current of criticism did not intend to revert to the methods of the Tübingen school (§200 ff.); in fact, the latter had shut itself up within the early Christian world to study its supposed internal contradictions, but had completely ignored the possible external influences that had played over it. Now instead the aim of the new criticism was to track down precisely these influences and work out a systematic comparison between early Christianity and other religions, both contemporary and older. Here we have the criteria and techniques of the study of comparative religions.

It had already been noted that early Christianity reflected certain external influences but only within the limits of a few terms and concepts from Greek philosophy. Now the attempt was made to trace the influence of the Hellenistic religions, especially the mystery cults, and the more remote Oriental religions. The religious syncretism which dominated Hellenistic thought prior to and contemporary with Christianity and which had assimilated the widest variety of concepts of Oriental origin, suggested the possibility that some of its ideas had been injected into nascent Christianity either directly or through the later Judaism of the Diaspora or even of Palestine itself.

The fields explored were many, and they yielded really new knowledge. Among the numerous studies which resulted, it is sufficient to mention those of Fr. Cumont on the *Mysteries of Mithra* (1896, 1900) and on the *Oriental Religions in Roman Paganism* (1906); those of R. Reitzenstein on *Monasticism* (1904), on the *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions* (1910), and on the *Persian Mystery of Redemption* (1921); the studies on Mandeism by W. Brandt (1889, 1893, 1910, 1912, 1915), M. Lidzbarski (1900, 1905, 1915) and L. Tondelli (1928); the studies on Gnosticism by W. Bousset (1907), by E. De Faye (1913), and by F. C. Burkitt (1932). But the conclusions arrived at by comparing Christianity with these Oriental religions were very limited and often questionable or entirely arbitrary; they did not escape the obvious danger of mistaking what was only a vague similarity in form for identity of content, and the other more serious, chronological error of thinking that Christianity had derived from some current which was itself an offshoot of Christianity.

This is what happened in regard to Mandeism. In the beginning, some scholars jumped too hastily to the conclusion that it was one of the sources of the theological content of the fourth Gospel. Today these early enthusiasms have cooled considerably and it is commonly held that the strange sect of the Mandeans was greatly influenced by Christianity and not vice versa (§171).

215. But the favorite subject of the students of comparative religion has been St. Paul, whom they consider for all practical purposes the true founder of Christianity or at least the one who built its ideological framework. The latter, they find, contains very few original elements while much has been borrowed from the various Oriental religions and, with some slight adaptations, made to fit the idealized Jesus, or Christ, and the doctrine attributed to him. For instance, the concept of Christ as the man “from heaven, heavenly” (I Cor. 15:47) derives from the Oriental myth of the “primeval Man”; many concepts, especially those regarding Baptism and the Eucharist, are reminiscent of the mystery cults, and others concerning grace and the Holy Spirit are similarly treated. In substance, the attempt was made to find in Paul’s preaching what might be called a “pre-Christian [i.e., prior to Jesus] Christianity.”

This trend was definitely opposed by Schweitzer (§210) among others. In a new history of the critical studies on St. Paul (1911) and later in another study on the *Mysticism of the Apostle Paul* (1930), he clung firmly to the eschatological theory and applied it to St. Paul as well. Faced with the choice between Judaism and Hellenism as the parent of Christianity, he resolutely

took his stand for the former. Loisy, on the other hand, in a study on the pagan mysteries and the Christian Mystery (1919) admitted that the Hellenistic mystery religions had greatly influenced Christianity from the time of St. Paul on.

In reality, Schweitzer had a sharper eye than Loisy. He foresaw that the comparative-religion method, completely absorbed as it was in the hunt for “pre-Christian Christianity,” would eventually deny the historical existence of Jesus. And he was right, for there was no escaping the strictly logical consequences this time either. Just as Bruno Bauer carried the premises of Strauss and the Tübingen school to their ultimate conclusions and ended by denying the historicity of Jesus (§202), so this time too, certain principles of the “comparative religion” school, and especially the philosophical premises in vogue since Reimarus’ time, led to the deduction that Jesus had never actually lived.

216. Indeed the new group of deniers looked like amateurs and intruders in a class of specialists, for they had no new exegesis to their credit which would save the man Jesus — as the fashion required — after “purifying” him of every divine characteristic. These *enfants terribles* came forward to sustain the opposite thesis; instead of saving the man Jesus they tried to save the “god” Christ, preferring a Hegelian “god” to a historical man. Nevertheless, they also had their letter of credit and a very authoritative one at that, for it was furnished them by the eschatologists. We have noted (§210) that Loisy challenged anyone who denied Jesus’ feverish expectation of the end of the world to prove his historical existence. The challenge was accepted to the letter, and since the proofs of this excited expectation advanced by the eschatologists did not at all convince the new arrivals, they denied that Jesus had ever existed. What eschatologist could accuse them of being illogical?

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, several Dutch scholars, like A. Pierson, A. Loman, and a few others, also had set out to deny Jesus’ existence but without any appreciable results. This is also true of the German, A. Kalthoff (1902), who based his work on the premises of Bruno Bauer. In England, J. M. Robertson was responsible for several publications from 1900 on in which he maintained that Jesus was the object of an ancient Hebrew cult and that he was in reality a myth based on the ancient figure of Joshua. In 1906, W. B. Smith, an American who wrote in German, published a work significantly entitled *The Pre-Christian Jesus*, in which he went searching for the cult of a Jesus among non-Hebrews. In the same year, P. Jensen, an

eminent authority on Assyrian lore, produced a voluminous work in which he showed that Jesus, like Moses and other personages in the Old Testament, was merely an episode in the vast mythological epic of the Babylonian Gilgamesh. Finally, from 1909 on, we have the activity of the German, A. Drews, who published two thick volumes entitled *The Myth of Christ*, and later, in various other writings as well as in numerous and fervid lectures, tried to present scientifically the refutation of Jesus' historicity and popularize it. He made abundant use of the ideas of Robertson (*Jesus is Joshua*) and Smith (the influence of pagan concepts).

The almost frivolous paltriness of these "historical" reconstructions did not merit any refutation from the specialists, but the impetuous activity of Drews did provoke scornful indignation and angry controversies. From the historical point of view, they seemed unjustified, as it would

seem equally unjustifiable to argue with anyone who denied the historical existence of Julius Caesar or Socrates. The only fitting answer for such a person is silence. What constituted the difficulty here, however, was the fact that Drews and his colleagues completely shared the philosophical principles so dear to their adversaries.

Drews and his followers argued substantially as follows: You deny that Jesus was God and that he worked miracles and you are absolutely right. But do you not see that the New Testament evidence for a God-Jesus is no less, perhaps clearer and more specific than that for the man-Jesus? Do you not see that the two personalities, of God and of man, are so intimately associated that they cannot be separated? Historically speaking, the documents shed the same light on both personalities. Hence, if you accept the man-Jesus, you cannot reject the God-Jesus on the basis of mere philosophical premises. After all, experience is in our favor for all the attempts made since Reimarus to save the man-Jesus and reject the God-Jesus have failed, evidently because they were traveling the wrong road. Hence, we take the opposite direction and reject the man-Jesus, or better we consign both the God and the man to the sphere of unreality. In doing this we are much truer to history than you. You, in fact, are forced to admit the monstrous absurdity that rigid monotheists, like St. Paul and the early Christians converted from Judaism, adored as a divine and supernatural being a man who had died only a few years before and whom many of them had known personally. We, on the other hand, require only a simple process of ideal incarnation; that is, we assert that those



early Christians clothed their religious idea with an earthly existence, a phenomenon which has occurred in other instances in the history of religion.

Their reasoning, as argument *ad hominem*, was of impeccable logic. Hence, the angry scorn and polemics of their adversaries, who did not relish being made to look illogical and inconsistent.

217. In the course of these controversies, after World War I, a new trend in New Testament criticism took shape to become known eventually as the form-critical method (*formgeschichtliche Methode*).

The specific aim of the followers of this school, the great majority of whom were Germans (K. S. Schmidt, 1919; M. Dibelius, 1919 ff.; R. Bultman, 1921 ff.; M. Albrecht, 1921; G. Bertram, 1922ff., etc.), is literary-critical only; they propose to study the manner in which the first accounts concerning Jesus came into being and were transmitted before they were written down. To this end they proceed to analyze the literary "forms" of popular or religious nature which were incorporated in those accounts (for example the "tale," the "apothegm," the "example," etc.). They admit that before it was written down the content of the Gospels was part of the Church's teaching (§112) and was intimately associated with Christian worship, and that it had, therefore, a life and development peculiar to itself. They also recognize that the Jesus pictured in the earliest Christian tradition is already a supernatural being and the object of religious veneration. Hence, they do not directly concern themselves with the biography of Christ but only with the gospel content on which it is based. On the other hand, it is both inevitable and significant that the fields of literary criticism and creative biography should overlap. The result of this new criticism is a theory which resembles in many ways that of Strauss (§199); the historicity of Jesus is usually admitted but the gospel narratives concerning him are considered the creation of the early Christian community. It is not a mythical creation, as Strauss argued; it has all the characteristics of religious folklore, and it does contain some elements of objective historical truth, although today it is practically impossible to isolate these elements with any degree of certainty for a reconstruction of the account of Jesus' life.

This skepticism is not the prerogative of the *formgeschichtliche* school, but it is becoming increasingly characteristic of the followers of other methods as well. Nor is the usual Robert Eisler (§181, §189) an important exception; in a voluminous publication bearing the Greek title *Jesus the King Who Never Reigned* (2 vols., 1929-1930), he presents with a great show of certainty and

accuracy a revolutionary Jesus who instigated an armed insurrection and was duly put to death by the Romans. Later in a treatise on the *Enigma of the Fourth Gospel* (1938), Eisler gives a no less detailed biography of John the Evangelist. Scholars of every school have considered both publications sheer romance, especially where they pretended to reconstruct history, and there is nothing to be said against this verdict.

Today the field of criticism is divided among the schools of eschatology, comparative religions, and mythology; those who use the form- critical method may belong to any one of these three. A few late-lingerers in the liberal school attract little attention. The comparative-religions group has progressively abandoned certain hypotheses in which it had at first placed great faith, like the one regarding Mandeism (§214). The mythological theory, on the other hand, has had a vigorous champion in the Frenchman Couchoud, who has argued principally against the eschatologists.

218. In his nervous little book, *The Mystery of Jesus* (1924), Couchoud frequently addresses himself specifically to the principal exponent of the eschatological school, Loisy, to whom he expresses gratitude for all that he has learned from him, but whose attachment to the historical existence of Jesus he considers unjustifiable. He finds the following stumbling blocks, among others, in Loisy's theory that Christianity was born of the deification of the man-Jesus: "In many regions of the empire it was quite possible to deify a private citizen. But in at least one nation it was impossible, and that was among the Jews. They adored Yahweh, the one God, the transcendent and ineffable God, whose image they did not portray, whose name they did not pronounce, who was separated from every creature by abyss upon abyss. To associate with Yahweh any kind of man at all would have been a sacrilege and a supreme abomination. The Jews honored the emperor but they let themselves be cut to pieces rather than profess even in a whisper that the emperor was God; and they would also have let themselves be cut to pieces if they had been obliged to say the same thing of Moses himself. And would the first Christian whose voice we hear, a Hebrew son of Hebrews [St. Paul] associate a man with Yahweh in the most natural manner in the world? That is the miracle I refuse to accept." — It would be ridiculous to reject the apotheosis of the emperor to the point of suffering martyrdom only to accept in its stead the apotheosis of one of his subjects." — "Does Paul really say of an artisan like himself: 'Whoever shall call upon his name shall be saved'<sup>49</sup> or 'Every knee shall bow before him'<sup>50</sup> when the Scriptures say these things of

God? Has this tentmaker [such was St. Paul by trade] perhaps attributed to another wandering carpenter the work of six days, the creation of light and the waters, of the sun and moon, of the animals and of man, of the Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, and Powers, of the Angels and of Satan? Has he perchance confused a man with Yahweh?" It is, therefore, inadmissible on purely historical grounds that the Christ of Christianity should be the man-Jesus deified. Can he be, then, true God and true man at the same time? This also is inadmissible, not for historical but for philosophical reasons; the concept of a man-God, in fact, "is a pre-Kantian concept; it has nevertheless captured great spirits like St. Augustine, St. Thomas, Pascal, but today it is inadmissible.... There has been a gradual evolution of the understanding, and I suppose that Kant has had more than a little to do with it." (Kant has unquestionably had something to do with it, and so has Hegel to an even greater extent; but Celsus also was "pre-Kantian" and he — as we have seen §195 — followed the same identical reasoning as Couchoud.) There is nothing left, therefore, but to turn to the hypothesis which is the direct opposite of Loisy's; and that is what Couchoud does, concluding that "Jesus is not a man who was gradually deified, but a God who was gradually humanized."

219. Loisy incidentally answered Couchoud's attack in a dry and scornful manner, declaring among other things, "We have never taken the speculations of the mythologists tragically." But that the attack really did have a tragic element is evident from Loisy's last publications, *The Birth of Christianity* (1933), which he bolstered with *Observations on the Epistles of the New Testament* (1935). In these writings he underlines with increasing emphasis his skepticism concerning the historicity of Jesus' biography, and he justifies it with a progressively radical criticism of the *Epistles* of St. Paul.

His skepticism is expressed in these terms: "Let us resign ourselves to the fact that we know only that in the time when Pontius Pilate was procurator of Judea, perhaps in the year 28 or 29 of our era, perhaps a year or two earlier, a prophet rose in Galilee, in the region of Capharnaum. He was called Jesus.... This Jesus was of the humblest origin. It is not improbable that the name of his father, Joseph, and that of his mother, Mary, were invented by tradition. Some of his brothers enjoyed more or less considerable prestige in the first community. Without doubt he was born in some town or village where he first began to teach." Note how similar this is to Renan's words on the same subject (§206), although the latter, in practice, abandoned his skepticism. Loisy did not.

After all, this Jesus would not have had the time to carry on any vast activity, for his preaching in Galilee "could not have lasted very long; we are making a generous allowance if we give it a few months." After that came the journey to Jerusalem and his death. But even whittled down in this fashion, this interpretation of Jesus is still contradicted — as Couchoud pointed out — by the testimony of St. Paul, who, not even twenty years after Jesus' death, considers him a divinity, the author of man's redemption, universal grace, the Eucharist, and the Christian mysteries of salvation. Hence either Loisy's portrait of Jesus is false or St. Paul's testimony is untrue. Loisy naturally chose the second alternative.

He had in the past admitted the substantial authenticity of St. Paul's Epistles and had assigned to them a period between 50 and 61. Now, to avoid the above objection, he nominally keeps the same dates but in reality, abandons them, for he breaks each epistle down into a great quantity of fragments, attributing to St. Paul only the smallest part. The longer fragments and especially those most disturbing to his theories he declares were interpolated and ascribes to a "mystic gnosticism" of the late first century. After a great deal of wavering, he finally declares false and interpolated (§548) the bothersome passage in which St. Paul attributes to Jesus the institution of the Eucharist (I Cor. 11).

220. Loisy's new and radical criticism of St. Paul's writings had had a precursor in Henri Delafosse. This is one of the many pseudonyms of Joseph Turmel, under which he published (1926-) a series of little volumes edited by Couchoud (the association of the two scholars is significant). In them he, too, dissected the Epistles of St. Paul and left the Apostle brief passages only while he assigned almost all the rest to Marcion, who is supposed to have written about 150. Still writing under the name of Delafosse, Turmel performed a similar operation on the letters of St. Ignatius of Antioch (1927), declaring them of Marcionite origin, and on that of Polycarp, which he declared interpolated. Loisy shared and made considerable use of Tunnel's conclusions except for the claims regarding Marcion.

But while Loisy had a precursor, it does not seem that he had any followers. His own former disciples refused to follow him into this new radicalism. "Let us speak clearly. Alfred Loisy has left an indelible imprint on religious criticism of the twentieth century with his studies on the Synoptics, characterized particularly by the effort to isolate the Pauline contribution to the evangelical tradition, in Mark especially. Now if the historical Paul, the Paul of the *Epistles*,

is to evaporate in our grasp and disappear in the clouds of second-century Gnostic speculation, the critical work on the Gospels (for which the papyri keep setting increasingly narrow chronological limits [most correct: cf. §160]) is to be done all over again; and if anything, it would have to be redone with greater conformity to orthodox tradition. This is a fine consequence, indeed, of so many excommunications!” (E. Buonaiuti, in *Religio*, Jan., 1936, p. 67.)

The same thing has happened in France, where M. Goguel and Charles Guignebert have rejected the final conclusions of Loisy, although both accept the eschatological theory and owe him a great deal. Goguel has published a *Life of Jesus* (1932), which he followed with a treatise on *The Faith in the Resurrection of Jesus in Early Christianity* (1933). Eschatological principles prevail in the biography although we do find in it some elements borrowed from the liberal school. The second study denies the historicity of ‘the Resurrection and attempts to explain how belief in it arose. Guignebert published a *Jesus* (1933) in which he almost constantly follows the old Loisy step by step and is much more radical than Goguel.

But here, too, we are faced with the same question which suggested itself in connection with Bruno Bauer and the later mythologists; that is, from the point of view of critical consistency and logical reasoning — not from the viewpoint of historical documentation — are we not to consider Loisy more correct than his hesitant disciples? Logic has its own iron-clad laws which demand that when certain principles have been established, they must be carried to their final conclusions. When, therefore, it has been established that the Gospels portray Jesus as an eschatological visionary; when, on the basis of this, the Synoptics are split into fragments the majority of which are discarded along with the entire fourth Gospel; when the teacher and his pupils have been in perfect agreement up to this point; and when, finally, the teacher sees that the work already accomplished is worth nothing unless the same process is applied also to the irreducible St. Paul of tradition and therefore proceeds to apply it — then any one with ordinary sense can see that the teacher is traveling with perfect logic straight along the road he has marked out for himself while his reluctant disciples are illogical, stopping halfway as they do through some unjustified conservatism of sentiment.

221. But we may also ask whether Loisy himself ever really carried his principles out to their true logical conclusion. Throughout his long devotion to research it is clear that he became progressively more radical and later

recanted less destructive criticisms he had formerly held.<sup>51</sup> In any case, today Couchoud's colleagues of the mythological school are even more radical, and their negations Loisy abhors. There is certainly a deep abyss between Couchoud, who denies the existence of Jesus, and Loisy, who affirms it. But this abyss seems to exist more in theory than in actual fact. What is the historical Jesus of Loisy really? A young Galilean visionary who preached for two or three months and was executed in Jerusalem. Nothing else is known of him (§219). He is a shadow, a mere phantasm that can be blown away with the slightest puff. Loisy, however, does not wish to be responsible for that puff and conveniently pulverizes the letters of St. Paul rather than cause his precious phantasm to disappear. The expedient is consistent but desperate; and precisely because it is so obviously desperate it has not been and will not be imitated. Would it not be easier and above all more logical to release the decisive puff and blow that ghost of a historical Jesus away, as Couchoud has done?

It is true that Loisy, and the faithful Guignebert after him, have often answered Couchoud by saying that his hypothesis is at fault in "not explaining the origin of Christianity." But Couchoud can always reply by asking whether the shadowy historical Jesus cherished by Loisy truly explains the origin of Christianity, or at least explains it better than the theory of the materialization of a religious idea, which he prefers. He can in fact go further and assert that even if the origin of Christianity was not explained by the hypothesis that Jesus never existed, this would be only one more of the many instances in which history must resort to the wise *ars nesciendi*, but that in any case, the hypothesis does avoid the monstrous historical absurdity which claims that strict monotheistic Jews began to adore *en masse* a man who had died only recently and whom they had known personally (§216, §218).

The spiritual drama of the rationalists who refuse to follow Couchoud is just this. They assert that the historical existence of Jesus cannot be questioned, because it is vouched for by very weighty, numerous, and solemn testimonies. If these testimonies are to be rejected then there is even more reason to reject the testimonies regarding the historical existence of Socrates, Alexander the Great, Hannibal, Mani, Mohammed, Charlemagne, and numberless other personages, and all of history would collapse. But while these same weighty, numerous, and solemn testimonies guarantee the historical existence of Jesus, they also attest his supernatural characteristics and his miraculous power. Hence, just as we conclude from these testimonies that Jesus did truly exist,

we must also conclude that he was a supernatural being who wrought miracles. But this conclusion is for the rationalists impossible a priori; hence the conflict. They must demonstrate a posteriori that the testimonies regarding the supernatural and miraculous Jesus have no historical value though philosophical axioms which guide their researches and dictate their conclusions to a far greater extent than the historical testimony in the documents.

223. This last represents a delicate point at issue. The leftists often scornfully accuse the rightists of being tyrannized by dogma and unable to enjoy the scientific freedom which shines so benignly on the left.

Here we must define our terms. In the first place, when a given principle has been freely and consciously accepted, then we may speak of strict adherence to that principle but not of tyranny. Then there are dogmas and dogmas: the true dogma is a religious one; but there are also philosophical axioms which have all the authority of lay "dogmas" and inspire a loyalty so tenacious that religious dogmas may well envy them on this score. Now, it would be either childish or dishonest to deny that the leftists have their particular lay "dogmas," namely, those philosophical axioms which guide their researches and dictate their conclusions to a far greater extent than the historical testimony in the documents.

They do not admit this fact very often or willingly, but there have been some happy exceptions to this quite understandable reluctance: "If the [Christological] problem which has impassioned and absorbed Christian thinkers for centuries is today examined again, this is due much less to the fact that its history is better known than to the complete renovation which has occurred and continues in modern philosophy (A. Loisy, *Autour d'un petit livre*, pp. 128-129). Here is a confession as sincere as it is valuable.

Thus, the scornful leftist charges against the critics on the right are not at all justified, and the latter can counter with others at least as serious, especially since, if some have deserted the left for the right, still others have deserted the right for the left. Nor can it be seriously maintained that it is always simple and easy to give up a lay "dogma" while this is not the case in the opposite camp. In reality, experience shows that out of sincere attachment to lay "dogma" one may even go to meet a kind of lay "martyrdom," such as accepting the final nonsense of Paulus' theory or the ultimate absurdity of

Couchoud's. Is it not almost lay "martyrdom" to suffer such nonsense and absurdity?

Actually, the two camps speak two different languages, one called "naturalism" and the other "supernaturalism." The left wing, which speaks the former, does not understand and has no desire to understand any other. The right wing, whose language is "supernaturalism" understands the other very well but declares it a foreign tongue in the country called Gospel and asserts, therefore, that the visitor to that country will not succeed in understanding anything or making himself understood there if he puts his trust in that language alone.

Hence, the leftists scorn on principle all that the rightists say, considering them a tribe that speaks a barbarous tongue. The best proof of this is the fact that the work of the radical Schweitzer (§210), which treats at length the research on the life of Jesus, pays almost no attention whatever to the publications of the right wing.

On the other hand, the latter take a great deal of interest in the publications of the left wing, because (among other things) they find in them the respective failures of the various naturalistic theories, which resemble discourses of people who speak every language but the right one and so have converted their camps into a kind of tower of Babel. If this comparison seems tactless and in bad taste, the blame must fall on the one who used it first, and that was Loisy, whose position in the left-wing hierarchy was an eminent one. Yet he was able to say: "We are greatly tempted to think that contemporary theology — with the exception of the Roman Catholics, for whom orthodox tradition has always the force of law — is a real tower of Babel, in which the confusion of ideas is even greater than the diversity of languages" (in *The Hibbert Journal*, VIII-3, April, 1910, p. 486).

If these words are intended as a measure of the results achieved by the left, the rightists are glad to accept them as a confession of failure.

224. These, then, are the practical consequences of the research accomplished by the left wing, which is the only one we have considered here.<sup>52</sup> Almost every new generation, from Reimarus to the present, has raised the shout of victory in the belief that it had finally found the true and definite solution of the problem of Jesus; but the next generation has invariably rejected the widely applauded solution and gone in search of another. Certain points, it is true, have been established as the result of so



much research, but they are of secondary importance and are also acceptable to the right wing; while the true fundamental question, that is, the problem of Jesus in itself, is still there awaiting a definitive answer. The last solution triumphantly proposed was that of the eschatologists, but almost another whole generation has passed since it was first proclaimed. Hence if the rule of the last century still holds good it will not be long before it too is completely repudiated. Actually, the signs of its rejection are already visible and they are numerous; but we cannot glimpse any signs of the Parousia which will furnish the substitute for it.

Nor is it going to be easy to construct any new and well-defined historical theory because the various fields of research, both within and outside of early Judaism, have already been sufficiently explored. There is still the possibility, it is true, that new discoveries will bring important documents to light; but even here the forecast is not rosy, for the papyri discovered in recent years have worn a benign and affectionate mien toward the ancient and compact Gospels of tradition while they have scowled in a singularly grim and disagreeable manner on the later and interpolated gospels of the eschatologists (§160). If the past teaches us anything about the future, it is easy to foresee that the left wing will display even greater radicalism in its attitude toward the sources — regardless of the multiplication of ancient evidences for those documents — and an even more suspicious skepticism toward any reconstruction of the life of Jesus.

In short, the left wing seems to have consigned the historical Jesus inexorably to the tomb. On one corner of that tomb the mythologists, or their successors, will write *Nemo*; the eschatologists will reject this inscription as a grave offense against history, and in another corner, they will write *Ignotus*; but then both groups will proceed to help each other roll the stone against the entrance to the sepulcher. In happy accord, they will affix their seals to it and then sit down together before the closed door to keep their watch.

## The Life of Christ

## CHAPTER XIV: Jesus' Life Before His Public Ministry

### “TOTO ORBE IN PACE COMPOSITO”

225. IN THE years immediately preceding the Christian Era, the Roman Empire, or rather the *orbis terrarum*, was at peace. In 15 B.C. Tiberius and Drusus, the stepsons of Augustus, had subjugated the Rhaeti, Vindelici, and Norians between the Alps and the Danube; in 13 B.C. the Dalmatians and Pannonians had been reduced to obedience by a military expedition begun by Agrippa, son-in-law of Augustus, and concluded by Tiberius; from 12 B.C. on Drusus had conducted military operations against the Germans and solidly established Rome's dominion along the Rhine. The year 8 B.C. marks the beginning of a period of peace which is not disturbed until after the birth of Christ, when insurrections of Germans, Dalmatians, and Pannonians eventually culminate in the defeat of Quintilius Varus in the Teutoburg forest (A.D. 9). In Rome the *Ara Pacis Augustae* was inaugurated in January of 9 B.C.; the Temple of Janus, which had been closed on only two occasions in all the history of Rome before Augustus and twice by him, was now closed for the third time in 8 B.C., *toto orbe in pace composito*), as the Church proclaims every year on the anniversary of Jesus' birth.

Augustus, the author of this *pax romana*, had reached the peak of his pyramid of glory. Indeed, people said of him that for the good of Rome either he should never have been born or he should never have died. The period preceding his absolute reign was that for which he should never have been born; the period in which he was sole master of the world was the one for which he should never have died. And in this second period the master of the world was given honors hitherto unknown in the empire; temples and entire cities were dedicated to him, and he was proclaimed to be of divine, not human, origin. He was the “new Jove,” “Jove, the Savior,” the “star rising over the world.”

Among all these exalted titles, however, we do not find that Augustus was ever called the “prince of peace,” as he may well have deserved in this period. But seven centuries earlier a Hebrew prophet did use this very expression, bestowing it together with others reminiscent of Augustus on the future Messiah as a final and definitive title:

“For a child is born to us, and a son is given to us,  
and the government is upon his shoulder:

and his name shall be called, Wonderful, Counsellor,  
God the Mighty, the Father of the world to come, the  
Prince of Peace” (*Isa. 9:6*).

It is true that in Hebrew the expression “prince of peace” (*sar shalom*) has a much broader meaning than the Latin *princeps pax*, for in Hebrew “peace” (*shalom*) indicates “well-being,” perfect “happiness.” But along with happiness, the future Messiah, whom the prophet foresaw as a prince, could not fail to give his kingdom peace in the sense of freedom from war as well, for where there is war there is not only no peace but much less is there happiness.

### THE TIDINGS BROUGHT TO ZACHARY

226. It was the year 747 of Rome (7 B.C.) and a time of peace under the Emperor Augustus, “in the days of Herod, king of Judea” (*Luke 1:5*). There was at that time a priest of the Temple of Jerusalem, named Zachary. He was wedded to Elizabeth, who was of a sacerdotal family, and they lived in the lull country” of Judea. The town in which they made their home is not named for us, but a tradition as old as the fifth century identifies it with the modern Ain-Karem (St. John in the Mountains), about four miles southwest of Jerusalem. The couple was advanced in years and had never been granted that first and most joyful blessing of a Hebrew household, children. They sorrowed in their loneliness, and conscious that their whole lives had been dedicated to the great commandments of the Hebrew religion, they wondered why God had seen fit to deny them this consolation.

The time came for the class to which Zachary belonged, the eighth class headed by Abia (§54), to take its turn of service in the Temple, and he went up from the country to Jerusalem. When the lots were drawn for the various daily functions, the singular privilege of offering incense on the altar of incense fell to Zachary. This offering was made twice daily, at the morning and the evening sacrifice. The altar of incense was in the Holy place” (§47), which only the priests might enter, while the faithful remained outside and watched the ceremony from a distance as the priest came and went in the “sanctuary.” When Zachary had entered the holy place, “the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord, standing at the right of the altar of incense. And Zachary, seeing him, was troubled, and fear fell upon him. But the angel said to him: Do not be afraid, Zachary, for thy petition has been heard, and thy wife Elizabeth

shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John" (*Luke 1:10-13*). For the Hebrews more than any other people, the *nomen* was an *omen*, an augury; and in this case, John, or Jehohanam, meant "Yahweh (God of Israel) has shown mercy." The angel, in fact, continued to assure the startled Zachary that in the birth of this son, he, the father, and many others would rejoice. The child would be great before God and he would not drink wine or any strong drink; he would be filled with the Holy Spirit even in his mother's womb, and he would summon many Israelites back to their God. More than that, he would be a precursor, who with the spirit and power of Elias would go before the Lord to prepare him a fitting welcome from a people well disposed.

227. The angel's announcement transcended all possible human expectations. Those who took the vow of "Nazirite" abstained from wine and intoxicating drink, but theirs was usually a temporary, not a perpetual vow. According to the holy Scriptures, certain prophets or other personages had been filled with the Holy Spirit on special occasions, but only of Jeremias do we read that in his mother's womb he had already been marked by God for the fulfillment of a sublime and special mission. In ancient times the prophet Malachias had foretold that a precursor would appear before the long-awaited Messiah (Mai. 3:1; 4:5-6), and all believed that this spiritual harbinger was to be the prophet Elias, who had gone to heaven in a fiery chariot. But the celestial prophet could not be reborn as the son of Zachary nor could he infuse his spirit and power into another.

For these reasons, Zachary's first frightened awe was followed by a diffident suspension of judgment. "And Zachary said to the angel: How shall I know this [to be true]? For I am an old man, and my wife is advanced in years. And the angel answered and said to him: I am Gabriel, who stand in the presence of God [§78]; and I have been sent to speak to thee and to bring thee this good news. And behold thou shalt be dumb and unable to speak until the day when these things come to pass, because thou hast not believed my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time" (*Luke 1:18-20*). The punishment, if indeed it was really such, was an additional proof of the extraordinary promise. In ancient times Abraham, Moses, and others had asked and received a "sign" from God in confirmation of his promises; now Zachary had requested one and received it on his very person, so that it served also as a means of spiritual purification.

This was the beginning of the new times that had been promised to Israel from of old. They were announced unexpectedly but during the performance

of Israel's age-old liturgy and at a time when the entire world was at peace.

Meanwhile the people outside the holy place were waiting for the priest to come out in order to chant the hymn which accompanied the sacrifice to be offered on the altar of holocausts, and they wondered at his extraordinary delay. Finally, Zachary appeared on the threshold, but he did not pronounce the customary benediction over the people, nor could he 'speak to them, and they realized that he had seen a vision in the temple. And he kept making signs to them, and remained dumb" (*Luke 1:22*). Zachary's muteness probably prevented the people from learning the exact nature of the vision and the promises made him; they spoke of a vision in general, as they must have done frequently in those days, with or without reason.

When his week of service in the Temple was ended, Zachary, still mute, returned to his own city. Shortly afterward, "Elizabeth his wife conceived, and secluded herself five months, saying: Thus has the Lord dealt with me in the days when he deigned to take away my reproach among men" (*Luke 1:24-25*). Her reproach was barrenness, so highly deprecated among the Hebrews, and this is proof enough that Elizabeth's reticence in those first five months was not prompted by a desire to hide her pregnancy, which would rather have brought her honor among her neighbors, but by much higher motives instead. In the sixth month, she will reveal her condition to another woman as a sign of the divine plan, which, meanwhile, was being quietly accomplished in the sanctuary of Elizabeth's reticence and the mute silence of Zachary.

The Evangelist Luke, who desires to set forth his material in 4 order" (§114,§140) and is fond of coupling his episodes, immediately follows this incident with another which is very similar to it but at the same time marks a great advance in the fulfillment of that plan. The announcement and conception of the precursor is followed by the announcement and conception of Jesus the Messiah himself.

## THE ANNUNCIATION

228. For the second episode the scene is laid far from Jerusalem and its Temple, in Galilee in the north of Palestine. There, about eighty- eight miles from Jerusalem by the modern highway, lay Nazareth. Today it is a charming little city of about ten thousand inhabitants, but in Jesus' time it must have been anything but charming and nothing more than a negligible little village. There is no mention of Nazareth in the Old Testament, in Flavius Josephus, or in the Talmud. The Gospels, which alone mention it, record also the

disparagement with which a man from that neighborhood was regarded: “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” (*John* 1:46.) (Figure 3)

Nevertheless, there must have been a human settlement there from very ancient times. Recent archeological probings around the local Shrine of the Annunciation have brought to light numerous caves artificially opened in the side of the hill. The cruder and more barren of these served as storehouses for provisions, while the more comfortable ones, to the front of which some simple kind of construction had been added, served also as dwelling places. The Nazareth of Jesus’ day must have been limited to what is now the eastern end of the town, overlooking the valley of Esdraelon. Since every human settlement in ancient Palestine seems to have been near some source of water, Nazareth too had its well. This is today called the Virgin’s Fountain and the apocrypha have woven many a fancy about it, but in Jesus’ time it was perhaps the only reason why the thirsty caravans passing through the surrounding countryside ever visited the village. Perhaps its high perch, above the plain to the east, had given this collection of semitroglodytic hutches the name of *Nasrath*, *Nasrah*, in its original meaning of “guardian,” “custodian” (rather than “flower” or “seedling”).

Now, in one of those dwellings in Nazareth lived a “virgin betrothed to a man named Joseph, of the house of David, and the virgin’s name was Mary” (*Luke* 1:27). Mary, too, belonged to the house of David. Nor must we wonder at finding the descendants of a house so glorious in ancient times tucked away in a wretched little village far from the ancestral home of Bethlehem. The descendants of David had for centuries been living in obscurity apart from the stream of public events, and not even during the national resurgence under the Machabees did any of them distinguish themselves for any particular merit. Their simple life as ordinary private citizens had favored their leaving their place of origin as well, many of them going to settle in various parts of Palestine where their interests called them but without forgetting the ties which bound them to the family home.

229. The name Mary, in Hebrew *Miryam*, was very common in Jesus’ day,<sup>53</sup> but we find it only once in the Old Testament, as the name of Moses’ sister. Its original meaning is completely uncertain notwithstanding the numerous (more than sixty) interpretations which have been suggested for it. It would seem, too, that in Jesus’ time the original Hebrew pronunciation had been modified to Maryam and that the word had acquired a new meaning.

The canonical Gospels tell us nothing of Mary's family and the apocrypha tell us too much. A "sister" of hers is mentioned only incidentally (*John* 19:25). We are told that Elizabeth was Mary's "kinswoman" ((suggeiz — *Luke* 1:36), but we do not know the exact degree of this relationship, which must have been through marriage because Elizabeth was from a sacerdotal family (§226) and therefore belonged to the tribe of Levi, while Mary, being of the family of David, belonged to the tribe of Juda. Perhaps Elizabeth's father was of Levite descent while her mother was from the house of David.

230. Now, six months after Elizabeth had conceived (*Luke* 1:26), the same angel Gabriel who had announced that event was sent by God to Mary in Nazareth, and when he 'had come [in] to her, he said: Hail, full of grace, the Lord is with thee.... She was troubled at his word and kept pondering what manner of greeting this might be" (*Luke* 1:28-29).<sup>54</sup> Similar to the episode of Zachary is the sudden apparition and the bewilderment of the one beholding it; but in this case the perplexity is not produced by the apparition itself but by the majestic words uttered, which seem so lofty considering the station of the one to whom they are addressed. This was, therefore, the troubled bewilderment of a humble spirit conscious of its own "lowliness" (papeinwsiz, *Luke* 1:48). But Mary was not frightened, because even in the presence of the vision she "kept pondering in herself" (dielogixeto). According to the apocryphal Proto-evangelion of James (§97), the vision occurred near the fountain in Nazareth while Mary was preparing to draw water. In fact, the apocrypha are inclined to make everything happen publicly, as it were, but this episode took place in private, for the angel spoke to Mary "being come in," that is, having entered her house, which was certainly one of the humblest in the village.

"And the angel said to her: Do not be afraid, Mary, for thou hast found grace with God. And behold thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and shalt bring forth a son; and thou shalt call his name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most-High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he shall be king over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end" (*Luke* 1:30-33). The angel's salutation had prepared the way somewhat for this message, profoundly solemn though it was. She who is "full of grace" and has the "Lord with her" finds the explanation of these singular privileges in the rest of the angel's message, which refers explicitly to the Messiah and uses the Messianic expressions of the Old Testament (cf. 2 *Sam.* 7:16; *Ps.* 88 [89] 30, 37; *Isa.* 9:6; *Mich.* 4:7; *Dan.*



7:14, etc.). The very name to be given the child is foretold, just as the name of Zachary's son had been. Jesus, Hebrew *Jeshua* (the shortened form of *Jehoshua* or *Joshua*), means *Yahweh has saved*; hence the child's mission will be to bring salvation from Yahweh. In short, the angel has announced to Mary that she is to be the mother of the Messiah.

She does not question the message, nor does she, like Zachary, ask for a definite sign. She begins instead to reflect on the humblest way in which her motherhood might be accomplished, and that was the natural way, by which all men, including Zachary's son, have been conceived. But she has one objection against this, and she presents it in the form of a question: "And Mary said to the angel: How shall this be done, because I know not man?" This is the usual Hebrew euphemism for the cause of natural conception. To appreciate its full significance here we must remember what Luke has just told us concerning Mary, that she was "a virgin (*parqenoz*) betrothed to a man named Joseph" (§228).

(Figure 33, Figure 34, Figure 35)

231. Among the Hebrews, legal marriage took place, after certain preliminary arrangements, in two successive ceremonies, the betrothal and the wedding itself. The betrothal (Hebrew *qiddushin* or *'erusin*) was not, as it is today, simply a promise to marry, but a perfectly legal marriage contract, the real *matrimonium ratum*. Hence a betrothed woman was already a wife; her betrothed husband could send her a bill of divorce, and if he died, she was considered his widow. If she was unfaithful, she was punished as an actual adulteress in conformity with *Deuteronomy* (22:23-24). Philo accurately sums this up when he states that, among the Jews who were his contemporaries and Jesus', betrothal was equivalent to marriage (*De special. leg.*, III, 12). After this combination betrothal-marriage, the couple continued to live each with his respective family for a certain length of time. This was usually a year if the bride was a virgin and a month if she was a widow; and it was spent in preparing the new home and its furnishings. Strictly speaking, there should have been no marital intercourse between the betrothed, but actually it was quite common as we learn from rabbinic tradition (*Ketuboth*, I, 5; *Yebamoth*, IV, 10; b. *Ketuboth*, 12 a; etc.), which tells us that such irregularity did occur in Judea but not in Galilee.

The wedding (Hebrew, *nissu'in*) took place after the afore-mentioned lapse of time, and the ceremony consisted of the bride's solemn reception into her

husband's home. Then the legal formalities were over and they lived together publicly as man and wife.

Generally speaking, a girl was betrothed when she was twelve or thirteen years of age, and sometimes a little earlier. Hence at the time of her marriage she was thirteen or fourteen. That was probably Mary's age when the angel appeared to her. A man was betrothed between the ages of eighteen and twenty-four, and so this was probably Joseph's age.<sup>55</sup>

In conclusion, then, we know from Luke, that Mary was a betrothed virgin; from Matthew (1:18) we learn besides that Mary was with child before she went to live with Joseph (prin h sunlqein), that is, before the wedding. Now, in the light of this information, what do Mary's words to the angel mean: "How shall this be done, because I know not man?"

232. Considered in themselves they can have only one of two meanings: either they refer to the well-known natural law by which every child must have a father or they denote the intention not to submit to this law and therefore a renunciation of motherhood. However, we examine them, it is impossible to discover a third meaning in them.

Now, when spoken by Mary, a betrothed Jewess, the words in question cannot have the first of these two meanings, because then they would be disconcertingly childish and would actually make no sense. To any betrothed Jewess who thus expressed herself, it would have been most natural to reply, "What has not happened until today may duly happen tomorrow." Hence, we must inevitably accept the second meaning, in which the verb "I know not" refers not only to the present but also to the future, that is, expresses an intention for the future. All languages, in fact, have some expression in which the present is used with future meaning, especially when it refers to a continued action or state in the future (i.e., I am not getting married; I am not becoming a priest, a lawyer, etc.).<sup>56</sup> If Mary had not been already formally betrothed her words might have been stretched a little to imply her desire to have a husband; but the fact was she did have a legal husband and therefore, if the angel's prophecy was to be fulfilled in the natural way, there was no difficulty.

In reality, however, there was a difficulty and it is expressed in her "I know not," an avowed intention for the future which completely justified her question, "How shall this be done?" Christian tradition, which has

unanimously interpreted Mary's words in this manner, has, it is true, chosen the simplest and easiest way, but also the only reasonable and logical one.<sup>57</sup>

However, if Mary intended to remain a virgin, why had she consented to be betrothed according to the Jewish Law?

The Gospels offer us no explanation on this point but we can find it in the Jewish customs of the day. Ancient Hebraism looked with no favor at all on the unmarried state, and the chief concern of the family was to have as many children as possible. The lack of children was believed a curse from God (*Deut.* 7:14), We have only two recorded instances of celibacy among Hebrew men, that of Jeremias in ancient times, who remained single in order to dedicate himself completely to the mission of prophet (*Jer.* 16:2), and that of the Essenes, in Jesus' day, who married only in rare instances and perhaps not at all (§44). We have no example to cite for women; for the Hebrews a woman without husband and children was a dismal creature. When St. Paul tells us incidentally that fathers thought it a disgrace to have unmarried daughters "over age" at home (*I Cor.* 7:36) he is merely echoing what Ben Sira had said so long before, that a father cannot sleep at night for worry that his daughter may grow old without finding a husband (*Ecclus.* 42:9), and what the rabbinic writings say later, namely, that a daughter must be married as soon as she is old enough. For the Hebrews an unmarried woman was like a person without a head, "because the husband is head of the wife" (*Eph.* 5:23). This was the general feeling among the Hebrews and other Semitic peoples of antiquity and is still the attitude of the modern Arabs, who have the proverb that a young girl may have only one procession, a procession for her wedding or for her funeral.

233. Hence, yielding to the tyranny of established custom, Mary had been betrothed. But her very intention to remain virgin, which she so confidently calls to the attention of the angel, also illumines for us the attitude of her spouse, Joseph, who would never have been accepted as such if he had not agreed to respect Mary's intentions. Joseph's attitude has a good historical parallel in the celibacy of the Essenes which we have just noted.

The Gospels tell us nothing further on this point; but just as Mary's intention is clearly evident in her words, so is the rest evident from even a superficial knowledge of contemporary customs. St. Augustine, with his usual perspicacity, understood this when he wrote: "This is indicated by the words in which Mary answers the angel who tells her she is to bear a son: 'How,' she

said, 'shall this be done, for I know not man?' She certainly would not have said this if she had not already vowed her virginity to God. But since Israelite custom did not allow for this, she espoused a just man, who would not take from her by force, but would protect from violence, what she had vowed to God" (*De sancta virginitate*, 4).

The angel refers to Mary's secret intention in his reply: "And the angel answering, said to her: The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the power of the Most-High shall overshadow thee. And therefore also [he that is born shall be] holy . . . shall be called the Son of God" (*Luke* 1:35).<sup>58</sup> Mary's question, "How shall this be done?" is answered and her vow is safe. The power of God will descend directly upon her, and just as in ancient times in the desert the glory of Yahweh hung like a cloud over the Hebrew tabernacle, overshadowing it (*Exod.* 40:34-35), so will he overshadow the living tabernacle which is the Virgin Mary, and the son who shall be born of her shall have no father but God. Her son shall realize in perfect manner the title Son of God, which was true only figuratively of other personages in the Old Testament who had borne it. The Messiah could be called "Son" only by God, who gave him his divine nature from eternity, and by his virgin mother, from whom he took his human nature; strictly speaking no other human creature would have the right to call him by that name.

Now the angel's message has been fully and clearly presented. Though not doubting any part of it, Mary has asked for an explanation; and she has received it. Nothing is wanting but her consent that all may be accomplished. And this episode continues to unfold like that of Zachary. Just as he had received a definite sign, which he requested, of the truth of the message, so Mary too is given a sign which she has not requested. Hence the angel continues: "And behold Elizabeth, thy kinswoman, also has conceived a son in her old age, and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month; for nothing shall be impossible with God" (*Luke* 1:36-37).

234. Mary makes no reply to the sign she has not asked for; she simply answers: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord: be it done unto me according to thy word" (*Luke* 1:38). The maiden in the humble little house in Nazareth, though chosen to be the Mother of the Messiah, is nevertheless fully aware of her "lowliness" (§230), and so she calls herself not the minister of God nor his collaborator, but his "slave" (*donlh*), a poor creature in the lowest level of

human society; only then does she accept the invitation delivered by the angel.<sup>59</sup>

And then the “Word was made flesh” (*John* 1:14): The Messiah was numbered among the children of men.

Seven centuries earlier, the prophet Isaias had prophesied an extraordinary sign from God in these words: “Behold a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel (*‘Immanu’ El*, “God-with-us” — *Isa.* 7:14). Matthew, who is careful to point out how the ancient messianic prophecies have been fulfilled (§125), here quotes this one of Isaias as being verified by Jesus and his mother (*Matt.* 1:22-23). For Jewish tradition, however, the prophecy of Isaias remained a closed book, sealed with seven seals, and the rabbinic writings do not contain even the remotest reference to the virgin birth of the Messiah.

## THE BIRTH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

235. Immediately after narrating the two parallel episodes, Luke gives us the meeting of the two heroines. Mary, to whom the news of Elizabeth’s pregnancy had been communicated as a sign, set out to visit her kinswoman to rejoice with her; besides, the angel’s words clearly indicated that special ties would exist between the two children soon to be born as they already did between their mothers. The trip from Nazareth to the “Trill country” of Judea (§226) was not a short one. If we suppose that the town of Zachary was really Ain-Karem, it was about a four days’ trip by caravan. Perhaps Mary had previously made the journey for the various “feasts of pilgrimage” (§74) to Jerusalem, and she may even have stopped to visit her kinswoman for a while on the way. But immediately after the annunciation she went “with haste,” entered unexpectedly into the house of Zachary and greeted Elizabeth.

At that meeting the two mothers were given special divine illuminations. The angel had told Zachary his son would be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother’s womb; Elizabeth, in her turn, had wrapped herself in a reticence equal to Zachary’s muteness and she perhaps thought that no one knew of her pregnancy, just as she was certainly unaware of Mary’s. But Mary’s arrival shed a sudden light on everything. “And it came to pass, that when Elizabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the infant leaped in her womb. And Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Ghost, and she cried out with a loud voice, and said: Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb! And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to

me? For behold as soon as the voice of thy salutation sounded in my ears, the infant in my womb leaped for joy. And blessed [is she] who has believed [that] those things shall be accomplished that were spoken to [her] by the Lord” (*Luke 1:41-45*). Before their encounter much of what had happened was clear to the two women though in varying degrees, but much more was still veiled in mysterious shadow. Now their meeting was like a sudden dawn whose startling radiance throws the whole landscape into bold relief. Here it was the landscape of God’s plans.

Elizabeth found her secret discovered, and in her turn learned Mary’s secret to recognize in her the mother of her Lord.

236. The people of the Orient are easily given to improvising songs or poetry on occasions of great joy. In ancient times, Mary the sister of Moses, Debbora, the prophetess, and Anna the mother of Samuel had on solemn occasions improvised canticles which were preserved in the Holy Scriptures and were certainly known to Mary. Among Semitic peoples even today, it is not unusual for a woman at a time of great joy or sorrow to improvise a chant, which expresses her feelings in brief but poignant words guided by a vague rhythm rather than any definite meter; the theme of these canticles is usually a traditional one, but they have a more or less personal character as well. And in that hour of exultation, Mary, too, sang her heart out in poetry. Inspired by the Holy Scriptures and especially by the canticle of Anna (1 Kings 2:1 ff.), she recited her *Magnificat* (*Luke 1:46-55*):<sup>60</sup>

“My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
and my spirit hath  
exulted in God my Savior;  
because he hath regarded the lowliness of his handmaid;  
“For lo, from henceforth, all generations shall call me blessed;  
because he who is mighty hath done great things to me; and holy is his name.

“And his mercy is from generation unto generations, to them that fear him.  
He hath shown might in his arm; he hath scattered the proud in the conceit of their heart.

“He hath put down the mighty from their thrones, and hath exalted the lowly;  
he hath filled the hungry with good things;  
and the rich he hath sent empty away.

“He hath succored Israel his servant, being mindful of his mercy,  
as he spoke to our fathers, to Abraham and his seed forever.”

The original of this canticle was certainly Semitic, and indeed various retranslations (which are, after all, extremely easy to do) have been made from the present Greek text into Hebrew. The Old Testament reminiscences are insistent, but even more insistent, from the psychological point of view, is the contrast between lowliness and greatness, between humble poverty exalted and pride abased, between hunger that is satisfied and the satiety that still hungers. Mary sees in herself only the lowliness of the handmaid, but she is aware also that the powerful arm of God has exalted her littleness to a throne, accomplishing great things in her, and she foresees that all generations shall call her blessed.

Could a more “unlikely” prophecy than this be imagined? It was about the year 6 B.C., and a little girl no more than fifteen years old, without any fortune or social standing whatever, unknown to her fellow countrymen and living in a tiny village equally unknown, was confidently proclaiming that all generations would call her blessed. One might well take the child seeress at her word in the absolute certainty that the first generation would belie it!

Twenty centuries have passed since then and we may compare the prophecy with reality. History now has had all the time it needs to discover whether or not Mary’s prediction was correct and whether humanity today really does exalt her above Herod the Great, then arbiter of Palestine, and above Caius Julius Caesar Octavian Augustus, then master of the entire world.

237. Mary remained with Elizabeth for three months, that is, until it came time for her kinswoman to be delivered, and then she returned to Nazareth. We cannot be certain whether she was still at Zachary’s house when John was born; there are good arguments on both sides of the question.

And when her time was come, Elizabeth gave birth to a son, and the news of the extraordinary event brought her kinsfolk and neighbors to congratulate her. On the eighth day after his birth the newborn infant was to be circumcised as prescribed (§69), and receive his name, but here disagreement arose. Usually, the grandfathers name was bestowed on the first-born in order to continue the family tradition and at the same tune to avoid confusion between son and father. But in this extraordinary instance, when the father was dumb and as old as a grandfather besides, it seemed permissible to make an exception to the general custom and give the child his father’s name. All, in

fact, insisted that he be called Zachary, but his mother insisted that he be called John, and she well knew the reason why this must be (§226).

Her zealous friends, however, could not understand her strange choice especially since no one of Zachary's family had been called John. Only the father's decision could prevail over the mother's and so the busybodies turned to him. But he was dumb, and perhaps deaf too, and they conveyed their difficulty to him with gestures. Then Zachary asked for a little waxed tablet, such as was used for brief messages, and wrote on it: "John is his name." The matter was settled and all were left wondering.

But now the sign of proof and purification imposed on Zachary by the angel no longer had any reason for being because all had been accomplished and the future destiny of the infant was sufficiently clear from the various circumstances of his birth. Therefore, "immediately" after the name was settled upon (*Luke 1:64*), Zachary recovered his speech and began to talk, blessing God. All those present were astonished and foresaw great things in store for the child. Zachary "was filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesied saying: Blessed be the Lord God of Israel etc." This is the canticle Benedictus (*Luke 1:68-79*), used so much in Christian liturgy; it exalts the fulfillment of the promises made by God to Israel and sees in the newborn child the precursor of this fulfillment, or he is to go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways."

The advent of the Savior, then, was imminent, for his harbinger had already appeared. The fact that the powerful of the time, within and outside of Israel, as yet knew nothing of one or the other did not matter because the ways of the Savior and his herald were not the ways of the world God was not seeking the aid of the powerful in order to accomplish his plan of salvation, but the unknown, those hidden from the public view, the lowly like Zachary, Elizabeth, and Mary. One thing only had God accepted from the potentates of the time, almost as an indispensable requisite for his plan of salvation, and that was the peace which was reigning then throughout the world under the authority of Rome.

Before leaving the story of the newborn John to continue that of Mary, Luke anticipates his narrative a bit and tells us briefly that the child grew, and was strengthened in spirit; and was in the deserts until the day of his manifestation to Israel (*Luke 1:80*). These deserts, where John probably went



as a young man, were in all likelihood the regions southwest of Jerusalem known as the desert of Judea (cf. *Matt.* 6:1).

## JOSEPH, THE SPOUSE OF MARY

238. Up to this point our informant has been Luke, but now we must listen to Matthew too, who recounts the story of Jesus' conception much more briefly but with one or two new details. In Matthews narrative, Joseph, who is barely mentioned by Luke, also figures in the foreground. Now just as we are justified in believing that Luke's principal informant was Mary herself, either directly or through John (§142), so we may reasonably suppose that Matthew had recourse to informants from Galilee who had been associated in some particular way with Joseph, as, for example, James, the "brother of Jesus."

Matthew tells us that Mary is the spouse of Joseph and before they come together (§231) she is found with child. Joseph has not been forewarned of the supernatural conception and only later, when it has been accomplished, does he become aware of it (*Matt.* 1:18) - probably not until after Mary's return from her visit to Elizabeth, that is in the fourth or fifth month of her pregnancy. When she returned to Nazareth which she had left immediately after the Annunciation, her physical condition was evident, but Joseph did not know what had gone before. "Whereupon Joseph her husband (anhr) being a just man, and not willing publicly to expose her (deigmatissai), was minded to put her away privately" (*Matt.* 1:19). In the light of what we know about the laws governing the betrothal-marriage among the Jews (§231), these words offer no difficulty. Joseph, a legitimate "husband, could have put Mary away" by giving her a bill of divorce, which would have exposed her to public reproach. To avoid this, he considers putting her away privately," and he decides to do this "being a just man. This last phrase is the most important in the whole sentence and the true key to the explanation.

In a case of that kind, an upright and honest Jew who was convinced of his wife's guilt would have given her a bill of divorce with no further ado, considering this not only his right but perhaps also his duty, for a passive and silent tolerance of the situation on his part might seem approval and even complicity. Joseph, on the other hand, precisely because he is a "just man," does not do this; therefore, he was convinced of Mary's innocence and consequently decided it was unjust to expose her to the dishonor of a public divorce.

On the other hand, how could Joseph explain Mary's actual conditions? Did he perhaps think that while blameless herself, she had suffered some violence during those three months of absence? Mary's continued and deliberate silence — which would have been natural, after all, for a reserved maiden in those circumstances — might well favor a suspicion of that kind. Or did Joseph come closer to the truth and catch some glimmering of the supernatural, of the divine, in what had happened? We do not know because Matthew says nothing about it; but from Joseph's decision to break his bond with Mary without injuring her reputation, we conclude that he acted both as one convinced of her innocence and as a "just man."<sup>61</sup>

239. Joseph's perplexity was not allowed to last very long. "But while he thought on these things, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying: Do not be afraid, Joseph, son of David, to take to thee Mary thy wife, for that which is begotten in her is of the Holy Spirit. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins" (*Matt.* 1:20-21). In the Old Testament the dream had been a not infrequent means for God to use in communicating his will to men; Matthew, the Evangelist most concerned with the Old Testament (§125, §234), records various other divine communications by this means (cf. *Matt.* 2:12, 13, 19, 22; 27:19) which are not reported by the other Evangelists. The name Jesus which the child was to receive had already been communicated to his mother (§230); here the reason for the name is explained (for he "shall save," etc.) by its very etymology.

After the angel's warning, Joseph took Mary into his home. The usual wedding (*nissu'in*; §231) ceremonies were probably celebrated. Friends and relatives, no doubt, attended the modest little feast but certainly remained in ignorance of the profound mystery hidden within the bosom of the new family.

And Joseph, of the tribe of Juda and the house of David, a carpenter by trade, became the legal head of that little family.<sup>62</sup>

## THE BIRTH OF JESUS

240. The fact that Joseph and his family belonged to the house of David, originally of Bethlehem, soon had its legal consequences in the census ordered by Rome and carried out under Quirinius. We have already discussed this famous census (§183 ff.) and shall proceed here on the basis of the considerations already set forth.

The Oriental attachment to the place of family origin was and still is very tenacious. Among the Hebrews, a tribe was divided into great “families (*mishpahoth*), the families were subdivided into “paternal” houses (*batte’aboth*), and these in turn gradually gave rise to new families which swarmed from the original hive to settle elsewhere. But wherever they went, the new family groups tenaciously preserved the memory both of the family and its place of origin. They could tell you, for instance, that the tenth or the twentieth ancestor of the family was So-and-So, son of So-and-So, who had lived in such-and-such a village and founded his house there, which had given rise to other families as well. The history of the Arabs is interwoven with names like *Banu X*, *Banu Y*, that is, sons of X, sons of Y, like *Banu Quraish*, among whom was Mohammed. Even today it is not hard to find an Arab emigrant, whether Moslem or Christian, in Europe or America who can tell you exactly to what clan he belongs and what region or town is its place of origin.

It was this attachment to the cradle of one’s ancestry that provided the basis for the census among the Jews; and the Romans, during the first registration under Quirinius, followed the local practice for political reasons (§188) as well as to check in some way the depopulation of the rural districts caused by the increased migration to the cities.<sup>63</sup> Hence when the census was decreed, Joseph was obliged to present himself to the registration officials in Bethlehem ‘Because he was of the *house and family* of David (*Luke 2:4*), which came originally from Bethlehem.

241. Bethlehem is today a little city of about 7500 inhabitants, situated approximately six miles south of Jerusalem and 2500 feet above sea level. Its name was originally *Beth-Lahamu*, “house of the god *Lahamu*” a Babylonian deity worshiped also by the Canaanites of that particular locality. When the Hebrews succeeded the Canaanites, the name came to be taken in the Hebrew sense, *beth-lehem*, “house of bread.” The house of Ephrata settled there (*1 Par.* 2:50-54; 4:4) and from then on, the place was called Ephrata or Bethlehem (*Gen.* 35:19; *Ruth* 1:2; 4:11). Then, in the line descending from Isai (Jesse), David was born (*1 Par.* 2:13-15).

If Nazareth was so unimportant that it was not mentioned in any ancient document (§228), Bethlehem, for its part, was a very humble little village at the time of Jesus. In the eighth century, B.C., the prophet Micheas (5:2) had called it “little” among the many clans of the tribe of Juda. The village and its

surrounding country must have housed no more than one thousand inhabitants, most of them shepherds or poor peasants. It was, however, on the road traveled by caravans going from Jerusalem to Egypt, and in fact a stopover, or rather caravansary (Hebrew *geruth*, “hospice”) was built there by Chamaam, who was perhaps the son of one of David’s friends (2 Kings 19:37 ff.), and it was therefore called the “hospice of Chamaam” (*geruth-Chamaam* — cf. Jer. 41:17).

It is ninety-five miles by the modern highway from Nazareth to Bethlehem, and in Jesus’ days the distance may have been somewhat less. Hence it was a three or four day journey by caravan. It is not certain whether Joseph alone was obliged to appear personally in Bethlehem or whether Mary was also included in the decree. However, this may have been, the fact is that Joseph went there “with Mary, his [betroted]<sup>64</sup> who was with child” (Luke 2:5). These last words may be a delicate reference to at least one of the reasons why Mary went too, that is, the fact that her time of delivery was near and she could not be left alone. But another reason — besides the possibility that she was included in the order — may have been that the two were thinking of moving permanently to the place of origin of the House of David. Since the angel had announced that God was to give the child the throne of David his father (§230), what was more natural than to think of returning to the country of David to await the fulfillment of the mysterious plans of God? Several centuries before, the prophet Micheas had pointed to “little” Bethlehem as the place from which he would come who was to rule over Israel (§254).

242. The journey must have been very tiring for Mary. The roads of the region were not the fine, well-kept highways built by the Romans, known masters of the art, but were so poor the caravans of camels and donkeys could barely manage them. At that particular time, with all the confused traffic occasioned by the census, they must have been more crowded than usual and that much more uncomfortable. Our travelers may have had at best a donkey to carry their provisions and other necessary baggage — one of the same tribe of donkeys which can still be seen in Palestine today trudging ahead of a line of camels or following a group of foot travelers. The three or four stopovers required in the journey were perhaps spent in the homes of friends or more probably in the public inns, where, with the other travelers, they slept on the ground among the camels and donkeys.

When they arrived at Bethlehem conditions were even worse. The little village was spilling over with people crowded into all the available lodgings, and the caravansary to begin with. This was perhaps Chamaam's ancient structure (§241), rebuilt through the centuries; Luke calls it the inn (to *kataluma*), with the definite article) but it would be a serious mistake to think of it as anything even remotely resembling the most modest hostelry in any modern town. The caravansary of those days was substantially the same as the modern *khan* in Palestine (§439), that is, a moderate-sized space enclosed by a rather high wall and having only one entrance. Along one or more sides of this wall ran a colonnade, which was sometimes partitioned off at one point to form a large room with one or two smaller ones beside it. This was the whole "inn"; the animals were bedded down in the middle of the enclosure under the open sky and the travelers took shelter in the portico or in the large chamber if there was room for them; otherwise, they settled down with the animals. The smaller rooms, if there were any, were reserved for those who could pay for such luxury. And there in the midst of that confused jumble of men and animals, some haggled and bargained while other prayed to God, some sang while others slept, some ate and others relieved themselves; a man might be born and another might die, all amidst that filth and stench with which the encampments of traveling Beduins in Palestine still reek even today.

243. Luke tells us that when Mary and Joseph arrived in Bethlehem "there was no room for them in the inn" (2:7). This phrase is more studied than it seems at first. If Luke had meant merely that not another person could fit into the caravansary, it would have been enough to say "there was no room"; instead, he adds "for them," which is an implicit reference to the fact that Mary was soon to give birth to her son. This may seem a subtlety, but it is not. In Bethlehem Joseph undoubtedly had acquaintances or even relatives from whom he might have requested hospitality; though the village was crowded, some little corner could always be found for two such simple and humble people. When hundreds of thousands of pilgrims poured into Jerusalem for the Pasch (§74), the capital was jammed to overflowing no less than Bethlehem was for the census, and yet all managed somehow to find a place to stay. But naturally, at such times, even the poor little private houses, consisting usually of only one room on the ground floor, were as crowded as the inns and just as public, so far as the occupants and their actions were concerned; there was no room for privacy or reserve of any sort. Hence it is

easy to understand why Luke specifies that there was no “room for them”; since her time was near, Mary was seeking privacy most of all.

"And it came to pass while they were there, that the days for her to be delivered were fulfilled. And she brought forth her first-born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger (*Luke 2:6-7*). Mention is made only of the "manger" but, given the customs of the time, this clearly enough denotes a stable, which in those days meant a grotto or small cave cut in the side of one of the little hills near the village. Caves of this kind are still to be seen near settlements in Palestine and they are still used for this purpose. The stable which Mary and Joseph found was perhaps already partially occupied by animals; it may have been dark and filthy with dung, but it was somewhat removed from the village and therefore quiet and private, and that was enough for the expectant mother.

Hence when the two arrived in Bethlehem and saw the crowds of people, they made the best of the hospitality offered by the lonely cave in the hillside. There they decided to stay until they completed the formalities of the registration and the child was born, an event Mary expected at any moment. Joseph probably prepared some little corner in the place which seemed more comfortable and not quite so dirty. He perhaps made a bed of clean straw, took from the knapsack their provisions and other necessities and arranged them on the manger attached to the wall, and there they were, completely settled. Other comforts or conveniences were not to be had then in Palestine by two such travelers in their humble station, who had besides segregated themselves of their own will in a cave intended for animals.

In short, poverty and purity were the reasons why Jesus was born in a stable: the poverty of his legal father who did not have enough money to secure a private room among so many competitors, and the purity of his mother who wished to surround his birth with reverent privacy.

244. Among the archeological relics we have today of the life of Jesus, the stable is the one which has in its favor the oldest and most authoritative testimonies outside the Gospels. Even apart from the various apocrypha with their busy embroidery of legend, Justin Martyr, a Palestinian by birth, gives us in the second century the following precious evidence: "The child having been born in Bethlehem, because Joseph had no place in that village (kwmh) to lodge, he lodged in a certain cave (sphlaiw) near the village (sunegguz thz kwmhz ); and then, while they were yet there, Mary gave birth to the Christ

and placed him in a manger . . ." (*Dial, cum Tryph.*, 78). In the first part of the third century Origen also testifies to the cave and the manger, citing a tradition widely known "in those places and even among those not of the faith" (*Contra Celsum*, I, 51). On the basis of that tradition Constantine in 325 ordered that a splendid basilica be built on the spot (cf. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini*, III, 41-43), which was admired in 333 by the

pilgrim of Bordeaux, was respected by the Persian invaders in 614, and is still standing today.<sup>65</sup>

245. When Jesus was born, Mary "wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger." In these words, our physician-Evangelist, with his usual delicacy, is telling us clearly enough that the birth took place without the usual assistance of other persons. The mother herself takes care of the newborn infant, wraps him up and lays him in the manger. Not even Joseph is mentioned here. It is only the later apocryphal narratives which become concerned about a midwife and make Joseph go about in search of one (Protoevangelion of James, 19-20); in Luke's narrative there was no place for her, as St. Jerome pointed out: "No midwife was there; no women attendants lent their aid; she herself wrapped the child in swaddling clothes; she herself was both mother and midwife (*Adv. Helvidium*, 8).<sup>66</sup> It was not for nothing that the expectant mother had sought so anxiously a quiet and secluded place.

Thus Mary "brought forth her first-born son,"<sup>67</sup> whom the angel had heralded as heir to the "throne of David his father" (§230). But the future kingdom of the newborn Babe — at least in these its first manifestations — foreshadowed something very different from the other kingdoms of his day; for the royal audience chamber of this princely heir was a stable, his throne a manger, his canopy the cobwebs hanging from the roof, the clouds of incense the warm reek of the dung, and his courtiers two homeless human beings.

The kingdom of this princely heir, however, displayed even from its beginning certain characteristics that, were truly new and completely unknown in the kingdoms contemporary with it. Of the three persons composing that stable court, one represented virginity, one poverty, and all three humility and innocence. Exactly seven miles to the north glittered the gilded court of Herod the Great, in which virginity was a completely unfamiliar word, poverty was abhorred, and humility and innocence took the form of attempts on one's father's life, the murder of sons, adultery, incest, and



sodomy.<sup>68</sup> The true contrast between the two courts lay not in the dung in the one and the gold in the other but in their moral characteristics.

246. In any case, the homage of courtiers was indeed due the newborn descendant of David, courtiers whose social position was not too different from that of David, the shepherd, or the two permanent attendants to his manger throne. Besides, since the angel had said that the Babe was to be called the "Son of the Most-High," there was also due him the homage of the courtiers of the Most-High who were to present their respects together with the lowly courtiers of earth.

Now, Bethlehem was and still is on the edge of a plain, or rather an abandoned and uncultivated tract which can be used only for pasturing flocks. The few sheep owned by the inhabitants of the village were gathered at night into the surrounding caves and stables, but the large flocks remained always out on the heath with some shepherd to guard them. Night and day, summer and winter (§174) those numerous beasts with their few guardians formed a community apart that lived on and from the plain. Shepherds like these had the very worst reputation among the Scribes and Pharisees, for since they led a nomadic life on the plains where water was not abundant, they were dirty, smelly, ignorant of all the most fundamental prescriptions regarding the washing of hands, the purity of utensils, the choice of foods, etc., and hence more than any others they constituted that "people of the land" who, from the viewpoint of the Pharisees, deserved only the most cordial contempt (§40). They were, besides, all reputed to be thieves, and others were warned not to buy wool or milk from them because they might be stolen goods (*Baba qamma*, X, 9).

On the other hand, it was not wise to insist too much that they return to the observance of "tradition" or to try to persuade them to wash their hands well and rinse their dishes thoroughly before eating. They were tough characters who promptly and fearlessly used their clubs to bash in the heads of the wolves that came bothering their flocks, and they would not have hesitated to do the same for the Scribes or Pharisees who came bothering their consciences.<sup>69</sup> Hence these despised and pugnacious rustics were excluded from the law courts, and their testimony — like that of the thieves and extortioners — was not admitted in a trial (Tosephta, Sanhedrin, V, 5).

247. But though excluded from the law courts of the Pharisees, these very lowly shepherds enter into the royal court of the newborn Son of David by



invitation of the celestial courtiers of the Most-High.

“And there were shepherds in the same district living in the fields (agraulountez) and keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold an angel of the Lord stood by them, and the glory of God shone round about them and they feared exceedingly. And the angel said to them: Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings (euaggelizomai) of great joy, which shall be to all the people. For there has been born to you today in the town of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: you will find the infant wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying:

Glory to God in the highest

and peace on earth among men of good will!”<sup>70</sup>

(*Luke 2:8-14.*)

This episode follows immediately after the account of the Nativity, and it is undoubtedly the narrator’s intention to show that only a few hours elapsed between the two. Hence Jesus was born at night, and the vision of the shepherds also occurred at night.

248. After due praise had been offered to God in the highest heavens, one thing only was announced to the shepherds: “Peace on earth.”

Now there was peace at that time (§225), but it was a transitory peace, and its few years duration were as so many seconds on the great timepiece of human existence. The *Savior*, that is *Christ* (Messiah) *the Lord*, took advantage of those few seconds, as of a momentary lull in the storm, to be born among men, and the first thing he did was to have his celestial courtiers proclaim *peace*. But his was a peace of new coinage, dependent upon an entirely new condition. The peace of those few brief years depended upon the circumstances of the Roman Empire; it was the *pax Romana*, maintained with twenty-five legions, which nevertheless proved insufficient at Teutoburg, thereby embittering Augustus’ last years. The new peace of *Christ the Lord* was subject to the good will of God: those who with their works become worthy of that good will and on whom it is bestowed (the two are interdependent) will enjoy the new peace. They are the *peacemakers* and they will be proclaimed blessed because their title is *children of God* (§321).

The shepherds understood from the wonderful apparition of the angel and the words that he spoke that the Messiah had been born. They were rough,

untutored men, it is true, who did not know anything about the vast doctrine of the Pharisees; but as simple Israelites of the old school they did know of the Messiah promised their people by the prophets, and they had probably talked of him often during the long night watches over their flocks. Now the angel had given them a sign by which to recognize him: they would find a child wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. Perhaps the celestial messenger had even pointed in the direction of the cave where they were to find him. Hence these shepherds were still on utterly familiar ground. Whenever possible they also took refuge in those caves against the heavy rains or the intense cold. More than one of them, perhaps, had sheltered his wife in one while she gave birth to her baby and had laid his own newborn child in a manger. And now they heard from one who could not deceive that the Messiah himself shared their humble circumstances. They went therefore "with haste," says Luke (2:16), the haste prompted by joyous familiarity, while they would perhaps have been slow with perplexed reluctance to set out for the court of Herod had the Messiah been born there instead.

They reached the cave, and they found Mary and Joseph and the Infant. And they wondered. And being lordly in spirit, however poor of purse, they asked for nothing whatever and went back to their sheep. But now they felt a great need of glorifying and praising God and of telling others in the vicinity what had happened.

Before bringing this episode to a close, the careful Luke points out that "Mary kept all of these words (Hebraism for 'events'), pondering them in her heart." This is another delicate reference, as we know, to the source of his information (§142).

## THE PURIFICATION

249. The Holy Family probably did not stay in the cave very long, perhaps only a few days. As the census progressed, people left for home and there was more room in the houses of the village. One of them was taken by Joseph, who moved into it with his little family, and that was, the "house" the Magi entered a few weeks later (*Matt.* 2:11). It was perhaps in this house that the infant was circumcised, as the Law prescribed, eight days after his birth (§69), receiving the name of Jesus which had been spoken by the angel both to Mary and to Joseph (§230, §239). The angel had also said that the child would be called the "Son of the Most-High"; but he had come into the world as a descendant of Israel through the house of David, and the angel had not given

any particular instructions which would exempt this new Israelite from the obligations binding on all the others. Hence Mary and Joseph fulfilled those obligations.

And they also fulfilled the prescriptions binding on themselves. According to the Hebrew Law, a woman after childbirth was to be considered unclean and must keep to herself for forty days, if her child was a boy, eighty if it was a girl. Then she was to present herself in the Temple for purification and make an offering, which, for the poor, was fixed at a pair of doves or pigeons. If the child was her first and a male, then according to the Law, he belonged to Yahweh like the firstlings of the flocks and the first fruits of the field. Hence his parents were to buy him back by paying five shekels to the Temple. It was not necessary to bring the child to the Temple to present him to God, but the young mother usually did so to invoke upon him the blessings of heaven.

Both these customs were observed in Jesus' case. After forty days Mary went up to the Temple to be purified, offering the prescribed gift of the poor, and she took Jesus with her to present him to God and pay the five shekels. Though the two pigeons or doves cost very little, the five shekels represented a sizeable sum for those as poor as Mary and Joseph. In fact, an artisan like Joseph would barely have earned five silver shekels, about four gold dollars, in a whole fortnight of labor, and he probably had had little or no opportunity to work during their sojourn in Bethlehem. However, the meager savings that probably accompanied them from Nazareth took care no doubt of this expense, which, though extraordinary, they had surely foreseen.

There certainly was nothing about that little group of three entering the Temple of Jerusalem to attract the attention of the people idling in its porticoes, listening to the discussions of the Pharisaic teachers or trading in the "Court of the Gentiles" (§48). So many mothers came every day to be purified after childbirth and to present their first-born, that there was indeed no reason why our three should receive any special notice. But on that day in particular there was someone there in the court who had a sharper glance than the rest and was able to see what they did not: "And behold, there was in Jerusalem a man named Simeon, and this man was just and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was in him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Christ of the Lord" (Luke 2:25-26).

250. The name Simeon was very common among the Jews of that time. We are told of him only that he was "just and devout," and the most we can gather from his words is that he was well advanced in years. There is nothing to indicate that he was a priest, and much less the high priest as one of the apocrypha would have it. The fact that he bears the same name is not sufficient to identify him, as some have suggested, with Rabban Simeon, son of the great Hillel and father of the Gamaliel who taught St. Paul, and there are besides serious chronological difficulties against this theory. He was, then, an ordinary layman who kept apart from the great activities of the politicians of Jerusalem and lived in the fear of God, busied with his pious works as the shepherds of Bethlehem were busy with their sheep, and like them he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel," the promised Messiah. And just as the shepherds were informed by the angel, Simeon was forewarned by the Holy Spirit that his ardent expectation was to be fulfilled. Thus, on that day he "came by inspiration of the Spirit into the Temple. And when his parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him according to the custom of the law, he also received him into his arms, and blessed God, saying:

"Now thou dost dismiss thy servant, O Lord,  
— according to thy word — in peace!  
Because my eyes have seen thy salvation,  
which thou hast prepared before the face of all peoples:  
A light of revelation to the Gentiles,  
and a glory for thy people Israel."  
(*Luke 2:27-32.*)

The "salvation" which now satisfied at last the longing hope of Simeon was represented by that Infant only forty days old, who had nothing visibly unusual about him. And up to this point all was well. But if there had been a Pharisee standing there, one of the most genuine and typical of the lot, he would not have been able to suppress his angry scorn upon hearing that the Messiah (whoever he might be) was to bring about the salvation of "all peoples" and be a "revelation to the Gentiles," to those pagan peoples who formed no part of the chosen nation of Israel. Such statements were scandalous and subversive. It is true that Simeon added at the end that the same Messiah would be the "glory" of the people of Israel; but that last concession was too meager a recompense, a puny mess of porridge in exchange for the loss of their spiritual primogeniture — or better, unigeniture. The future Messiah was to appear in Israel and for Israel only, and the other

peoples, the *goyim*, would at the most be admitted as humble subjects and disciples of Israel in the triumphal temples of the Messiah; to consider Israel and the Gentiles equal in the fruits of salvation spelled heresy and revolution!

The genuine and typical Pharisee, as such, would have been right. Simeon could not justify his prophecy with any maxim from the great Pharisaic doctors. But he could go back much further and claim for his words the authority of God himself, who in the Holy Scriptures had declared to the future Messiah:

"And I have given thee for a covenant of the people, for a light of the Gentiles" (*Isa.* 42:6.)

and had declared shortly afterward:

"Behold, I have given thee to be the light of the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation even to the farthest part of the earth." (*Isa.* 49:6.)

Exclusivist nationalism had caused the word of God to be forgotten,<sup>71</sup> but Simeon was above the jealous particularism of the Pharisees and he evoked anew the universal decree of God.

When he had done this and had gazed on the Messiah, the aged man desired no more; he could set out now on the journey from which no traveler returns. Yet even "his [the child's] father and mother were marveling" (*Luke* 2:33) at his words, whereupon the contemplative turned to them. But as Mary alone had the precious prerogative of a real parent, it was to her that Simeon addressed himself: "Behold this child is destined for the fall and for the rise of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be contradicted. And thy own soul a sword shall pierce, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed" (2:34-35).

The contemplative, therefore, sees the light of the Messiah shine resplendent over all peoples, but it will not escape all shadow; in Israel itself many will go down to ruin because of that light, which is to be a sign of contradiction, a "sign of immeasurable envy — and profound compassion — of inextinguishable hatred — and unconquered love."<sup>72</sup> And the blows that lash out against it will strike also his mother, whose very soul will be pierced with a sword.

Is it perhaps that in the salvation wrought by that child, the mother is to be so united with her son that it will be impossible to strike him without wounding her at the same time?

251. Luke, who is fond of twin episodes, gives us next the incident of Anna (2:36-38).

He calls her a "prophetess," and there have been others in ancient Israel. Seventy years later Flavius Josephus claims that he knows future events (*Wars of the Jews*, III, 351-353, 400 ff.) and in Rome Suetonius takes him at his word (Vespasian, 5). Josephus, however, was anything but a "prophet," the ancient Hebrew *nabi*, the "man of God" who lived and died for his faith, while the prophetess Anna was truly a woman of God. Left a widow after seven years of marriage, she had spent her life in the Temple courts in fasting and prayer, and she was now eighty- four years old. She, too, "coming up at that very hour . . . began to give praise to the Lord, and spoke of him [the Infant Jesus] to all who were awaiting the redemption of Jerusalem" (2:38).

Among these latter Luke has introduced to us only Simeon and Anna but with them must have been standing many others for each of whom it was possible to exclaim: "Behold a true Israelite in whom there is no guile!" (*John* 1:47)—all of them people ignored by the sacerdotal classes, outside the pale of political rivalry and dispute, ignorant of the subtleties of rabbinic casuistry; people who had with most intense yearning concentrated their existence on the one hope of the Messiah promised to Israel centuries before.

Yet in those days in Jerusalem far more numerous certainly were the persons whose most anxious yearning was to learn the decisions of the great teachers, Hillel and Shammai, on a formidable point in question at the time, namely, whether or not it was permissible to eat an egg laid during the holy repose of the Sabbath day (*Besah*, I, I; *Edduyyoth*, IV, I).

## THE MAGI

252. Besides the celestial ministers, Luke has so far pictured for us around the newborn Messiah only very humble courtiers of earth, the shepherds of the wastelands and the two old people in the city. Matthew says nothing about any of these, but he presents instead personages who are not only eminent but in addition — and this is rather unexpected in the most Israelite of the four Evangelists — they are not Israelites and therefore are numbered among the abhorred goyim. If Luke had given us this new episode, we should have said that he introduced it here to show the fulfillment of Simeon's prophecy regarding the "revelation of the Gentiles"; but since it is Matthew there is nothing to do but accept the facts as they are variously chosen by the different narrators. "Now when Jesus was born ... there came Magi from the

East to Jerusalem, saying: Where is the newly born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East and have come to worship him. — But when king Herod heard this, he was troubled, and so was all Jerusalem with him. And gathering together all the chief priests and Scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. And they said to him: In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: And thou Bethlehem, of the land of Juda, art by no means least among the princes of Juda; for from thee shall come forth a leader who shall rule my people Israel” (*Matt.* 2:1-6).

The unexpected strangers were *magi* and they came from the East. This is the only specific information we are given concerning them and it is vague enough. The vaguest term of all is the East, which, geographically speaking, indicated all the regions beyond the Jordan, where, traveling in the direction named, we find first the vast Syro-Arabian desert, then Mesopotamia (Babylonia), and finally Persia. In the Old Testament, all three of these regions were designated as the East, even far-distant Persia (cf. *Isa.* 41:2, where reference is made to the Persian Cyrus the Great). Now, it is precisely to Persia rather than to either of the two nearer regions that the term *magi* takes us, a word which is Persian in origin and intimately associated with Zoroaster (Zarathustra) and his teaching.<sup>73</sup>

The *magi* originally were the disciples of Zoroaster. To them he had entrusted his teaching of reform for the populations of Iran and they were therefore its custodians and preachers. As a class they seem very powerful in most ancient times, as early as the era of the Medes and still earlier than that of the Achaemenids. The famous Gaumata (pseudo-Smerdis) was a *magus* who usurped the throne of the Achaemenids in 522 B.C. during the campaign of Cambyses in Egypt. But even after the murder of Gaumata, the *magi* remained a powerful group in the Persian Empire and under its subsequent governments down to the eighth century A.D. They probably studied the movements of the stars as all learned people did in those days and regions, but they certainly were not astrologers and sorcerers. In fact, as disciples of Zoroaster and the ones who faithfully transmitted the *Avesta*, they must have been the natural enemies of the astrology and divination of the Chaldeans, which are specifically condemned in the *Avesta*.

253. The Magi who had come to Jerusalem had seen a star (*astera*) in the East, understood that it was the star of the “king of the Jews,” and consequently journeyed from the East to adore him.

As for the star, I have already stated my opinion that Matthew intended to present it as something miraculous and that it is therefore not to be identified with any natural phenomenon (§174). Shortly afterward he will tell us that when the Magi left Jerusalem the star preceded them like a torch to show them the way (*Matt.* 2:9). It was said of King Mithridates that a comet appeared at his birth and at the beginning of his reign (Justin, *Histor.*, XXXVII, 2), and the same was asserted for the beginning of Augustus' imperial reign (Servius, on the *Aeneid*, X, 272), but no one ever claimed that those particular comets indicated step by step a given road for certain men to follow, waiting for them when they stopped and then moving on again ahead of them and finally coming to a halt right over their goal. But having established the miraculous nature of the star, how are we to explain the fact that the Magi recognized it as the star of the “king of the Jews”? What did they, in far-off Persia, know of a king of the Jews awaited in Palestine as the Savior?

The fact that the Magi recognize the star is, in Matthew's narrative, intimately associated with the very nature of the star itself; that is, the miraculous phenomenon is miraculously recognized as the sign of the newborn king. Thanks to recent studies we know much more today than formerly about the Magi's cultural background and possible knowledge of the Messianic expectations of the Jews. We know that in accordance with a native tradition, the Persians were awaiting a kind of savior and that they knew besides of a similar expectation in Palestine. This is treated in a footnote because it is too long a question to discuss here but too important to omit altogether.<sup>74</sup>

Matthew does not tell us how many Magi came; popular tradition set the number anywhere from two to twelve but favored the number three, undoubtedly suggested by the three gifts they offered. Around the ninth century it even proceeds to give their names, Caspar, Melchior, and Balthasar.

254. These Magi are truly strangers and completely unaware of the political conditions in Jerusalem, for as soon as they enter the city they begin to ask: “Where is he that is born king of the Jews?” There was no king of the Jews but Herod, and it was enough to know the very least about his character (§§9 ff.) to be sure that any potential competitor of his would no sooner be discovered than his days if not his hours would be numbered. Hence in the very interests of the child whom they sought, that question was as dangerous as it was naive.



The first citizens to whom it was addressed were astonished and also somewhat disturbed because an inquiry of that nature, made by men no one knew, had the flavor of dark conspiracy, which would occasion the usual civil upheavals and the slaughter of all suspects. The question spread from one to another until it finally reached the members of the court and Herod himself.

The aged tyrant who, on the mere suspicion of conspiracy, had murdered two of his sons and was about to murder a third, could not fail to be upset. But he saw immediately that if this inquiry did conceal a threat it was a far different one from any of the others he had taken care of. His magnificently organized secret police<sup>75</sup> kept him informed of the minutest happenings in the city, and they had not reported anything disturbing within the past few days. Besides it was hardly feasible to control the wires of conspiracy from a place as distant as Persia, nor was it likely that anyone so inexperienced and naive as these Magi should be sent to the scene of operations. No, there was something different at the bottom of all this, some religious superstition, very likely that old daydream about the Messiah-King whom his subjects were waiting for but whom he was not expecting in the least. In any case, it would be well to take precautions and obtain some definite information first and then play his hand craftily as usual.

Since this was obviously a religious question, Herod consulted not the whole Sanhedrin (§58) but the two groups in it who were most skilled in such matters, that is, the “chief priests and Scribes of the people” (§50, §41), and he set before them the abstract and generic question where the Christ [the Messiah] was to be born (pou o cristoz gennatai).” Once he learned where, according to Jewish tradition, the awaited Messiah was expected to be born, then he could use these poor stupid Magi to settle his own personal account with the newborn king of the Jews.

His consultants answered that the Messiah was to be born in Bethlehem, and they quoted as proof a passage of Micheas (5:1-2), which in the Hebrew text reads as follows: “And thou, Bethlehem Ephrata, though thou art little among the thousands<sup>76</sup> of Juda, out of thee shall come forth for me (one who shall be) ruler in Israel, and his goings forth [his origin] are from of old, from ancient days. Therefore, shall he [God] deliver them [to the power of the enemy] till the time wherein she that is to give birth has borne.” Note that the reply of the Scribes as recorded by Matthew is not a complete nor exact quotation of the prophet's words (§252), but the essential meaning is the

same. Bethlehem is named as the birthplace of the Messiah, and the Targum understands the passage in the same way. Hence this designation was the traditional Jewish one in those days.

The answer must have puzzled Herod. Bethlehem was a very ordinary little place, and his agents there had noticed absolutely nothing suspicious. Nevertheless, the star, the unknown Magi, and especially that title of king of the Jews all combined to excite his curiosity on the one hand and to disturb his peace on the other. To satisfy the one and restore the other, there was nothing to do but use the Magi in such a way as not to arouse their suspicions or anyone else's.

255. That was exactly what Herod did. He sent for the Magi "secretly" (*Matt.* 2:7), for he wished neither to appear too gullible in attaching that much importance to persons who were perhaps a little unbalanced nor to forego his own precautionary measures. Having therefore questioned them diligently on the time and the manner in which the star had appeared to them, he let them go on to Bethlehem; they were to search well for the newborn child and as soon as they had found him, they were to let Herod know so that he too might go there to adore him.

The best and surest precautions would have been to send a maniple of soldiers with secret orders after those comical Orientals and this would have saved the old king from waiting for the news that the child had been found. But it would also have exposed him to the jests of his subjects, for in all Jerusalem there was talk of nothing but that strange delegation, though everyone expected the whole incident to end in a farce and the Orientals to be proved a set of crazy dreamers. Since Jerusalem lay on their road, they must pass through it on the return journey, and so Herod would still have them at his disposal any way.

After their audience with the king, the Magi "went their way. And behold, the star that they had seen in the East went before them, until it came and stood over the place where the child was. And when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly. And entering the house, they found the child with Mary his mother, and falling down they worshipped him. And opening their treasures they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod they went back to their own country by another way" (*Matt.* 2:9-12). We have only the bare skeleton of the story; there are no details of time or place. But we may gather that the

Magi spent at least one night in Bethlehem since they were warned “in a dream,” while this does not exclude the possibility that they stayed there longer. We learn, too, that Joseph’s family had left the cave and were living in a house (§249).

Since they were going to do homage to a “king,” the Magi had brought the offerings required by Oriental etiquette. The palace of Herod in Jerusalem shone with gold, and clouds of fragrant resin and incense rose from the censers along its halls and porticoes. The same was true of his luxurious Herodium, where its proud builder was to be buried within a few months and which stood a short distance from Bethlehem (§12). Perhaps the shepherds of the vicinity, as they wandered the slopes of the little hill on which it rose, glimpsed now and then the tawny reflections of its gilded halls and were overtaken by the incense rolling down the breeze. In keeping, then, with the ceremonial of the great courts, the Magi offered gold, incense, and the fragrant resin which all Semitic peoples called *mor*, whence our word *myrrh*. Herod himself was lavish with gifts to other kings, especially if they were more powerful than he. For example, at that very moment his will contained a bequest to Augustus amounting to a good 1000 or 1500 talents (*Wars of the Jews*, I, 646; II, 10; cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVII, 323), a superlative sum even for those times, which, however, the lordly Emperor refused. The Magi naturally could not be as munificent as Herod, but in compensation they had the joy of seeing their gifts accepted and of realizing besides that they were very timely. While all three were an acknowledgment of the royal dignity of the Infant, the gold particularly was a boon to the strained finances of that little court which owned nothing, not even the roof above it, not even a half shekel perhaps, since five whole ones had been left in the Temple of Jerusalem (§249).

Having offered their homage, the travelers departed after a while for their own country, though not by way of Jerusalem and Jericho, but perhaps by that other road which skirted the Herodian fortress of Masada and ran along the edge of the western shore of the Dead Sea. And nothing more was ever heard of them.<sup>77</sup>

## THE SLAUGHTER OF THE INNOCENTS

256. Herod, meanwhile, was waiting for the Magi to return. But as the days passed and they failed to appear, he must have suspected that his plan had not been quite cunning enough, and that instead of fearing the jests of his

subjects in Jerusalem and depending on the unwitting co-operation of the Magi he would have done better to send a few of his cutthroats after them to relieve him immediately of all his apprehensions. When his suspicions became certainties, he became himself again and, in one of those terrible paroxysms of rage which generally preceded his orders for slaughter, he made a typically Herodian decision. He commanded that all male children under two years of age in Bethlehem and its surrounding territory be killed. He based the age limit on what the Magi had told him concerning the apparition of the star, allowing a generous margin in order to be sure that this time the child would not escape him (§173).

But the child did escape him; for though the newborn Infant of Bethlehem did not have Herod's secret police at his service, he had about him the heavenly courtiers who had already attended him the first time on the night of his birth. Before Herod's assassins could arrive, an angel appeared in a dream to Joseph and said to him: "Arise, and take the child and his mother, and flee into Egypt, and remain there until I tell thee; for Herod will seek the child to destroy him" (*Matt.* 2:13). The command admitted no delay. Joseph set out that very night on the road which led away from Jerusalem toward Egypt. And this land, in which the family of Abraham had become a nation and which through the centuries had been a place of refuge and escape for his descendants in Palestine, now gave shelter to the "first and last" among them.

While the three fugitives, with perhaps the usual little donkey, stopped at Hebron or Beersheba to make some provisions before braving the desert, Herod's order was being carried out in Bethlehem. The male children, two years old and under, were all murdered.

(Figure 36, Figure 37, Figure 38)

257. What probably was the number of victims? A likely enough bit of information tells us that Bethlehem and its territories numbered slightly more than one thousand inhabitants, and we may conclude from this that there were about thirty babies born there every year. Hence, in two years there would be sixty. But since the two sexes are about equally represented and Herod had no reason to destroy the girl babies, only one half of the newly born would have fallen victim to his cruelty, namely, the thirty male children. Even this number is too large, however, because infant mortality in the Orient is very high and a goodly number of babies never reach the age of two. Hence, we may set our figure between twenty and twenty-five.<sup>78</sup>

This inhuman slaughter unquestionably has historical value as we have noted (§10.); it is perfectly in keeping with Herod's character. But if Augustus was actually informed of it as Macrobius indicates (§9), the news would not have created much stir in the capital since there had been rumors there of a similar episode associated with the Emperor himself. Suetonius reports (August., 94) that a few months before Augustus' birth, there occurred a portent in Rome which was interpreted as forecasting the imminent birth of a king of the Roman people. The senate, composed of stubborn republicans, was terrified at the thought and in order to circumvent such a national disaster as a monarchy it ordered that no child born in that year was to be brought up. Those senators whose wives were pregnant, however, forgot their staunch republican loyalties somewhat "because each hoped for the fulfillment in his own case" (quod ad se quisque spent traheret), and they brought pressure to bear so that the senate's decree would not be carried out.

We may reasonably doubt that this incident happened, but the fact that such a rumor was current in Rome and that Suetonius recorded it suggests that if the news of the massacre in Bethlehem did reach the *Urbs* it would have been greeted only with contemptuous laughter, almost as if the old king had killed nothing more than a scorn or so of fleas. This is the historical situation; and it certainly could not be expected that the Quirites would become any more excited about the slaughter of some twenty little barbarians than over the hundred or more of their own children who had run a similar danger.

A few months after the massacre in Bethlehem, the enthroned monster who ordered it, now long since reduced to a mass of rotting flesh, sank to his death while maggots fed on his genitals (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, I, 656 ff.). The true finesse of the nemesis of history, however, is to be seen not so much in his death as in his burial. He was entombed on the Herodium, from whose summit could be seen the site of the cave in which his feared rival had been born and the place where the slaughtered babies had been buried. His burial there was his real funeral, not that celebrated with such magnificence and described with so much admiration by Flavius Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, I, 670-673).

Today if you stand on the top of the Herodium and look about, you can see nothing but ruins and the desolation of death. Only in the direction of Bethlehem are there any signs of life.

## THE SOJOURN IN EGYPT

258. Meanwhile, the three fugitives of Bethlehem had entered the desert. Keeping step with their little donkey, anxiously trying to follow the less beaten trails, looking behind them every now and then to see if they were being followed by the soldiery, they drew further and further away from human intercourse and remained isolated for at least a week, which is the probable length of their journey.

In order to make time they must have taken, upon leaving Bethlehem, the comfortable road which passed through Hebron and Beersheba; but at a certain point they probably turned right to find the old caravan route which skirted the shore of the Mediterranean and joined Palestine to Egypt. At Beersheba, then as now, began the empty, barren wasteland, but the ground was still solid underfoot. Further down, however, nearer the delta of the Nile, begins the real desert, the “sea of sand,” where there is never a bush, or a blade of grass, or a stone, nothing except the sand.

According to the apocrypha, the crossing of this region was a triumphal procession for the three fugitives, for the wild beasts ran to crouch with exemplary meekness at the feet of Jesus and date palms lowered their branches that he might gather their fruit. In reality the journey must have been extremely difficult and exhausting, especially because of the lack of water. (Figure 39)

In 55 B.C. the same journey was made by the Roman officers of Gabinius, who knew more than a little about difficult traveling yet feared that crossing more than the war which was awaiting them in Egypt (Plutarch, *Antony*, 3). In A.D. 70 Titus' army traveled it in the opposite direction on the way up from Egypt to storm Jerusalem, but they did so with all the assistance of the careful Roman service of supplies (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, IV, 658-663). The last army to make the crossing was an English one during World War I in a march from Egypt to Palestine, but among other things the English built a permanent aqueduct as they advanced, thus carrying the water of the Nile more than ninety-five miles to el-Arish, the ancient Rhinocolura.

Our three travelers, however, had to drag themselves laboriously over the shifting sands in the exhausting heat by day, spend their nights on the ground, and sustain themselves with the little food and water they were able to carry with them. And their journey lasted a good week. A modern European or American can form a clear picture of such a journey only if he has spent

sleepless nights in the open in the desolate wastes of Idumea (the Negeb of the Bible) and by day has watched some small band of travelers toil by through the sandy mist overhanging the desert of el-Arish, their donkey laden with provisions or bearing a woman with a child at her breast, and the entire little company proceeding in thoughtful silence, almost of resignation, to disappear finally across the solitude toward an unknown goal. Anyone who has had such an experience has seen more than just a bit of local color; he has witnessed historical evidences of the journey of the three refugees from Bethlehem.

At Rhinocolura Herod's threat ceased to exist, for that marked the boundary between his kingdom and Roman Egypt. From Rhinocolura to Pelusium the journey was less worried if no less difficult. At Pelusium, the usual entrance into Egypt, there were other human beings and various conveniences, and the gold brought by the Magi must have rendered excellent service and seemed more providential than ever.

Matthew tells us nothing of the place nor the length of time of the sojourn in Egypt (though the apocrypha and later legends, as usual, tell us a great deal); nevertheless, we can be reasonably sure the stay was a brief one. If Jesus was born at the end of the year 748 of Rome (§173), the flight into Egypt could have taken place only a few months later, that is, after the forty days of Marys purification in the Temple and the arrival of the Magi. Since this interval may represent several weeks or several months, the flight is usually assigned to the spring or summer of the year 749.

The fugitives had been in Egypt a few months when news came of Herod's death, which occurred in March or April of the year 750 (§12). And then once more the angel appeared in a dream to Joseph and commanded him to return with the child and its mother "into the land of Israel" (*Matt.* 2:20). The command was obeyed and the refugees went back to their own country.

## NAZARETH

259. When they reached Palestine, Joseph learned that Herod's son Archelaus was governing Judea and therefore Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Since the new ruler's reputation was an evil one (§14) he decided not to return to their former dwelling and thus renounced the intention — if indeed it had been an intention (§241) — to settle in Bethlehem, the birthplace of the house of David. In his perplexity, he was given another revelation in a dream and as a result he returned to Nazareth, ruled not by Archelaus but by Antipas

(§13, §15). Matthew closes the incident by stating that they settled in Nazareth “that there might be fulfilled what was spoken through the prophets: He shall be called a Nazarene” (2:23).

These exact words are not to be found in any of the prophecies contained in the Bible as we have it today. To suppose that they belong to a passage that was later lost is too arbitrary, and it would be against all likelihood to ascribe them to some apocryphon. Much better founded is the opinion of St. Jerome, negative though it is; he says that Matthew, “quoting the prophets’ in the plural, shows that he has taken from the Scriptures not the words but the sense.” That is, Matthew is not alluding to any specific passage but to a concept; he is not quoting specific words but an idea. In fact, we find examples of this practice in the Old Testament and in later rabbinic writings.<sup>79</sup>

But what is the thought or concept to which Matthew refers? The question has not yet been definitely answered and it is affected in part by the philological problem in the double form Nazorean and Nazarene.<sup>80</sup> But whatever the philological solution of this difficulty, it was also possible in a case like ours to make the association through some similarity or assonance alone; this type of connection is also to be found in the Old Testament especially in the case of proper names.<sup>81</sup> If we accept this possibility, then we can trace more than one allusion in Matthew’s words.

In the first place, they may refer to *Isaias* 11:1, which says of the future Messiah: “And there shall come forth a rod out of the root of Isai [Jesse, David’s father], and a flower shall rise up out of his root.” Since instead of “flower” the Hebrew has *neser*, Matthew might have found in it an echo of the name Nazareth (§228) especially since rabbinic tradition also associated this passage from *Isaias* with the future Messiah. It is also possible that there is a secondary reminiscence here of the word *nazir*, one who was a *Nazirite* by consecration of his person to God. It is true that in Hebrew *nazir* (N Z R) is not spelled like Nazareth (N S R), but for these symbolic name-associations a merely apparent resemblance or assonance was sufficient, as in similar instances in the Old Testament (*Gen.* 11:9, 17:5; *Exod.* 2:10). And perhaps a clearer prefiguration of the Messiah could be discovered in Samson,<sup>82</sup> who was the savior of his people and was called “*nazir* of God” even from his childhood as we read in the book of *Judges* (13:5), which is reckoned among the “earlier prophets” in the Hebrew Bible. Which of these possibilities and



the many others proposed by ancient and modern scholars is the true one we have no way of knowing.

260. When Joseph returned to Nazareth to dwell, toward the middle of the year 750 of Rome, the child Jesus was about two years old (§173). From this time until the beginning of his public ministry (§175) there runs a period of more than thirty years in which he lived a hidden life. Of all this long time we know nothing except for two bits of information, both, as we might expect, preserved for us by Luke, the historian whose source is the personal recollections of Jesus' mother.

In the first place, the physician-Evangelist states that when the three settled in Nazareth "the child grew, and became strong, full of wisdom; and the grace of god was upon him" (*Luke* 2:40); and shortly afterward, as if to point out that this continued, he repeats that at the age of twelve Jesus was advancing "in wisdom and age,<sup>83</sup> and grace with God and men" (2:52).

Hence Jesus grew and developed, not only outwardly in the sight of men, but inwardly before God. As he grew in body and his sensitive and intellective faculties developed, so did he grow in experiential knowledge; he developed gradually through childhood, boyhood, young manhood, and maturity both physically and intellectually.

The ancient Docetae denied the reality of this development and claimed it was only apparent and fictitious because to them it seemed incompatible with the divinity of Christ. But none other than Cyril of Alexandria, the implacable adversary of Nestorius and the vigorous exponent of the doctrine of the unity of Christ (*Quod unus sit Christus*, in Migne, P.G., 75, 1332), sustains that the laws of human nature were all obeyed in Jesus' case, including those governing normal and gradual physical and intellectual development.<sup>84</sup>

261. The other item Luke gives us concerning these years is that on one occasion Jesus was lost and found again in Jerusalem.

The parents of Jesus —so Luke (2:41) calls them simply, goneiz- went up to Jerusalem every year for the Pasch, as every good Israelite did on this most important of the "feasts of the pilgrimage" (§74). According to the Law, Mary, being a woman, was not obliged to go and neither was Jesus before his thirteenth year. Yet many women naturally accompanied their husbands, and the more devout fathers used to take their children with them even before their thirteenth year. The rabbis of the school of Shammai required that a child who could sit up astride his father's shoulders should be brought to the

Temple, while those of the school of Hillel restricted it to the youngster who could climb the Temple stairs if his father held him by the hand. In any case, pickaback or on foot, many toddlers and many more little boys made the pilgrimage of the Pasch, swelling the stream of people which poured into Jerusalem for the occasion (§74). Certainly, Jesus was taken there even as a small child, but the episode narrated by Luke occurred when he was twelve.

From rather distant places like Nazareth, pilgrims undertook the journey with a group of relatives or friends, forming little caravans that traveled and spent the night together at the stopovers along the route. There must have been three (or four) such night stops between Nazareth and Jerusalem, the distance being about seventy-five miles (eighty- eight by the modern road). They reached the Holy City a day or two before the fourteenth *Nisan* (§74), and stayed there through the fifteenth or for the whole octave, that is, through the twenty-first, when the Paschal celebrations came to a close. That year, when it came time for the departure, the boy Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem without his parents' noticing it. Though he was not with them, the two had no reason to suspect that he had stayed in the city.

The Oriental caravan is governed by a singular discipline all its own, with nothing strict or military about it. Everyone obeys the schedule for departure and arrival, but otherwise he is perfectly free. Along the road the party may break up into any number of little groups journeying a certain distance apart and the travelers may shift from one group to another as the fancy moves them. Only in the evening do they all meet again as they reach the stopover for the night. Any boy of twelve, who among the Jews was almost *sui juris*, shared this easy discipline with his elders and probably enjoyed it much more given the general liveliness of his years, while he knew very well besides how to conduct himself. Thus, during the first day's journey Jesus' parents thought he was with some other party in the caravan, but when they arrived at the first stopping place<sup>85</sup> and began to look for him among the various groups coming in, they realized he was missing.

262. In great distress, they set out for Jerusalem once more, and the next day was spent partly in the return journey and partly in their first inquiries through the city, all of which proved fruitless, so that they were obliged to continue the search until the third day. Then "they discovered him in the temple, sitting among the doctors of the Law, listening to them and asking them questions; and all his hearers were amazed at his understanding and his

answers. And when they saw him, they [his parents] were struck with astonishment, and his mother said to him: My Child, why hast thou treated us so? Indeed, thy father and I have been searching for thee in great distress! — Why did you search for me? he asked them. Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?<sup>86</sup> — Now they did not comprehend what he said to them" (*Luke 2:46-50*).

At the end of the same century, Flavius Josephus wrote (*Life*, 9) that when he was fourteen years old, that is, about A.D. 52, he was already famous in Jerusalem for his knowledge of the Law and that the chief priests and other prominent people of the city used to gather in his house to consult his opinion on difficult questions. Many other passages in his works betray him as something of a boaster and a humbug and hence we have every right not to believe what he writes here. But there may be a kernel of truth in the incident inasmuch as, being of lively intelligence, he may casually have engaged now and then in a kind of discussion with some doctors of the Law who had come to his house for other reasons. In fact, the rabbis accepted into their schools little boys of six: "from six years on we accept [the child, and with the Law] we fatten him like an ox" (*Baba bathra*, 21 a); and naturally they paid more attention to the children or boys who seemed to be quicker and more intelligent and they did not hesitate to engage in discussion with them as equals.

But the scene described in Luke is entirely different from that in Josephus. Jesus is in the Temple, in one of the courts where the Doctors habitually gathered for discussions (§48). He does not dictate opinions like the future freedman of Vespasian, but conforms to the regular academic procedure of the rabbis, which consisted of listening, asking questions, and proceeding with order so that the solution of the problem would result from the combined contribution of all those taking part in the discussion. But the contribution of this unknown boy was so extraordinary both for the appropriateness of his questions and the keenness of his observations that the first to be astonished at him were the subtle jurists of Jerusalem.

And Mary and Joseph, who probably heard some of the discussion as they waited for it to end, were very much astonished too. Nevertheless, their amazement was different from that of the Doctors; it was the wonder of those who know many things but who have not yet foreseen all their consequences and especially have never before seen those consequences in action. Mary's

grieved exclamation was a natural one for a mother. Her son answers her as the son more of a heavenly Father than of an earthly mother. If he has for the moment abandoned his human family, it is for the one sole reason which could have possibly prompted him to do so, that is, the fact that he was in the spiritual house of his heavenly Father. Jesus' answer is a summary of all his future mission.

Luke, who is writing *post eventum*, can interpret Jesus' answer in this way, that is, not as referring to the material Temple of Jerusalem as the words might first suggest. But being a precise historian, he adds immediately that Jesus' parents "did not comprehend what he said to them." They did not understand, although they knew so many things about Jesus, for the same reason that they were so amazed when they found him among the Doctors. They had not yet foreseen all the consequences of the things which they knew. And who could have confessed this old bewilderment at Jesus' answer if not Mary herself, when she spoke of it after her son had died and risen again?

That is why Luke repeats here again his precious reference: "And his mother kept all these words in her heart" (2:51). It is still another discreet and respectful allusion to his source (§142, §248).

263. We know nothing else concerning all those thirty years which Jesus spent in Nazareth. When he returned there after the episode in the Temple, he was "subject to them" (2:51), to Mary and *Joseph*. Certainly, every thinking person would have a five desire to penetrate the secret of those thirty years, but who would dare enter that sanctuary without an authoritative guide? Our official guides have stopped on its threshold, and tell us only that within it Jesus "was subject to them."

The messianic king, born into a court of purity and poverty, continued faithful to its traditions. The stable had been succeeded by a carpenter's shop and by an extremely humble home, half of it carved out of the rock of the hillside. Purity was expressed in the same forms and persons as before; poverty was now externalized in the necessity to work, accompanied and confirmed by his voluntary obedience to his parents.

Big things had been happening around the world in those thirty years. In Rome the temple of Janus was reopened, for the period *toto orbe in pace composito* (§225) was ended. In Judea, Archelaus left for exile and Roman procurators took his place. Augustus, at the age of seventy- six, ceased to be the master of this world and immediately became a god in the next by decree

of the senate. Germanicus died in the Orient after his victories over the barbarians of the North. Sejanus was lording it in Rome while Tiberius, ever ready to oust him from office, kept an eye on him from Capri. In Nazareth, meanwhile, it was as though Jesus did not exist. Similar outwardly to all those of his own age, he danced on his mother's knee, then helped her child-fashion, then assisted Joseph in the shop, later began to read and write, recited the *Shema'* (§66) and the other customary prayers, attended the synagogue. As a young man he probably took an interest in the fields and the vineyards, in the work Joseph was doing in Nazareth and its pleasant environs, in questions concerning the Jewish Law, in the Pharisees and Sadducees, in the political events in Palestine and abroad. To all appearances his days were spent quite simply in this wise.

His daily language was Aramaic, spoken with the accent peculiar to the Galileans, which betrayed them the minute they began to talk. But since his country was a border territory in which there was continual contact with the surrounding Greek populations, a certain knowledge of Greek was almost a necessary requirement. Hence it is probable that he used Greek sometimes and even more probable that he used Hebrew.

264. Jesus also had relatives. As his mother had a "sister" (*John* 19:25), so he had "brothers" and "sisters" who are mentioned more than once by the Evangelists (and also by Paul, *1 Cor.* 9:5). Four of these "brothers" are known to us by name - James, Joseph, Simon, and Jude (*Matt.* 13:55; *Mark* 6:3). His "sisters" are not named, but there must have been several because mention is made of "all" of them (*Matt.* 13:56). The mention of such a numerous troop of relatives is in complete harmony with the customs of the Orient, where the ties of kinship are traced out and cherished even in their most distant and tenuous ramifications. Hence those who are closest are designated by the generic term brothers and sisters, though they may be only cousins of various degree. In the Hebrew Bible the nouns *ah* "brother," and *ahoth*, "sister," often denote persons far removed in kinship, especially since in ancient Hebrew there is no precise term for cousin exclusively. The "brothers" and "sisters" of Jesus, therefore, were his cousins.

Now, not all these many relatives looked on Jesus with favor. In the middle of his public life, we find that "not even his brethren believed in him" (*John* 7:5). Nor is it reasonable to suppose that this antipathy or alienation or whatever it was began with Jesus' public life. It must have been rather the open manifestation of an old feeling toward him which had brooded in the

hearts of his kinsmen even during his hidden life in Nazareth. Jesus himself gives us the reason for this though in general terms: "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, and among his own kindred, and in his own house" (*Mark* 6:4). In any case, besides these resentful kinsmen there were others most faithful to him, *usque ad mortem et ultra*, who undoubtedly surrounded him with their kindness even while he was still an obscure boy and youth in Nazareth. First among them all were Mary and Joseph, then "James the brother of the Lord" (*Gal.* 1:19), that is, James the Less, then others (*Acts* 1:14) some of whom perhaps had shed with time their earlier resentment.

After the account of Jesus' childhood, we find no further mention of Joseph nor do we catch the least glimpse of him during the public life. Everything points to the supposition that Jesus' legal father died during the thirty hidden years of his son's life. If he had survived those years as Mary did, some mention of him would surely have been preserved in the ancient catechesis and therefore in the Gospels which derive from it. Officially nothing remained of him except the title of his fatherhood which he bequeathed with his trade to his putative son: "Is not this the carpenter's son?" (*Matt.* 13:55); "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary . . .?" (*Mark* 6:3.)

## CHAPTER XV: From the Beginning of the Public Ministry to the First Pasch

265. JOHN THE BAPTIST AND THE BAPTISM OF JESUS 265. UP TO this point, Luke's narrative has been divided parallel-wise between John the Baptist and Jesus. The Evangelist has left them both boys, one in the desert and the other in Nazareth, saying of each of them that he was growing in strength and wisdom (§257, §260).

At the end of the dim obscurity of these thirty years, John appears in public to be followed soon afterward by Jesus, almost as if to parallel the brief time that separated their births. John has been announced as the precursor or harbinger, and such he is to be much more in his public life than in his unnoticed birth.

Early Christian catechesis usually began with the appearance of John (§113); hence for this period the other Gospels, including Mark's summary narrative and the nonsynoptic John, proceed hand in hand with *Luke*.

During his long sojourn in the desert regions, John had lived an austere and solitary life. Since, when he appears in public, we find him "clothed in camel's hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins, and eating locusts and wild honey" (*Mark* 1:6), we may certainly suppose this was his way of life during the long years of solitude. After all, both his dress and his food were usual with those who, out of devotion to some ascetic ideal, thus lived a hermit's life. Even today the Beduin of Palestine ordinarily weave their cloaks of camel's hair and for want of something better eat locusts, which they sometimes even dry and store. About twenty-five years after John's appearance, Flavius Josephus, for ascetic motives, spent three years with a hermit named Banus or Bannus who "lived in the desert, and used no other clothing than grew upon trees, and had no other food than what grew of its own accord" (*Life*, 2). Hermits of this type were probably not rare, especially in the deserts east of Jerusalem and along the Jordan. We are not warranted, however, in supposing them affiliated with the Essenes, for the very community life prescribed for the latter (§44) excludes per se the solitary existence of these hermits.

In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius (§175), "the word of the Lord came to John, the son of Zachary, in the desert" (*Luke* 3:2). His mission to prepare the way for the coming Messiah is about to begin, and he inaugurates it by proclaiming: "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" (*Matt.* 3:2.)

From this general announcement, he comes down to particulars. In the first place, he demands two rites of all those who come to him, a physical ablution and the open confession of the sins they have committed. In the second place, noticing many Pharisees and Sadducees among those flocking out to him, he greets them with the words: "Brood of vipers! Who has shown you how to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruit befitting repentance, and do not think to say within yourselves: We have Abraham for our father. For I say to you that God is able out of these stones to raise up children to Abraham. For even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that is not bringing forth good fruit is to be cut down and cast into the fire" (*Matt.* 3:7-10).

266. There were many messianic preachers both before and after John, but they were of an entirely different breed.

Immediately after the death of Herod the Great, there had appeared first a certain Simon of Perea, who set fire to the royal palace and proclaimed himself king. Then in Judea a shepherd named Athronges had set up a regular government. In Galilee a certain Judas, son of Ezechias, took possession of the armory at Sephoris. Next came Judas the Galilean who founded the Zealot faction (§43), and later still we meet Theudas, the Egyptian preacher, and others mentioned by Josephus; and certainly, there were many more besides of whom no specific mention is made.

But their methods were quite different from John's. All without exception declared that the sons of Abraham were the first people of the earth, and to assure a real political supremacy for them they all had recourse to arms. Many actually claimed to be kings; others asserted that they could perform miracles or at least promised to perform them. A few laid hands on other people's property and risked other men's lives though rarely their own. It absolutely never occurred to any one of them to improve his followers morally.

John traveled entirely in the opposite direction. He declared that sons of Abraham could rise up even from the stones; he promised no kingdoms or supremacy; he neither touched weapons himself nor appealed to any armed force; he ignored political matters; he worked no miracles; he was poor and naked; but in recompense one moral admonition contained all his preaching: The kingdom of God is imminent, hence change your way of thinking!

In fact, the very first word of his proclamation, "Repent!" meant just this: "Change your way of thinking!" The Greek word is *metanoeite*, or "change



your mind"; in Hebrew it was *shub*, which means to "return" from a false road in order to set out on the right one. In both languages the concept is the same, a complete transformation in the heart of man.

Now, deep sincere feeling naturally seeks expression of some sort, and an external physical act may be evidence and proof of an inner spiritual one. So, John required those "changing their way of thinking" to confess their sins as an external manifestation of the change, and to undergo a physical ablution as its proof and symbol.

267. In other ancient religions, the public acknowledgment of one's sins and some form of bodily ablution were included in special rites for the simple reason that the first answers a natural impulse of the human spirit when it becomes conscious of wrong-doing, and the second is the easiest and most spontaneous symbol of spiritual cleanliness.

Judaism practiced both rites on various occasions. For example, on the day of Atonement or Kippur (§77), the high priest performed them together, for he acknowledged the sins of the whole people (*Lev.* 16:21) and performed a special ablution on himself (*ibid.*, 16:24). John did not go beyond the general pattern of Judaism, but his originality lay in the fact that he required these rites as preparation for the kingdom of God, which he now proclaimed as imminent.

Hence it was a kingdom which concerned the spirit above all else just as these rites did, a kingdom completely different from those heralded by all other messianic preachers. They were concerned only with money and weapons, with angels who were to swoop from heaven sword in hand and drive the Romans helter-skelter out of the way, with Israel's political dominion over the pagans and other very old things which were quite easy to grasp; but the kingdom heralded by John was very difficult and altogether new. If his teaching was not completely original, that was because it was directly related to the ancient teaching of Israel's authentic prophets. They too had insisted on works of justice much more than on the ceremonies of the liturgy (*Isa.* 1:11), on the circumcision of the heart and the ears more than that of the flesh (*Jer.* 4:4; 6:10); they too traveled the road of the spirit more than that of ritual formalism. And it was precisely this road of the spirit, too often forsaken by contemporary Judaism, which John entered anew. The old standard-bearers of Israel, the prophets, had long since vanished; for several centuries now had echoed the lamentation:

"Our signs we do not see;  
there is no longer a prophet,  
there is none among us that knoweth anything!"  
(*Ps.* 73 [74]: 9.)

Now John rose up as the last and final prophet. Later, in fact, Jesus is to say: "Until John came, there were the Law and the Prophets; since then the kingdom of God is being preached" (*Luke* 16:16).

268. Many flocked from Judea and Jerusalem to hear John preach; even Flavius Josephus testifies to the great authority he acquired over the multitudes (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 116-119). His immediate and permanent disciples led the same austere life (*Luke* 5:33), but with the others who came to him he was very understanding and forgiving. He commanded neither publicans nor soldiers to forsake their professions; he merely ordered the former not to be extortionate and the latter not to commit violence. This gentle attitude in a man so austere did not please the Pharisees and Sadducees, who had run out with the crowd to hear him and had elicited the far from gentle invective quoted above (§265.); and later the Scribes and Pharisees especially took their revenge by questioning or openly denying the legitimacy of his mission (*Luke* 7:29-30; cf. 20:1-8).

Despite these difficulties, however, the current started by John became very powerful. Many of his disciples later followed Jesus, and of these we know the names of Andrew and Peter, James and John. Others, however, were more attached to the person of the precursor than to the spirit of his teaching, and they remained aloof on the threshold of Christianity even after John and Jesus had died (cf. *Acts* 18:25; 19:3-4). Still another few could not help being jealous of Jesus while both were still alive (*John* 3:26).

269. John lingered for the most part along the banks of the Jordan, at that part of the river most accessible to those coming from Jerusalem, that is, a little above its entrance into the Dead Sea. It was a convenient place to perform the ablution ceremonies in the river. He did go elsewhere on occasion, however, probably when the heavy rains left the river bank slippery with mud or the current dangerous. Then he chose other spots near some source of water, and we have incidental mention of two of them: Bethany beyond the Jordan where the river bank curved into a broad and quiet cove (§162), and Ainon, near Salim, identified with a place about eight miles south

of Beisan (Scythopolis) as early as the fourth century (Eusebius, *Onomasticon*, s.v.).

Meanwhile, the crowds thronging to hear John were swelling in number, and among them the question and the wonder had begun to circulate as to whether he himself was not the Messiah so long awaited; the profound moral difference between him and other preachers of the messianic kingdom had impressed everyone. But John abruptly quashed this tentative hope with a very clear, precise statement. He was not the great One who was to come; he immersed — Greek, “baptized” — only with water, but after him would come one more powerful than he who would baptize with the Holy Spirit and with fire. The One to come shall also winnow: with fan in hand, he will clean his threshing floor, gathering the wheat into his barn and throwing the chaff into the fire.

To the Scribes and Pharisees these words had a revolutionary ring. The threshing floor was evidently the chosen nation of Israel; but who were the wheat and who the chaff? If the good grain meant the disciples of the rabbis who observed the “traditions” and the chaff meant all the others, then they agreed perfectly with John. But this singular preacher gave little guarantee that his opinion was at all like theirs if only because he showed such kindness to publicans and soldiers, who should instead be rejected as belonging to the filthy, impure “people of the land” (§40).

Enough; there was nothing to do but await the great One to come announced by John and meanwhile keep careful watch over this precursor of his.

270. One day, along with the crowd came Jesus. He was coming from Nazareth, no doubt with other countrymen of his because John’s fame and the enthusiasm for him must have spread even to Galilee. He was lost among the penitents, one among many. No one knew him, not even John, his kinsman. Referring later to this day on which they first met, John gave testimony of Jesus: “And I did not know him. But he who sent me to baptize with water said to me: He upon whom thou wilt see the Spirit descending, and abiding upon him, he it is who baptizes with the Holy Spirit” (*John* 1:33).

The fact that John does not know Jesus is not surprising if we remember his life. As a boy he had already left his father’s house to live in the desert (§237) and there is nothing to indicate any periodic returns to visit his relatives during the twenty-odd years of his solitude. In the meanwhile, his parents,

both of them already old when he was born, must have died; but both, and especially his mother, must have been with him in spirit even in the desert. After all, why had he withdrawn into the desert if not because of the extraordinary things his parents, and his mother especially, had told him regarding his birth? He was a man of faith and lived entirely by his faith.

Perhaps this was also the reason why he had not tried to know in person the mysterious son of Mary who had been born six months after him. He knew him spiritually, and for the rest, his faith told him that God in his own good time would have him know him personally. But he had a kind of premonition. When he caught sight of Jesus in the crowd preparing to be baptized, the voice of the Spirit made him surmise in that one among many the Messiah and his kinsman, even though he had not yet seen the predetermined sign (*Matt. 3:14-15*). When Jesus had overcome John's discreet reluctance, he baptized him and then his suspicion became certainty.

For there appeared the sign by which Jesus was to be recognized. Apparently, a penitent but confessing no sin, he had gone into the water, and as he emerged, behold the heavens opened and the Spirit descended in the form of a dove and remained on him, and from above was heard a voice saying: "Thou art my beloved Son, in thee I am well pleased (*Mark 1:11*).

This heavenly manifestation brings us back to the cave of Bethlehem (§247). There the Messiah began his physical existence, here his ministry. There he had been announced to shepherds, here to repentant sinners while a sign was given to the innocent Precursor. And just as in Bethlehem, this announcement on the banks of the Jordan produced a very limited effect from the point of view both of time and the number of persons to whom it was given. A few months later, two of John's disciples were sent by their master himself to ask Jesus if he was really the Messiah they were waiting for (§339).

## THE DESERT AND THE TEMPTATION

271. In fulfilling the rite of his precursor, Jesus associated himself with John's ministry and at the same time began his own. But for every great undertaking there is a proximate as well as a remote preparation, and Jesus obeyed this common norm also, prefacing his public life with a period of preparation.

This lasted forty days. Forty is a typical Old Testament number which recurs in many biblical episodes in expressions of time. The instances most closely resembling ours are that of Moses, who remains on Mount Sinai in the

presence of Yahweh for “forty days and forty nights: he neither ate bread nor drank water” (*Exod.* 34:28); and the other of Elias, who, having eaten the food brought him by the angel, “walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, unto the mount of God, Horeb” (*3 Kings* 19:8). It is related that Jesus, after his baptism, was “led (anhcqh) by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil, and when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, afterwards he was hungry” (*Matt.* 4:1-2). This is not to be interpreted as the ordinary Jewish fast renewed each day for forty consecutive days. The Jews fasted until sunset but ate in the evening (as the Moslems do today during the month of the *Ramadan*), but Jesus' fast is uninterrupted for forty days and forty nights, exactly like that of Moses and Elias.

It is clear that this fact is recorded as something absolutely supernatural. Besides, early Christian catechesis could have learned of it from none other than Jesus himself. There was no witness to those forty days; “he was with the beasts,” as Mark says (1:13), summing up this forty- day period in a few brief words while the other two Synoptics treat it more fully.

The lack of more definite information, and above all the supernatural character of the events described, make it particularly difficult to explain this period, much more difficult than other pages of the gospel story which are greatly discussed today. The others will certainly be reduced to secondary importance when some form of spirituality — even though non-Christian — dethrones the heavy positivism dominating scholars today; but the forty days in the desert will remain for every mind and every age a closed book, in which only a word here and there may be glimpsed in passing.

The title of the book, however, or rather its general content is quite legible, and it was accurately deciphered by the early catechesis: “For we have not a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities: but one tempted in all things, like as we are, without sin” (*Heb.* 4:18, cf. 2:17-18). In other words, for the original Christian catechesis the meaning, general but genuine, of the forty days in the desert was simply that Jesus permitted himself to be tempted in order to complete his “likeness” to his followers, who are also exposed to temptation, and to be for them both an example and a source of consolation in their “infirmities.” This interpretation is, besides, psychologically sound.

This is the title of the closed book as it was read by the first bearers of the good tidings: the reading of its three chapters has been left to the inclination

and ability of the individual.

272. According to a tradition which is attested in the seventh century but which goes back perhaps to the fourth, the place where Jesus spent this fast is the mountain the Arabs today call the mount "of the forty days" (*Jebel Quarantal*); its peak in the time of the Machabees was called *Duq* ("observatory"), and on it rose the small fortress where Simon, the last of the Machabees, was assassinated. The mountain rises about 1600 feet above the Jordan Valley, walling it in completely toward the west above Jericho. The place has always been more or less deserted, and only in the fifth century did the numerous caves which honeycomb the slopes come to be used as dwellings by Byzantine monks. Hence, if Jesus was baptized in the Jordan in the vicinity of Jericho — as is probable (§269) — he would have had to walk only a few miles to reach the place of his retreat.

"As often as I have been among men, I have come back less a man," exclaimed, a few years later, a philosopher in Rome who did not practice what he preached. Jesus, in the eve of his mission among men, completely isolated himself from men for forty days, almost as if to store up an abundance of that humanity which they so sorely lacked and which he was to diffuse among them.

The extraordinary circumstances, even from the physical point of view, in which those forty days were spent we seem to glimpse in the words of the two Evangelists, who tell us that Jesus was hungry "afterwards" (*Matt.* 4:2), or when "they [the forty days] were ended" (*Luke* 4:2). Are we, then, to suppose that he did not feel any hunger at all before? Did he perhaps spend those forty days in an ecstasy so deep and so transcendent that the ordinary physical life of the body was almost suspended? These are questions which the historian has no means of answering and he leaves the field not so much to the theologians as to the mystic.

273. When, after forty days, Jesus did feel the pang of hunger, he was confronted by the tempter, to whom Mark refers only as "satan" (§78) and Luke as the "devil," while Matthew uses both terms. Mark's summary narrative does not list the separate temptations, nor, for that matter does it mention Jesus' hunger. The other two Synoptics record three separate temptations but in different order. That in Matthew seems to be preferable.

"And the tempter . . . said to him: If thou art the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread! — But he answered and said: It is

written, 'Not by bread alone does man live, but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God'" (*Matt.* 4:3-4). The quotation is from *Deuteronomy* 8:3, and Matthew's rendering agrees with the Greek of the Septuagint. But Jesus undoubtedly was quoting from the original Hebrew, which reads, "Not by bread alone does man live; but by all that comes forth from the mouth of Yahweh does man live." The second clause refers to the manna, mentioned in the same verse, which had been produced by order of the "mouth of Yahweh" that the Hebrews might find sustenance in the desert.

The tempter had challenged Jesus to use the miraculous power which was his as Son of God in order to obtain something which was obtainable by non-miraculous means. Jesus answered that the bread which man needs may be obtained not only through the usual natural means, but also through a special disposition of divine Providence, as in the case of the manna, without the indiscriminate use of miraculous powers at the mere prompting of others. The tempter's purpose had been to discover whether Jesus was and knew himself to be the Son of God, and he had failed. His attempt to elicit a superfluous miracle had come to naught. The solicitude for physical sustenance to which he subordinated miraculous power; Jesus subordinated instead to the providence of God.

274. The second temptation, like the third, is in a completely superhuman realm: "Then the devil took him [with him] (*paralambanei*) into the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple (*ieron*) and said to him: If thou be the Son of God, throw thyself down; for it is written, 'He will give his angels charge concerning thee, and upon their hands they shall bear thee up lest thou dash thy foot against a stone.' — Jesus said to him: It is written further, 'Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God'" (*Matt.* 4:5-7). The "holy city," as it is still called today by the Arabs (*el Quds*), is Jerusalem, explicitly named in the parallel account of Luke. The "pinnacle of the temple"— not of the "holy place" (*naoz*) — was the corner where Solomons Porch joined the Royal Porch (§48) and it rose high above the Cedron valley.

The devil therefore invites Jesus to prove that he is the Messiah. If he is the Son of God, what more splendid demonstration of it than to cast himself into space there before the people crowding the Temple courts, for the angels will rush to bear up the falling Messiah and set him on the ground as gently as the leaf falls cradled in the breeze.

Historically speaking, the devil's opinion was not unique; it was shared by many Jews of the time. Twenty years later, under the procurator Antony Felix (52-60), there was a mushroom crop of messianic wonder-workers and the Romans killed a "great multitude" of them, as Josephus says (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 259 ff.). He records in particular that a false Egyptian prophet gathered thousands of disciples on the Mount of Olives, promising them that from there he would enter into Jerusalem, which lay below them, and sweep away the Romans doubtless by virtue of some dazzling celestial assistance. In short, the Egyptian was following the devil's advice to Jesus, except that his great display of messianic prestige was to take place in the eastern part of the Cedron valley instead of in the west where the pinnacle of the Temple rose.

The devil, too, quotes Scripture this time —that is, *Psalms* 90 [91]: 11-12 — just as Jesus had done in the previous temptation. But as St. Jerome ironically observes, he shows himself to be a very poor exegete because the Psalm promises divine protection to those who are devout and observe God's law, not to anyone who arrogantly challenges God. And Jesus' second quotation, from *Deuteronomy* 6:16, corrects the devil's distorted interpretation of the Scriptures.

How did this and the following temptation take place, in a real and objective manner or only in the form of suggestion or subjective vision? In the Middle Ages, people began to believe that the whole episode occurred in a vision, for it was considered unworthy that Christ should be carried here or there by the devil and be even restrictedly in his power. The early Fathers, however, had no such difficulty and ordinarily interpreted the facts as real and objective happenings. In addition, Luke seems to have been of the opinion of the Fathers, for at the end of his account of the three temptations there is a veiled reference to the events of the Passion of Jesus as new assaults by the devil (§276), and those events were certainly real and objective.

275. "Again the devil took him to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them. And he said to him: All these things will I give thee if thou wilt fall down [at my feet] and worship me! —Then Jesus said to him: Begone, Satan! For it is written, 'The Lord thy God shalt thou worship and him only shalt thou serve'" (*Matt.* 4:8-10). Luke adds a few details to this account (4:5-8), namely, that the vision of all the kingdoms of the world took place "in a moment of time" (en stigmh cronou) or as we should say, "in the twinkling of an eye," and that the devil, in pointing out the



power and glory of those kingdoms, declared, “for to me they have been delivered, and to whomever I will I give them.”

In this last statement the father of lies was perhaps lying a little less than usual. In any case, the exaggerated boastfulness of his claim is self-evident for the Sacred Scriptures repeatedly declared that all the kingdoms of the earth belonged not to the devil but to Yahweh, God of Israel (*Isa.* 37:16; 2 Par. 20:6; etc.) together with his Messiah (*Dan.* 2:44; Ps. 71 [72]: 8-11; etc.). It is noteworthy, however, that the third temptation (which Luke places second) does not begin with the challenge, “If thou be the Son of God,” as the first two did. Had the devil perhaps been convinced of the contrary, or did he think such a formula of doubt unnecessary in this last and most violent attack?

We know nothing whatever about this, just as we do not know the “very high mountain” on which the vision of the kingdoms took place and which Luke does not even mention. No one familiar with Palestine can consider it Thabor or Nebo as some commentators have in the past, for both of these are modest little peaks — Thabor is 1820 feet above the Mediterranean and Nebo 2700 — and anyone who has ever climbed them knows very well that not even all of Palestine can be seen from their summits. But even if it had been Mont Blanc or some other higher mountain, the natural view would never have included “all the kingdoms of the world.” It was, therefore, a vision, and while it did occur on the top of the unnamed mountain, it was effected by preternatural means to us unknown.

The devil asks Jesus for the homage which was given to kings of the earth and to God in heaven, namely, prostrate adoration. It is the act of one who considers himself inferior to the one adored and accepts subjection to him. Jesus answers the proposal with a quotation from Scripture (*Deut.* 6:13) which is contained in the passage that forms the first part of the *Shema*’ (§66). In the original Hebrew the passage is somewhat different from the reading in the two Synoptics: “Yahweh thy God shalt thou fear, and him shalt thou serve.” But the gospel rendering is implicit in this original.

276. All three temptations bear a marked relationship to the messianic mission of Jesus, against which they are directed. The first tries to sidetrack him to a convenient and comfortable messianism; the second to a messianism entrusted to empty wonder-working exhibitions; the third to a messianism spending itself in political glory. Just as Jesus has now overcome the three

temptations, so in his subsequent activity will he continue to contradict the principles on which they were based.

After the third temptation, Matthew adds that the devil, as if in obedience to Jesus' command to be gone, actually left him, and "behold angels came and ministered to him" (*Matt.* 4:11). Luke does not mention the angels but offers a detail regarding the devil's departure. He "departed from him until a favorable time" (ακρι καιρου — *Luke* 4:13). There is no danger of mistaking the "time." It is the coming Passion of Jesus when he will exclaim to the mob trailing Judas, "This is your hour, and the power of darkness" (*Luke* 22:53), when Satan will enter into Judas (*ibid.*, 3) and will sift the Apostles like wheat (*ibid.*, 31). On that occasion, Jesus will tell his Apostles to pray that they may not enter into temptation (*ibid.*, 40) and he himself, entering upon his last agony, will pray with greater intensity (*ibid.*, 44). Now it is at precisely this time that Luke, who has not mentioned the ministrations of the angels after the three temptations, speaks of the angel that descends from heaven to strengthen him (*ibid.*, 43). In Luke's mind, therefore, the Passion is the favorable "time" Satan chooses to launch his final and most violent assault.

## THE DECLINE OF JOHN AND THE RISE OF JESUS

277. In the meanwhile, John the Baptist continued his ministry and the potentates of Jerusalem continued to watch him with increasing vigilance (§269).

Who, after all, was this independent hermit, neither Pharisee nor Sadducee, neither Zealot nor Romanophile, neither Essene nor Herodian, who administered a baptism not included in the Jewish ceremonial and preached a "change of mind" (§266) not contemplated in the casuistry of the Scribes? If he had stayed a hermit in his desert with a meager retinue of disciples at the most, they might have put up with it; but he attracted multitudes who came trooping out to him from Jerusalem and Judea no less than from distant Galilee. Undoubtedly the man exercised a moral influence of the first order and those in Jerusalem who held the reins of Judaism could not let him go unbridled any longer. He was either with them or against them. Let him declare once and for all who he was and what he wanted!

To get this information they had recourse, naturally, to a committee, which, since the matter concerned everyone more or less, was made up both of priests and Levites (for the most part Sadducees) and of representative

Pharisees, and which set out in a body from Jerusalem for Bethany beyond the Jordan (§269) where John was preaching at the time. The committee appeared on the scene not to accuse but to investigate. Its members represented the most important and right-thinking Jews, who had the right to know the truth, hence they asked John: “Who art thou?” (*John* 1:19).

Almost four and a half centuries earlier the most important and right-thinking citizens of Athens had asked the very same question of Socrates: “In short, who are you?” (Arrianus, *Epictetus*, III, I, 22.) But even in its vagueness the question of the worthies from Jerusalem had a very definite purpose. The great throngs which followed the Baptist kept asking with increasing insistence whether or not he was the Messiah and the committee wanted to find out what John himself thought about it.

But John “confessed, and did not deny, and he confessed: I am not the Christ [Messiah]” (*John* 1:20). And they replied: Are you then Elias whom all await as the precursor of the Messiah? Are you the prophet, equal to Moses, who is to appear in the messianic age? To all these questions John answered: No! — But then who are you, insisted the delegates, for we have to bring some answer back to Jerusalem! And John said, “I am the voice of one crying in the wilderness: Make straight the way of the Lord, as said Isaias the prophet” (*Isa.* 40:3).

This answer did not satisfy the commission, especially the Pharisees. So, they replied: If you are not the Christ nor Elias nor a prophet, then why do you baptize? And then John repeated the announcement he had already made to the multitude: he was baptizing with water, but in their midst stood one whom they did not know, who would come after him, whose sandal strap he was not worthy to loose.

278. The day after this encounter, Jesus, having ended his fast, came once more to John near the river. John caught sight of him in the crowd, and pointing him out to his disciples, he exclaimed: “Behold the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is he of whom I said: After me there comes one who has been set above me, because he was before me”; and after alluding to the miraculous apparition at the time of Jesus’ baptism, he concluded: “And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God” (*John* 1:29-34).

The metaphor “Lamb of God,” which John uses here, suggested to his Jewish hearers the real lambs sacrificed every day in the Temple of Jerusalem

and especially during the celebration of the Pasch. Some listener better versed in the Scriptures may have recalled that the future Messiah was described as a sheep led to the slaughter for the evil deeds of others (*Isa.* 53:7 and 4), and that some of the prophets had been likened to the gentle little animal which was the usual sacrificial victim (*Jer.* 11:19). The connection between the two concepts of Son of God and sacrificial lamb probably escaped almost all of John's listeners, but to him it must have been very important for he repeated it on the following day.

The next day (this specific chronological information is given us by the careful Evangelist John, 1:35, cf. §163), while John was speaking with two of his disciples, he again saw Jesus nearby, and pointing to him he again exclaimed: "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two disciples, struck both by the phrase and by the repetition of it, left John and began to follow Jesus, who was moving away. Jesus turned around and saw them, and asked them: "What is it you seek?" And they answered, "Rabbi . . . where dwellest thou?" And Jesus said to them, "Come and see." In fact, they accompanied him to where he was staying. Since the crowd that came to hear John was so great, this was probably one of the huts used by those guarding the crops, which are still to be seen in use in the valley about Jericho. It was about four in the afternoon. John's two disciples were so overcome by the power of the unknown Rabbi, that they stayed with him the rest of that day and undoubtedly through the night as well.

The two of them had come down from Galilee. One was Andrew, the brother of Simon Peter; the other is not named, but in this particular narrative, that is enough to indicate who he was as clearly as though his name were given. It was the Evangelist John, the witness who was able to recount all these things so precisely as to the day and the hour. It was the youth, not yet twenty, destined to become the "disciple whom Jesus loved" (§155), and who, on that day he first met Jesus, could have written in the book of his life with much deeper truth than Dante the day he met Beatrice: *Incipit vita nova*.

After that first stay with Jesus, the enthusiastic Andrew had to share his great joy with his brother Simon. When he found him, he said to him: Do you know? We have found the Messiah! And so, Peter went back with him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and then said: You are Simon, the son of John; but you shall be called Cephas. — In Aramaic *kepha* means "rock," but it does not seem to have been used as a proper name either in the Old Testament or at the time of Jesus. Simon probably had no idea what that unexpected

announcement signified or he may at the most have thought that the unknown Rabbi was following some special train of thought of his own (§397).

## GALILEE

279. On the day after that, as we are told by the Evangelist who witnessed these things, Jesus returned to Galilee. The spiritual link between his mission and that of the Precursor had been forged and for the moment there was nothing more to keep him in Judea.

Jesus' first return to Galilee is not recorded in the Synoptics, which mention only the second, after the Precursor had been imprisoned (§298). As usual, the Evangelist John supplies what they have omitted. He does not stop to describe the journey, however (he describes the second journey, which the others do not, §293), but goes on to speak of what happened after Jesus' arrival in Galilee. Hence that is where the following events took place.<sup>87</sup>

With Jesus must have gone the three disciples who had left John the Baptist to join him, namely, the brothers Andrew and Simon Peter, as well as John, who is not named. They were all from the town of Bethsaida, on the border of Galilee (§19), which seems to have been the first stop in the return trip. Upon their arrival, the three could not have failed, in their excitement and fervor, to tell their relatives and friends all that they knew of Jesus, pointing him out enthusiastically to their townsmen. Among them, Jesus met a certain Philip, and he said to him: "Follow me!" It was not a matter of following him for a few hours but for always; and Philip, no doubt already fired with enthusiasm by the accounts of his three fellow townsmen, obeyed with zealous alacrity.

In fact, he began in his turn to tell others of the wonderful Rabbi they admired so much, but here he met a cold reception. Having come upon his friend, Nathanael, he confided to him, quivering with joy: Do you know? We have found him of whom Moses and the prophets speak! It is Jesus, son of Joseph of Nazareth! — Nathanael must have been a man of great poise and tranquility. He was besides from Cana (*John* 21:2), a town near Nazareth, and so he was well acquainted with the country of the Rabbi whose praises were being sung so vigorously. When he heard that he came from that pitiful little cluster of huts, he answered disparagingly: "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" (§228.)

This diffident answer in no way chilled Philip's ardor and he presented his proof: "Come and see!" And Nathanael, like Julius Caesar, came and saw, but

instead of conquering was himself conquered.

280. As soon as Jesus spied the skeptical Nathanael approaching, he exclaimed: "Behold a true Israelite, in whom there is no guile!" Undoubtedly, he merited the praise; proof of this lies in his very misgivings upon hearing that the Messiah had been found. With so many dreamers and charlatans wandering about and claiming to find the Messiah in themselves or others, a sincere Israelite had every right to be suspicious. Hence he asked: "Whence knowest thou me? Jesus answered and said to him: Before Philip called thee, when thou wast under the fig tree, I saw thee!" (*John* 1:48).

It was an old custom in Palestine to have a thick-leaved fig tree near one's little house and to enjoy an occasional hour of peace and quiet in its shade (cf. 3 Kings 4:25; Mich. 4:4; Zach. 3:10). In Jesus' time the rabbis sat there to study the Law undisturbed. Hence when Jesus said he had seen Nathanael in that shady retreat he was not announcing an extraordinary discovery from a purely physical point of view. But there must have been something spiritually extraordinary about it to occasion Nathanael's surprise; that is, the thoughts he was pondering within himself in that place must have been related somehow to this imminent meeting. Was he perhaps thinking of the true Messiah, having heard the strange rumors spreading through the town about the Jesus who had arrived there? Was he perhaps asking God in his heart for a "sign" as Zachary had done (§227)? We can give no definite answer, but it is clear that Nathanael found the words addressed to him perfectly true. Jesus had truly seen him, not in the shade of the fig tree but within his innermost thoughts.

The guileless Israelite was stunned, an impetus of ardor invaded his calm self-possession: "Rabbi, thou art the Son of God! Thou art King of Israel!" Nathanael agreed now with Philip and recognized Jesus as the Messiah. He was a warm-hearted man, perhaps a little too warm-hearted. Jesus, in fact, answered: "Because I said to thee that I saw thee under the fig tree, thou dost believe. Greater things than these shalt thou see." Then turning also to Philip and perhaps to others present, he continued: "Amen, amen, I say to you, you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man!" The reference is to the dream of Jacob (Israel), in which angels ascended and descended the mysterious golden ladder (*Gen.* 28:12). Jesus' mission, like this ladder, is to join earth to heaven, and its witnesses will be these first disciples, the descendants of Jacob, "true Israelites."

Nathanael is mentioned only in *John* and not in the Synoptics. On the other hand, they list among the Apostles a certain Bartholomew, whom John never mentions. It is very probable that the same person had both names, as was common enough in those times, especially since in the lists of the Apostles Bartholomew is usually named with Philip, the friend of Nathanael.

## THE WEDDING FEAST AT CANA

281. The conversation with Nathanael is a new point of departure for the time sequence in John's Gospel. He tells us that on the "third day" after that interview, "there was a marriage in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there; and Jesus also was invited, and his disciples, to the marriage" (*John* 2:1-2). Since, as we have noted, Nathanael was originally from Cana, it is possible that he was the one who invited Jesus and his disciples — Andrew, Peter, John, and Philip — to the wedding, which may have been that of some relative or friend of Nathanael himself. It seems clear from John's words, however, that the "mother of Jesus was there" even before her son arrived, and that would lead us to suppose that there was also some bond between Mary and one or the other of the wedded couple. As relative or friend, she had probably gone there a day or two in advance to help the women of the household with their various busy preparations, particularly the bride s, which were many. There is no likelihood whatever in certain later airy puns which would make the groom out to be Nathanael himself, or the Evangelist John, or others.

The Cana usually visited today in Palestine is Kefr Kenna, which is about six miles northwest of Nazareth along the highway traveling toward Tiberias and Capharnaum, while in Jesus' time, the distance between this Cana and Nazareth was two or three miles shorter. But in ancient times there was another Cana, today a field of ruins called Kirbet Qana, lying about ten miles north of Nazareth. Archeologists are still debating which of these two places is the Cana of the fourth Gospel. There are good, though not conclusive arguments for both, and the written accounts of early visitors to the town may be applied indifferently to one or the other. The question, therefore, is still unsolved, but its solution after all is not indispensable.

The wedding at Cana was the Jewish ceremony of the *nissu'in* (231). The feast which accompanied it was certainly the most solemn occasion in the whole life of poor folk in the lower or even the middle classes, and it could last for several days.

When the bride emerged from the industrious ministrations of her relatives and friends, she was decked in gay and elegant finery. She wore a crown on her head, her face was made up and her eyes were bright with collyrium. Her hair and nails were tinted, and she was laden with necklaces, bracelets, and other jewels which, for the most part, were counterfeit or borrowed. The groom, also wearing a crown and surrounded by the “friends of the groom,” went in the evening to lead his bride from her home to his. She was waiting for him surrounded by her friends, who carried lamps and cheered the groom when he arrived. All went in procession to the groom’s house, the whole town joining in with lamps, music, singing, dancing, and all the noise of merriment. So important were these processions that even the rabbis interrupted their lessons in the schools of the Law and went out with their pupils to honor the newlyweds. The feast was held in the home of the groom, and there were songs and speeches filled with good wishes and sometimes not entirely free from suggestive allusions, especially when the dinner was well along and the guests were all more or less tipsy.<sup>88</sup>

In fact, the wine was unstinted and the drinking hearty, it being so rare an occasion for people who all year long led a spare and drudging existence. It was special wine they drank, which had been set aside a long time before and saved especially for this feast. You may still see rows of mysterious earthen vessels in a dark corner of an Arab house today, and the head of the family will tell you with an air of great compunction that they cannot be touched because the wine in them is for weddings. After all, one reads in the Hebrew Scriptures that wine gladdens the heart of man, and those good people were going to obey the Scriptures at least in the gladness of the wedding feast.

282. Jesus chose to take part in such a celebration, so gay and friendly, so human even in its weaknesses, just as Mary undoubtedly helped to dress the bride in all her showy finery. Perhaps when Jesus was still a little boy in Nazareth, his mother told him now and then that she too had had a bit of wedding feast when the *nissu’in* were celebrated for her and she had come to Joseph’s house to live (§239). A new family had been founded then, which Jesus honored and sanctified with thirty years of filial obedience. Now that he is about to leave that family, it is as though he looks back a moment with something of regret and stays to honor and sanctify the moral principle which is the foundation of all families. This is why Jesus, who was born of a virgin and died a virgin, participated in a wedding at the end of his private life and at the beginning of his public ministry.



In fact, he began his public life with a miracle which, while it revealed his power, at the same time helped to make that wedding a more joyful and festive occasion. John is careful to conclude his account of the episode with the remark (2:11) that this of Cana was the first of the miraculous “signs” wrought by Jesus.

In Cana Jesus met his mother after a separation of about two months. This had been perhaps his first long absence from home; and since Joseph was dead the shop had been idle and Mary without companionship. In that first lonely separation she must have thought more than ever of her son’s birth and the mission that had been predicted for him, surmising perhaps that this was now about to begin. And as she pondered these things, she probably had to parry the tactless questions of the inquisitive women of the town or even the tart comments of acrimonious relatives (§264), who would want to know why Jesus had left her alone, where he had gone and why, and when he would come back. Now at Cana she saw him again, wearing already the title of *Rabbi*, acclaimed as a teacher and surrounded by enthusiastic disciples. There was no doubt that the things she had foreseen in her loneliness were about to come true. But Rabbi or no, Mary, true to motherhood the world over, still treated him as her son, just as she had treated the twelve-year-old boy discussing important questions in the Temple.

As a good mother and housewife, she was probably helping with other women to see that everything went as it should, that the food and all the other many things required by a special occasion were ready when needed. But toward the end of the dinner, either because the host had miscalculated, or because unexpected guests had arrived, the wine, the most important thing of all, began to run short.

The good housewives serving it were in great consternation; it was a disgrace for the family whose feast it was. The guests would not spare their protests or their jibes, and the festivities would come to an abrupt and ignominious end, as when all the lights of a theater suddenly go out at the climax of the play.

283. Mary immediately noticed the situation and foresaw the pained embarrassment of her hosts. The presence of her Rabbi son had so much more meaning for her than for any of the others, and she associated it now besides with what she had guessed of him through the lonely time in Nazareth. Was his hour perhaps not come?

Governed by these thoughts, Mary, amidst the general distressed confusion that could barely be concealed, said softly to Jesus: "They have no wine. And Jesus answered: Woman, what is that to me and to thee? My hour is not yet come" (*John* 2:3-4).

Jesus spoke these words in Aramaic and they must be interpreted according to their meaning in that language. In the first place "woman" was a title of respect, something like *(ma)donna* in fourteenth-century Italian [or the English "(mi)lady"]. A son ordinarily called the woman who had borne him "mother," but in special circumstances he might show her greater reverence by calling her "woman." Jesus calls his mother "woman" once again as he hangs from the cross (*John* 19:26). Even earlier is the rabbinic anecdote in which a Jewish beggar addresses the great Hillel's wife as "woman"; Augustus had called Cleopatra "woman" (Dion Cassius, II, 12), and there are other examples of this use besides.

More characteristic is the other expression, "what [is that] to me and to thee . . .?" The Greek reads *ti emoi kai soi*, but it is certainly an equivalent for the underlying Hebrew expression *mah li walak* which occurs several times in the Bible.<sup>89</sup> Now, the significance of this phrase depends much more on the circumstances in which it is spoken, on the tone of voice, the gestures, etc., than on the literal meaning of the words in themselves. All languages have similar idioms, in which the words are a mere pretext for expression and cannot be translated literally into any other language. In our case, we might achieve a close enough paraphrase of the Hebrew expression with something like this: "What [reason is there] for me and for thee [to discuss this]?" which might be rendered with the English: "Why do you discuss this with me?" In short, it was an elliptic phrase which asked why two parties should have become involved in a discussion, an action, or what not.<sup>90</sup><sup>4</sup>

With this answer Jesus declined Mary's invitation and gave as his reason the fact that his hour was not yet come. Hence in those three simple words "they have no wine" (if, in fact that was all Mary said) there was a hidden request to perform a miracle, and the purpose of the request was evident from the situation itself and especially from the unspoken thoughts and motherly face of the one who made it. Jesus was aware of all this but he refused, just as in the Temple he had refused to subordinate his presence in the house of his heavenly Father to his membership in an earthly family (§262). The time had

not come to prove with miracles the authenticity of his mission, for that of his Precursor John was not yet ended.

But the conversation between Mary and Jesus was not over. In fact, its most important words were never spoken except in an exchange of glances. Just as in the Temple after his first refusal, Jesus obeyed his mother immediately and left the house of his heavenly Father, so after this refusal, too, he proceeded to grant her request. In the mute dialogue which followed the spoken one, Mary was assured of her son's consent. So, without wasting any time she turned to the servants and said: "Do whatever he tells you!"

284. In the court of the house there were six large jars containing water for the purification of the hands and various utensils as prescribed by Jewish Law; hence the jars must have been of stone, for according to the rabbis this did not contract impurities as terra cotta did. And they were large jars, each containing two or three times the normal Jewish "measure," which was about ten gallons; hence all together they held about 150 gallons. Naturally the dinner was a long one and the guests were many, and so most of the water had been used up and the jars were practically empty.

Then Jesus told the servants to refill the jars to the brim. Off they ran to the near-by well or cistern and after a few trips the jars were full again. There was no more to be done; and he "said to them: Draw out now, and carry to the chief steward of the feast. And they carried it' (*John* 2:8). It had all happened in a few minutes, even before the chief steward had had time to note the women's consternation or realize that there was no more wine. Mary's gentle tact had kept the domestic calamity from being noticed.

When the chief steward of the feast found a different kind of wine set before him and tasted it as was his duty, he was so astonished that he forgot all dignified formality and spoke out with peasant bluntness. Going up to the groom he "said to him: Every man at first sets forth the good wine, and when they have drunk freely, then that which is poorer, but thou hast kept the good wine until now!" (*John* 2:10.)

The chief steward is not referring to some current usage, for which there is no evidence in any ancient document. His remark is simply a witty compliment which shows how unexpected was ambrosia like that and in such abundance at the end of the dinner. But at these words the bridegroom probably searched his chief steward's face to see if he was not actually the tipsiest of them all. He had never dreamed of saving the good wine as a surprise at the

end of the dinner. A few questions asked of the servants and the women led to Mary and Jesus, and then everything was explained.

With this first miracle, says John, Jesus “manifested his glory, and his disciples believed in him.” This is no wonder when we consider what enthusiasm Jesus’ handful of disciples already felt for him. But what was the effect of that miracle on the guests at the feast? When their heads cleared and they had forgotten the taste of that mysterious wine, did they ever think of the moral significance of what had taken place?

285. After the wedding feast and the miracle, Jesus went to Capharnaum, ‘he and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples; and they remained there not many days” (*John* 2:12).

This stay in Capharnaum was short because Jesus had decided to go up to Jerusalem for the coming Pasch, but from then on Capharnaum served as his usual dwelling place in Galilee, becoming his adopted home in place of Nazareth. He had already detached himself from his family, and to the institution of the family he had paid the homage of his first miracle. Now he also detached himself from his humble little village and moved to a place more convenient for the mission he was about to begin.

Capharnaum was on the northwest shore of Lake Tiberias, not far from where the Jordan flows into it. It was about nine miles north of the city of Tiberias and about twenty-five miles east of Nazareth, near the border between the territory of Herod Antipas and that of Philip. Hence it had a customhouse and there was constant travel through the town. On the lake there was a little harbor suitable for fishing boats. The religious life of the inhabitants must have been intense and was probably not disturbed very much by the Greek influences entrenched a short distance above them. Its citadel was, as always, the synagogue, which has fortunately been preserved to our own day, although in its present form the building probably belongs to a time later than that of Jesus. The name of the town, *Kephar Nahum*, “village of Nahum,” derived from a person about whom we know nothing. In much later times the tomb of a rabbi *Tanhum* was venerated there and his name was gradually distorted to Tell Hum, which is the modern name of the place.

In imitation of Jesus, his first disciples from the neighboring town of Bethsaida, like Peter and Andrew, also came in time to settle in Capharnaum. As for Simon Peter it is probable that he already had some relatives there. If, like a good son-in-law, he has his mother-in-law (§300) living there with him, it

is not too hardy to suppose that his wife came originally from Capharnaum. Later Capharnaum came to be designated as Jesus own city (*Matt.* 9:1), although the same document shortly afterward still calls Nazareth “his own country” (*Matt.* 13:54).



## CHAPTER XVI: From the First to the Second Pasch

### THE TRADERS IN THE TEMPLE

286. A FEW months had passed since Jesus' baptism. Now the Pasch of the new year was approaching, the year which, in our opinion (§176), was A.D. 28. Jesus had decided to make the pilgrimage (§74) for this Pasch and so he left Capharnaum and set out for Jerusalem.

When he reached the Temple, he saw spreading before him the usual scene that took place there especially during the great feasts. The outer court of the Temple had become a stable fouled and reeking with dung, and it echoed and re-echoed with the bellowing of oxen, the bleat of sheep, the cooing of doves, and above all the noisy cries and shouts of the traders and money-changers installed everywhere within its porticoes. In that court it was possible to hear only dimly the feeble echo of the hymns rising within the inner Temple and to glimpse only faintly the pale glow of the distant holy lamps. There were no other visible signs of religion in that vast enclosure, which was more like a cattle market or a convention of swindlers than the antechamber of the house where dwelt the spiritual God of Israel. To be sure, Jesus had certainly witnessed similar scenes on previous pilgrimages to Jerusalem, but then his public life had not yet begun. Now his mission was fully under way and in proof of it he must act as "one having authority" (*Matt. 7:29; Mark 1:22*).

Having made a kind of whip of cords, he began to strike at men and beasts and overturned the tables of the money-changers while their little heaps of coins went scattering across the pavements; out he drove them all, clearing the sacred enclosure: Out of here! "Do not make the house of my Father a place of business" (*John 2:16*). — "Is it not written: My house shall be called a house of prayer for all nations? (*Isa. 56:7*.) But you have made it a den of thieves" (*Mark 11:17*).

Six centuries earlier the prophet Jeremias had also seen the Temple reduced to a "den of thieves" (*Jer. 7:11*), but the voice of Jeremias was very far away to the priests and officials who were Jesus' contemporaries while the clamor of the profit which devolved to the Temple administration from all that trafficking was too close to be silenced without inconvenience. Yet Jesus silenced it to the stinging tune of the lash.

(Figure 40, Figure 41, Figure 42)

287. Theoretically no one could take exception to his action, as the Pharisees themselves were well aware. But in actual practice, they might yet ask why Jesus had taken it upon himself to perform such an act of authority personally instead of urging the officials in charge of the Temple to do so. Who had given him the authority to do it? Indeed, to put it more explicitly, how did it happen that this man who had just come wandering up from Galilee assumed, as his first actions seemed to indicate, an attitude of complete independence toward the established authorities very similar to that of John the Baptist?

Meanwhile certain Jews, undoubtedly of importance, approached him and said: "What sign dost thou show us, seeing that thou dost these things? In answer Jesus said to them: Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up! — The Jews therefore said: Forty-six years has this Temple been in building and wilt thou raise it up in three days?" We have already noted the importance of this answer for the chronology of Jesus' life (§176); it also indicates that his interlocutors did not understand to what he was referring, and undoubtedly neither did the Evangelist who witnessed and recorded the incident. The Jews had asked for a "sign" (*shmeion*), that is, a miracle. That was too much, for Jesus' action was justifiable in itself especially since the Temple magistrates had neglected to do anything to stop the profanation as their duty demanded. In any case, since his mission was challenged, Jesus offered a real and true proof of it, but this proof was to be understood only many months later; at the moment it did not at all satisfy the malevolent curiosity of his questioners.

The "temple" to which Jesus refers is his own body; when the Jews have destroyed that living temple, he will make it rise again within three days. Perhaps as he spoke these words Jesus made some gesture to indicate his own person; but however, that may be, all his listeners, though they fail to understand his answer, do remember it later — the Jews to accuse him (§565), his disciples to believe in him, recognizing in his Resurrection the "sign" he had offered his inquisitors (*John* 2:22).<sup>91</sup>

Although Jesus does not satisfy the malicious request for a "sign," nevertheless during that first Paschal sojourn in Jerusalem, "many believed in his name, seeing the signs that he was working" (*John* 2:23). But this was not so much faith from the heart as faith of the intellect, and Jesus wanted the former much more than the latter. That was one reason why he "did not trust



himself to them, in that he knew all men" (*John* 2:24), while he had trusted himself to the rough but generous disciples from Galilee. Even the faith of the intellect, however, is a preparation for, and invitation to, faith of the heart, and it is at this point precisely<sup>92</sup> that the "spiritual" Evangelist presents to us an interview between one who already believed with his mind and Jesus who lifted him into quite another sphere. We seem to be watching a baby chick caught up above the clouds in an eagle's grasp, and it is a favorite scene with the "spiritual" Evangelist, who gives us others like it (§294).

## NICODEMUS

288. There was at that time in Jerusalem an outstanding Pharisee and "teacher" of the Law, an honest man of sincere and upright intentions. But he was a member of the Sanhedrin and his consequent social position evidently required that he be very cautious and prudent about what he did in public. He was called Nicodemus; this name occurs in the rabbinic writings but it is hardly possible that they refer to the same person. When he saw the "signs" wrought by Jesus, he was deeply shaken; perhaps he had been one of the few Pharisees who recognized the mission of the Precursor John and accepted his baptism. On the other hand, his social position and still more his Pharisaic training and mentality warned him to be carefully reserved with regard to the unknown wonder-worker. In this anxious mental conflict, he managed to find a middle course and he went to visit Jesus by night. In the dim light of an oil lamp discussions proceed with less distraction and above all there is less danger of being recognized by outsiders.

The conversation was a long one and lasted perhaps throughout the night, but the "spiritual" Evangelist records only its salient points, those best suited to the purpose of his Gospel. Nicodemus began the discussion, and coming straight to what had so shaken him to the soul, he said to Jesus: "Rabbi, we know that thou hast come a teacher from God, for no one can work these signs that thou workest unless God be with him."

This honest Pharisee recognized that Jesus' mission was not a human one but something much higher, in fact, divine. Jesus' answer refers to the implication in Nicodemus' words: "Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born [from above]<sup>93</sup> he cannot see the kingdom of God." Nicodemus was too intelligent to interpret these words literally. His fellow rabbis also spoke of "rebirth" in the spiritual sense, referring it particularly to one who was converted to the God of Israel either from paganism or from his own sins, and

Philo of Alexandria used the same expression with still a different meaning. But Nicodemus could not quite grasp the precise spiritual significance in Jesus' words, and -so to elicit an explanation he pretended to be very dense: "How can a man be born when he is old? Can he perhaps enter a second time into his mother's womb and be born again?"

This feigned stupidity is shrewder than it seems. Nicodemus is setting himself up as judge of the teaching which Jesus is about to explain to him, but Jesus' answer reduces him to an unlearned apprentice. One cannot see the kingdom of God" unless he has already entered into it, and his entrance into it is not accomplished by human means: "Amen, amen, I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit, is spirit."

In Hebrew "spirit" was *ruah*, which also meant "puff" or "gust" (of wind). Jesus plays on the double meaning of the word to add a concrete example: "Do not wonder that I said to thee: You must be born from above. The wind [also] blows where it will, and thou hearest its sound but dost not know where it comes from or where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit." Though intangible and invisible the wind is a reality in the physical world. Thus, in the spiritual world, the influence of the divine Spirit cannot be regulated by human reasoning nor is its essence scrutable, but it clearly manifests itself in its effects. The Spirit causes us to be born to a new invisible life in a manner reminiscent of the way the first visible life of the cosmos burst from brute matter at the breath of God hovering over the waters of chaos (*Gen. 1:2*).

The reference to John's baptism is clear, and perhaps the conversation that followed explicitly mentioned whether or not Nicodemus had received it. In any case, the new life which Jesus here says is bestowed by the Holy Spirit and by water is not the effect of John's rite, a baptism of water only and a mere symbol; it is the effect of the rite which is the fulfillment of that symbol, administered with water and the Holy Spirit. The latter baptism is the baptism of Jesus and the Precursor himself gave testimony of it (*Matt. 3:11* and parallel passages; *John 1:33*).

289. The comparison between the action of the Spirit and that of the wind has carried Nicodemus into a world he does not know, in which the Pharisee is lost and bewildered. Hence, he no longer pretends to be slow of wit, but he is

not yet ready to admit he is the unlearned pupil. So, with all sincerity but some diffidence he exclaims: "How can these things be?"

Jesus' reply is a spontaneous reflection on Nicodemus' position: How is this? "Thou art a teacher in Israel and dost not know these things?" What then do you teach, if you do not teach the action of the Spirit on the soul? — After this beginning, Jesus' discourse must have proceeded at some length, not without interruptions and replies from Nicodemus. The Evangelist completely omits the words of the Pharisee and presents only a selection from all that Jesus spoke that night. But it is not forcing the context to deduce from that selection some of Nicodemus' answers and remarks (as in the reference to the serpent in the desert) or even a metaphor or two which springs from the lamp-lit setting in which the conversation took place (for example, the reference to light and darkness). Here is what John has chosen to give us:

"Amen, amen, I say to thee, we speak of what we know, and we bear witness to what we have seen; and our witness you do not receive.

"If I have spoken of earthly things to you, and you do not believe, how will you believe if I speak to you of heavenly things? And no one has ascended into heaven except him who has descended from heaven, the Son of man.<sup>94</sup>

"And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert (cf. *Num.* 21:8-9), even so must the Son of man be lifted up, that those who believe in him may not perish but may have life everlasting.<sup>95</sup>

"For God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that those who believe in him may not perish, but may have life everlasting.

"For God did not send his Son into the world in order to judge [i.e., condemn] the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

"He who believes in him is not judged [condemned]; but he who does not believe is already judged [condemned], because he does not believe in the name of the only-begotten Son of God.

"Now this is the [criterion of the] judgment [condemnation]: the light has come into the world, yet men have loved the darkness rather than the light, for their works were evil.

"For everyone who does evil hates the light; and does not come to the light, that his deeds may not be exposed. But he who does the truth comes to the

light that his deeds may be made manifest, for they have been performed in God" (*John* 3:11-21).

290. What must have been Nicodemus' state of mind as he listened to these things? Probably it was similar to Augustine's in the period of his hesitancy, when reading the Epistles of Paul, he seemed to sense, as it were, the fragrance of exquisite foods which he could not yet succeed in eating: *quasi olfacta desiderantem, quae comedere nondum posset*.

After all, unless Jesus clarified these pronouncements with explanations the Evangelist has omitted, Nicodemus could not understand them very well. Take, for instance, the allusion to the crucifixion contained in the mention of the serpent in the desert. As in his conversation with the Jews after driving the traders from the Temple, however, Jesus was not speaking for Nicodemus only. Though the Pharisee went to him by night, we are not told that he found Jesus completely alone. In a dim corner of the room, it is possible to glimpse a wide-eyed youth who breathlessly follows the whole interview and stamps every word of it in his vigilant memory. It is the beloved disciple, who when he is very old will tell the story of that conversation.

Notwithstanding his talk with Jesus, Nicodemus did not later become a true disciple of his, almost in proof of the words he heard that night, that the breath of God breathes where it will. Yet he was always kindly disposed toward Jesus even after the crucifixion. He dares to spend a word in Jesus' favor in the Sanhedrin (*John* 7:50-51), and he spends much more in money for the hundred pounds of spices to prepare his body for burial (*John* 19:39). Jesus' nocturnal visitor was not generous of soul, but he was generous of purse; he was not a Peter, but neither was he a Judas.

## THE TWILIGHT OF JOHN'S MINISTRY

291. The conversation with Nicodemus mentioned the baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, which was certainly not the baptism of John. In the meantime, John continued to perform his rite, and for this purpose he had gone to Ainon near Salim (§269).

After Nicodemus' visit, Jesus remained for some time in Judea, but it seems he moved away from the treacherous capital somewhat to the north. The open country afforded him and whoever wished to come to him more freedom of action away from the suspicious vigilance of the revered Ancients and the Pharisees. The place where he stayed was well supplied with water,

perhaps some cove along the Jordan, for we unexpectedly find that Jesus' disciples are themselves baptizing like John.

Was this the baptism of water and the Holy Spirit Jesus spoke of to Nicodemus? Almost certainly it was not. The fourth Gospel, in fact, points out explicitly that Jesus was not administering this baptism in person but that his disciples were (*John* 7:39; 16:7), nor had Jesus' disciples yet been instructed in the divine Trinity and the redemption wrought by the death of Christ, which are essential elements in the future baptism of water and the Spirit (*Matt.* 28:19; *Rom.* 6:3 ff.). Hence this rite too was only a prefiguration and a symbol like that of John. That is why John continued to administer his baptism even after the disciples of Jesus began to baptize, while if they had been baptizing in water and the Spirit he would have had to stop.

Nevertheless, one day a kind of dissension did arise. The disciples of John and a certain Jew<sup>96</sup> began to argue "concerning purification." Perhaps this Jew, from the neighborhood of Jerusalem and not a Galilean, thought the rite administered by the disciples of the Galilean Rabbi more purifying because it was something a little more exotic and hence, he preferred it to that of John. The latter's disciples were indignant and running to their master they told him of the supposedly rival activity of Jesus: "Rabbi, he who was with thee beyond the Jordan, to whom thou hast borne witness, behold he baptizes and all are coming to him."

John's impetuous disciples were perhaps expecting him to burst into jealous invective, but instead they heard him speak in a tone of joyous consolation: "No one can receive anything unless it is given to him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness that I said: I am not the Christ [Messiah], but have been sent before him (§269). He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who stands [present] and hears him, rejoices exceedingly at the voice of 'the bridegroom. This my joy, therefore, is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (*John* 3:27-30).<sup>97</sup>

The picture of Yahweh as the bridegroom of the nation of Israel is very frequent in the poetic writings of the Old Testament. Here, for John, the bridegroom is the Messiah Jesus, and at this mystic wedding, his own is the office of the "friend of the bridegroom" (§281). But the bridegroom is already at the door, and he has heard his voice; hence he must rejoice, not grow sad with jealousy! The splendor of the moon decreases and gradually vanishes as

the splendor of the sun increases; hence "he must increase, but I must decrease."

292. This was John's last testimony. A few weeks later, probably in May, the austere censor of the court scandal was imprisoned in the Machaerus (§17).

It is hardly possible that the Pharisees had no share in this imprisonment, or did not play some indirect or secret role in it. The Synoptics attribute it to John's censure of the royal couple, while Flavius Josephus ascribes it to his popularity, which was not relished by the authorities. Both reasons are good ones and dovetail perfectly. But the fourth Gospel suggests a third: "the Pharisees had heard that Jesus made and baptized more disciples than John" (*John* 4:1), and so Jesus left Judea and returned to Galilee. Thus, Jesus feared that his popularity, greater than John's, would expose him to the jealous machinations of the Pharisees and for this reason he went away. Had John, then, fallen victim to these machinations?

Nothing tells us so explicitly; but the Synoptics, too, give us to understand that Jesus departed from Judea as soon as John's imprisonment became known. This, then, was the trap that closed on John thanks to the activity of the Pharisees<sup>98</sup> as well as to his courage in openly rebuking the court. The Pharisees, anxious to be rid of this annoying reformer whom they had to watch so carefully, shrewdly played upon the resentment Herod Antipas' court felt for him and prompted the tetrarch to imprison his austere censor and the multitude's popular leader.

If John was still at Ainon near Salim, he was not in the tetrarch's territory, but in that of the free city of Scythopolis, which formed part of the Decapolis (§4), and hence Antipas could not arrest him there. But Scythopolis was wedged in between the two arms of Antipas' territory, Galilee and Perea, and so it would be easy to draw him within Antipas' jurisdiction on some pretext skillfully presented by obliging go-betweens. Later the Pharisees play the go-between again but in reverse, and pretending to be Jesus' protectors, advise him to depart from the territory of Antipas. Probably this second message was prompted by Herod Antipas himself, whom Jesus on that occasion calls a fox (*Luke* 13:31-32 — cf. §463).

In the secret dungeons of the Machaerus John languished through long exhausting months of waiting.

#### THE SAMARITAN WOMAN

293. To return to Galilee Jesus chose the road which ran through the center of Palestine and therefore across Samaria. He could have avoided this region

by taking the other road to the east, which followed the Jordan, but according to Flavius Josephus (cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 118; *Life*, 269) the former was the one more often taken by Galileans traveling to and from Jerusalem.

At a certain point the road Jesus chose entered a narrow valley formed by Mount Ebal on the north and Mount Garizim on the south. Today in this same valley is the little city of Nablus, founded in A.D. 72 under Vespasian and Titus and officially called *Flavia Neapolis* (whence Nablus) but more commonly *Mabortha* (that is, "passage," "crossing") because of its geographical position (*Wars of the Jews*, IV, 449). A short distance before entering the valley from the east, there was a spot famous in the history of the Hebrew patriarchs (*Gen.* 12:6; 33:18; 48:22 [Heb.]), the site of "Jacob's Well," which is still standing. A few hundred yards within the valley on the right lay the very ancient city of Sichem which was already in existence about 2000 B.C., but which in Jesus' time was falling into decay and had very few inhabitants. Near its ruins, recently the object of archeological research, rises the modern village of Balata. East of Balata-Sichem is situated the so-called "tomb of Joseph," the ancient Hebrew patriarch, and about a mile further on to the northeast lies the village of Askar.

This is the geographical setting for the next part of the gospel narrative, which presupposes the traditional hatred between the Samaritan inhabitants of the place and all Jews in general (§4).

Having left Judea, then, Jesus "came to a town of Samaria called Sichar, near the field that Jacob gave to his son Joseph. Now Jacob's well was there. Jesus, therefore, wearied as he was from the journey, was sitting at the well. It was about the sixth hour" (*John* 4:5-6). It would be impossible to imagine anything further removed from the realm of pure fancy and symbol than these specific particulars concerning the place, which have been wholly confirmed by the latest excavations, the exact indication of the hour and the other details of the episode. Yet preconceived theories have led some modern critics to consider the episode a sheer allegorical invention written by a mystic of Asia Minor who had perhaps never visited Palestine. Philosophical theories never prevail over the truth, however, and it is enough to reread the gospel narrative objectively to return to the old conclusion reached by the non-suspect Renan: "Only a Jew of Palestine who had often passed through the entrance to the Vale of Sichem could have described these things."



294. It is about noon (the "sixth hour"), and it is probably the month of May (cf. note 42). Jesus, hot and tired, is resting near the well. He is alone because his disciples have gone into the adjacent town to buy food.

A Samaritan woman comes from the settlement of Sichar to draw water at the well.<sup>99</sup> Jesus says to her: "Give me to drink." The woman answers haughtily: "How is it that thou, although thou art a Jew, dost ask drink of me, who am a Samaritan woman?" As a matter of fact, Jesus was really a Galilean, but the woman, guessing that he was returning from a visit to the Temple of Jerusalem, rightly takes him for a follower of the Jewish religion. Hence, she chooses to emphasize how humiliating it is that a man and a Jew should be in such need that he must ask a woman and a Samaritan for help. Jesus answers: "If thou didst know the gift of God, and who it is who says to thee: Give me to drink, thou, perhaps, wouldst have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water."

The eagle has caught up another little chick and is beginning to lift it toward the clouds (§287). Like Nicodemus, the woman perceives that there is some hidden meaning in the words which she cannot grasp, and so she sticks to their literal meaning, though she begins to speak with a little more respect: "Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep; whence then hast thou living water?" The observation is a legitimate one. The well today is over ninety feet deep, one of the deepest in all Palestine, although in Jesus' day its depth may have been somewhat less. And she completes her remark with a historical consideration: "Art thou greater than our father Jacob, who gave us the well, and drank from it, himself, and his sons, and his flocks?"

The chick is still staring at the ground from which it has been raised, still thinking it is scratching in the soil below. But Jesus replies: "Everyone who drinks of this water, will thirst again. He, however, who drinks of the water that I will give him, shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him shall become in him a fountain of water, springing up into life everlasting." The woman is still fluttering close to earth: "Sir, give me this water, that I may not thirst, or come here to draw."

The chick does not realize it is now soaring above the clouds, and so Jesus must explain and help it with a "sign." Therefore, he says to the woman: "Go, call thy husband, and come here." Both Hebrew and Aramaic, like the modern Tuscan of the countryside, said "man" for "husband," and so Jesus too undoubtedly said: "Go, call thy man. . . . The woman plays on the double

meaning of the word and says unabashed, "I have no man." Jesus disregards the ambiguity and takes the woman's answer in its less lovely significance: "Thou hast said well: I have no husband. For thou hast had five husbands, and he whom thou now hast is not thy husband. In this thou hast spoken truly." Her "man" at the time, then, was not her "husband," and very probably not all his five predecessors had been husbands either. Two or three of them possibly died or repudiated her, but certainly not all five unions had been legitimate, just as the sixth was not. In short, the Samaritan woman was not a model of chastity.<sup>100</sup>

295. The "sign" Jesus offers produces a good effect. Upon seeing her guilty secrets thus discovered, she exclaims: "Sir, I see that thou art a prophet!" But this same discovery and her exclamation testify to the superiority of this man who was one of the hated Jews; hence she turns the conversation to the reason for this hatred, to avoid besides the touchy subject of her private life: "Our fathers adored [God] on this mountain, and you say that at Jerusalem is the place where men must adore."

Mount Garizim towers above the heads of the two speakers; but the unknown Jew is returning from Jerusalem where he has certainly adored God in the Temple of Yahweh. What then does he, a prophet, think of this age-long dispute between the Samaritans and the Jews?

Jesus considers the woman's words almost entirely from a historical point of view, as though they represent what is now an idle question. Even from this point of view, however, he speaks as a Jew, favoring the Jews against the Samaritans. But he turns immediately from the past to the present, in which the old hateful rivalries no longer have any reason for being: Woman, believe me, the hour is coming when neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem will you worship the Father. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know; for salvation is from the Jews. But the hour is coming, and is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeks such to worship him. God is spirit, and they who worship him must worship in spirit and truth." The prophet has given his answer. From now on the worship of God will not be bound to Mount Garizim nor to the hill of Jerusalem nor to any other place on the earth, but only to the one condition, that it be offered "in spirit and truth."

A Pharisee happening to overhear these words would have found them revolutionary and scandalous; but they were not entirely new in Israel's own

tradition. The new prophet who spoke them merely passed over the “tradition” of the Pharisees to rejoin the genuine and older tradition of the prophets. Six centuries earlier, the prophet Jeremias had declared that the Temple of Yahweh in Jerusalem is worth nothing if the worshipers within are unworthy (*Jer.* 7:4), and he had even predicted that in the time of the Messiah no one would venerate any longer the most holy Ark of the Covenant (*Jer.* 3:16) for all would bear the new covenant and the law of God written in their hearts and in their spirits (*Jer.* 31:33).

296. At this point the woman realizes that she is in an unfamiliar sphere. Not Garizim, not Jerusalem, but spirit and truth! What world is this?

Certainly, it is not the petty little world in which Samaritans and Jews are forever quarreling; if the great doctors of Jerusalem have in practice forgotten the prophecies of Jeremias, it is not strange that an ordinary little Samaritan woman should be unaware of them and so lose her way through that world he foretold so long ago. Nevertheless, she perceives intuitively that these are somehow visions of the future, to be fulfilled only in the blessed days of the Messiah. Hence her bewildered thought retreats to those days, and though she does not dare to contradict the unknown prophet before her, she exclaims almost consolingly: “I know that the Messiah is coming<sup>101</sup> and when he comes, he will tell us all things.” Jesus answers: “I who speak with thee am he!”

The Samaritans were in fact expecting the Messiah, and their few descendants today are still waiting for him. They call him *Taheb* (*Shaheb*), “he who returns,” or “he who recalls (to good).” He is pictured as a reformer, like Moses, who will resolve all doubts, compose all differences, and establish a reign of happiness which will last a thousand years after his death. The Samaritan woman calls Jesus Messiah without the article because the word was equivalent to a proper name.

Now it is precisely to this woman who is not a Jew but of a race hostile to the Jews that Jesus reveals that he is the Messiah, though he later commands his disciples not to disclose this fact (*Matt.* 16:20). Yet in this same Samaritan hostility lies the secret of his preference. Such an announcement would hardly arouse the political enthusiasm among them it would most probably have excited among the Jews, a thing Jesus wanted to avoid at any cost. And if the Synoptics fail to mention this incident, then we may consider it further evidence of John’s intention to supply at least in part what they omit.

297. While Jesus is exchanging the last of these words with the Samaritan woman, his disciples return from the town with the food they have bought and approach the well. When the woman hears Jesus declare he is the Messiah, she is completely stunned and does not dare to answer him. Leaving her water jar at the well, she runs off into the town, shouting to everyone she meets: "Come, and see a man who has told me all that I have ever done! Can he be the Christ?"

The disciples do not quite venture to ask Jesus the reason for that unusual conversation though they wonder at it, since the Jewish rabbis avoided speaking to women in public, even their own wives. Somewhat disconcerted, they approach the Master only after the woman unexpectedly runs off in the direction of the town.

"Rabbi, eat," they say to him, offering the food they have brought back with them. By way of answer, Jesus continues the metaphor he has used in his conversation with the woman. He is nourished on spiritual food above all, and this is doing the will of him who has sent him to accomplish his work. He is the reaper of a spiritual harvest. At the end of December when the sowing was finished, the Palestinian farmers used to exclaim with relief: "Another four months and the harvest will be ready!" It was a kind of proverb, for the reaping took place in April or May, after four months of rest. But Jesus shows his disciples that the proverb has no meaning so far as his spiritual harvest is concerned. It is already ripe and ready, nor can it wait through delays of any sort. Hence the reapers must be ready too, even though they have not done the sowing. As Jesus speaks these words, the almost ripe harvests for the Paschal season (cf. note 42) are waving in the sun down the broad plain of *el-Makneh* which stretches below him toward the Jordan.

And a few sheaves of the spiritual harvest were gathered immediately. The busy garrulousness of the woman brought many Samaritans out of their houses and down the road to the well to see the Jewish prophet. They must have been won at his very first words, for they invited him to stay with them for a time. And they were Samaritans — men who preferred to beat till they drew blood or to murder outright the Jews traveling through their territories (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, II, 232; *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 118) and who later refused hospitality to Jesus' own disciples (*Luke* 9:52-53). But this time, or rather these Samaritans of Sichar were gracious, for they had undoubtedly been tamed by the personality of the prophet. Jesus accepted the invitation and "he stayed there two days. And far more believed because of his word.

And they said to the woman: We no longer believe because of what thou hast said, for we have heard for ourselves and we know that this is in truth the Savior of the world" (*John* 4:42).

## RETURN TO GALILEE AND FIRST PART OF THE MINISTRY THERE

298. After spending two days with the Samaritans of Sichar, Jesus returned into Galilee. John gives us the reason (4:44) in these words: "For Jesus himself gave testimony that a prophet hath no honor in his own country." What is the "country" to which John is referring here? The Synoptics attribute the same observation to Jesus but on a later occasion, when he had been unceremoniously driven out of Nazareth (*Luke* 4:16-30, and parallel passages), where it is clear that the "country" is Nazareth. This is not so clear in John, but there is no reason to suppose that the allusion here is to Judea, from which Jesus was traveling because of the intrigues of the Pharisees (§292). Rather we may suppose that John, taking it for granted that the contents of the Synoptics were well known (§165) and therefore this remark, too, moves it up to the beginning of the ministry in Galilee almost to foreshadow the eventual unhappy outcome.

At first, however, the Galileans welcomed Jesus with rejoicing. Several of them had witnessed the extraordinary things he had done in Judea and they talked about them on their return home, thereby exciting the pride of the prophet's fellow countrymen.

When Jesus arrived again in Cana, the town of his first miracle (§281), he was sought out immediately because of his fame as a wonder-worker. The son of an official<sup>102</sup> of the royal court lay seriously ill at Capharnaum, and the father, as soon as he heard of Jesus' arrival, hurried to Cana and besought him to come down immediately and heal the boy, who by now was at the point of death. Jesus seemed reluctant to grant his plea, and, his chief concern being for his own mission, he answered: "Unless you see signs and wonders, you do not believe!" The anguished father was concerned only with the fact that his son was dying and he insisted: "Sir, come down [to Capharnaum] before my child dies!" To be certain of the cure he wanted Jesus to go there personally, like a physician. Jesus answered him: "Go thy way; thy son lives!" The firmness with which these words were uttered inspired an equal firmness of faith in the father's heart. If the wonder-worker had so spoken, it could not be otherwise. It was now "the seventh hour" or about one o'clock in the afternoon, but after the anxious journey of the morning from Capharnaum to Cana, a distance of

more than twenty miles, he could not wear out the men and beasts in his escort by setting out immediately on the return journey. Hence, he did not depart until the next morning. As he approached Capharnaum, his servants came out to meet him to tell him that the boy was better. When he asked at what hour they had begun to notice the improvement, they answered: "Yesterday, at the seventh hour, the fever left him."

The careful John (4:54) points out that this was Jesus' second miracle, also in Galilee like that of Cana, but exclusive of the sojourn in Judea (note [92](#)). Again, we see his attempt to complete the Synoptics.

299. Having thus returned to Galilee, Jesus immediately began his mission "preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying: The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent ["change your minds" —[§266](#)] and believe in the gospel" (*Mark* 1:14-15).

At this time, he gradually visited practically all the various centers in Galilee, because we are told that he "taught in their synagogues" and that "all" listened to him and did him great honor, not without a little feeling of local pride perhaps (*Luke* 4:14-15). Nevertheless, he stayed longest and most frequently at Capharnaum which had, practically speaking, supplanted Nazareth as his home (§285). There is nothing to exclude, but much to favor, the supposition that in the course of his journeyings throughout Galilee he visited Nazareth as well. But the episode of his preaching in the synagogue there, which ended in his being driven from the village (§357), must have occurred at the end and not at the beginning of his activity in Galilee because on that occasion there is explicit mention of the miracles, he had already wrought in Capharnaum (*Luke* 4:23). Hence, though Luke places the incident at the beginning, the sequence followed in this regard by the other two Synoptics is to be preferred (*Matt.* 13:54r-58; *Mark* 6:1-6), for they set it at the end of this period when Jesus had already been quite some time in Capharnaum.

In the various towns he visited, Jesus spoke mainly in the local synagogue. As we know (§62), every tiny village in Palestine had one, and there the inhabitants gathered without fail on the Sabbath and sometimes even on other days. The synagogue not only provided an audience, ready and waiting, but it also furnished the occasion for speaking in full conformity with traditional customs, since, after the reading from the Scriptures, the ruler of the synagogue would invite someone present to give the usual instruction and

exhortation (§67). It is quite natural that Jesus should have volunteered frequently on such occasions, for they were so well suited to his purpose. At other times, however, he spoke in the open or in some private home as the opportunity arose or when a crowd had gathered about him.

His listeners were rapidly growing in number because they had immediately noticed that he "was teaching them as one having authority (wz exousian ecwn), and not as the Scribes" (*Mark* 1:22; *Luke* 4:32; cf. *Matt.* 7:29). Even the people, by virtue of their simple common sense, were able to notice a profound difference between the teachings of Jesus and those of the Scribes. The latter always took refuge in the ancients, and it was their ideal to transmit in their complete integrity, without „ adding or omitting anything, the teachings which they had received. Jesus, on the other hand, was opening treasures to which he only had the key and over which he only "had authority," and he did not hesitate even to contradict the teachings of the ancients when he thought it necessary to perfect them. "It was said to the ancients...; but I say to you... (*Matt.* 5:21 ff.). The Scribes, in short, were the voice of tradition. Jesus was his own voice and he claimed the right both to approve that tradition and to reject or correct it. Unquestionably anyone who assumed this right, given the spiritual dictatorship of the Scribes and the Pharisees, was behaving as one "having authority."

## CAPHARNAUM AND ELSEWHERE

300. And if the new preacher had "authority" in matters of doctrine, he showed he had no less authority over nature, working as he did extraordinary "signs"; and as this second authority confirmed the first, it also attracted the increasing attention of the multitudes, who must have reasoned something like Nicodemus on this point: "No one can work these signs.... unless God be with him" (§288). The two signs in Cana, the memory of which was still fresh, were followed by many others in other places.

In Capharnaum, one Sabbath day, after he had preached in the synagogue, Jesus publicly cured a demoniac, who, at his words, first gave forth in convulsive cries and then was left free of the obsession. The people who had heard the preaching and witnessed the deliverance of the demoniac wondered at both among themselves: "What is this? A new teaching with authority! He commandeth even the unclean spirits and they obey him!" (*Mark* 1:27.)



While these exclamations are still re-echoing, which as they spread are to carry Jesus' fame abroad, he leaves the synagogue and goes immediately to the home of the brothers Simon Peter (§285) and Andrew, where he finds Peter's mother-in-law lying ill. Luke, the physician- Evangelist, notes that she was the victim of a "great fever" (*Luke* 4:38), which, in the technical terminology of the time, was a different kind of sickness from the "little fever" (cf. Galenus, *Different febr.*, I, I). With Jesus are James and John, the two sons of Zebedee, and certainly other persons as well, who witnessed the cure of the demoniac and now beg Jesus to help this poor, sick old woman. He bends over her pallet, takes her by the hands, and lifts her up, in complete good health once more. She feels so well the moment she rises to her feet, that she immediately bustles about to prepare something for her extraordinary guest and wait upon him.

The town is still talking of the cured demoniac when the news spreads through the streets that Peter's mother-in-law has been healed as well. To have a man like that in town and not profit by his presence would be more than stupid. It is enough to bring to him the sick now lying at home and they will be made well again. But it is the Sabbath, and nothing can be carried on that day nor is it lawful to walk more than a limited distance (§70). Well, they will wait until sunset, when the Sabbath rest ends, and then it will be permissible to carry the sick.

That evening, in fact, demoniacs and sick people of every description were assembled in front of Peter's house. "All the city was gathered together at the door" (*Mark* 1:33); and Jesus, "laying his hands on every one of them, healed them. And the devils went out from many, crying out and saying: Thou art the Son of God. And rebuking them he [Jesus] suffered them not to speak because they knew that he was the Christ [Messiah]" (*Luke* 4:40-41). The same Jesus who had spontaneously declared to the Samaritans that he was the Messiah (§296), here in the land of the Jews did not permit the same declaration to be made by a reliable witness to the fact, the devil. But here there was the danger which did not exist on the first occasion, namely, that those present, following the current fashion, might consider the Messiah a political leader. Just as John the Baptist had not been concerned with things political, neither was Jesus concerned with them now, nor was he preaching a kingdom of the world or of men, but the kingdom of heaven and of God.

301. If Jesus was truly the Messiah and had come in order to be recognized as such by his own countrymen, then he was obliged to announce himself to



them openly once and for all, that is quite true; and Jesus did, in fact, openly and repeatedly make such an announcement, but only at a later time. In the beginning, that is, during this first period of his ministry in Galilee, he continued the preaching of his Precursor John, declaring only that the kingdom of God was at hand (*Matt.* 4:17; *Mark* 1:15). He spoke of the kingdom, but not of its head, of the institution but not of its founder. Later, when he has gathered about him a small nucleus of followers who understand at least in a general way that his kingdom is not political and that its founder is a spiritual king, to these he confides that he is the Messiah, though he commands them too, in the beginning, not to reveal this secret to others.

Jesus, then, does truly and clearly declare that he is the Messiah, but he does so only gradually. First, he announces the messianic kingdom, then his own Messiahship secretly to a few, and at length declares himself openly to all. Now, this gradual revelation is due most of all to his anxiety to avoid political enthusiasms and demonstrations, which would be no more than natural among people accustomed for so long to portraying the Messiah-to-come in national-military colors, as we have noted (§183). Politically speaking, Judaism was in those days a storehouse of incendiary material into which fanatic pseudo-prophets pitched their blazing torches all too often. Jesus wants in no way to be associated with them; in fact, he deliberately chooses the opposite mode of conduct, at first surrounding his personal prerogatives with secrecy until the people shall be won over to his concept of messianism.

When Jesus is obliged to speak of himself, then he uses at the same time certain highly efficient correctives to cool the fiery spirits of his confidants. He announces to them that he is indeed the Messiah, yes, but that he is destined to meet a violent and ignominious death and that the disciples who form his court are also marked for ignominies and tribulations of every sort. It is a very bitter disillusionment and an exceedingly gloomy prospect for ardent Jewish messianists, this of a Messiah-king who is himself to be killed instead of killing the enemies of Israel, whose courtiers are poor humiliated human creatures instead of the powerful humiliators of the *goyim*! But this is precisely the corrective necessary to make clear the true nature of the Messiah Jesus and the kingdom which he preaches.

The evening of that Sabbath day was a laborious one, but Jesus was at last able to retire into Peter's house. On the following morning, long before dawn, he went out secretly into a solitary place to pray. Soon afterward visitors from the town began to arrive seeking favors of the wonder-worker and desirous of

begging him especially never to go away from them again. Peter and the other members of the family, not finding Jesus in the house, began to search for him. At length they found him and told him what all hoped and desired of him, but he answered that he must announce in other places as well the good tidings of the kingdom of God, that it was for this he had been sent.

And he began once more to travel here and there throughout Galilee, having probably none of his disciples with him.

## THE CHOOSING OF THE FIRST FOUR APOSTLES

302. It is at this point that Luke (5:1-11) narrates the vocation of the four principal disciples, Simon Peter and Andrew his brother, John and his brother James. The other two Synoptics (*Matt.* 4:18-22; *Mark* 1:16-20) record this with much greater brevity at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, immediately after he has heard of the imprisonment of John the Baptist. Luke's order seems the most likely from the chronological viewpoint. It should be noted that neither Matthew nor Mark speaks of any previous association between Jesus and these four men, but Luke has mentioned and John has fully described their relations (§§278 ff.). In addition, this summons presupposes that Jesus had begun his preaching some time before, since there is a great crowd thronging about him anxious to see and hear him; this would not be easy to explain if the incident occurred during the first days after Jesus' return to Galilee immediately after the imprisonment of John the Baptist. Hence it must have taken place when Jesus had been preaching for some time and had already won a large following in Galilee.

But the information given us especially by John involves another and more serious problem. If the four had been with Jesus in Judea and then in Galilee at Cana and Capharnaum, how does it happen that Jesus here calls them to him for the first time? That this is the first time is certainly the impression we derive from Matthew and Mark, and we must correct and complete it with what the other two Evangelists say. Now since John obviously aims to round out our knowledge of the Synoptics, his information permits us to conclude that Jesus proceeded only gradually in the choice of his disciples just as he did in revealing his identity as the Messiah. At first, he accepted the four who had spontaneously left John the Baptist to follow him. But though he receives them as disciples they did not remain with him constantly nor did they follow him in all his travels about Galilee, which he made for the most part alone (§301). Later, when the four were sufficiently well versed in the kind of life

Jesus required of them and showed that they were disposed to accept it, he bound them definitely to himself by formally choosing them. This took place in the following manner, according to the narrative of Luke, which is fuller and more detailed than the other three.

303. One morning on the western shore of Lake Tiberias, Jesus found himself surrounded by a numerous multitude anxious to hear him speak. But the crowd was so great that in order to hold their interest and at the same time be heard more easily, he had recourse to a very practical expedient. When the lake is calm it is almost motionless, nor is there the least ripple of sound to keep one from hearing anyone speaking in a loud voice. Hence, if one pushed out in a boat a few yards from the shore, it was possible to speak very effectively to a crowd gathered on the beach to listen.

That is what Jesus did. There were two small boats nearby, whose owners had disembarked and were busy washing their nets. One of these was none other than Simon Peter. This detail suggests two probabilities; that the incident occurred near Capharnaum (§300) and that at the time Peter had suspended his intermittent following of Jesus, returning to his own trade with his brother Andrew in order to provide for the needs of his family. When Jesus finished speaking from his floating pulpit, he was careful to reward the one who had furnished it to him. Turning to Simon, he told him to row out into the lake and cast his nets.

Jesus' invitation must have seemed to Peter an unwitting irony. That very night had been a wretched one, and Simon and his companions had labored exceedingly without catching anything. Since the Master told him to cast his nets, he would not refuse, but he consented only out of respect for Jesus and not because he had any faith in this new attempt. Daylight, in fact, presented a new obstacle; if the fishing had been bad at night, it would be still worse by day. And so, the nets were cast. Suddenly, however, they began to pull in so much fish that the rigging could not support all the weight and the nets began to break under the strain. Peter shouted to his companions in the other boat, which was idling by, to come and help, and so they did, but they worked a long time, loading both boats with fish, and they were filled so that they almost sank.

Lake Tiberias was in ancient times, and still is today, very rich in fish-for antiquity we have the testimony of Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, III, 508, 520) — and the inhabitants of the western shore lived for the most part by fishing.

A little north of Tiberias, the town of Magdala (“Tower”) was called “Tower of Fishes” (*Migdal Nunaya*) by the rabbis while the Greeks called it Tarichea (Taricaiai), that is, “salteries [of fish],” both clear allusions to its principal industries. Any modern visitor to the place may see a fisherman with a rod make a good catch in a few minutes, or he may hear of great hauls with boat and net, amounting to several barrels of fish. But this is not and has not been unfailingly the case. In every age, the fishermen of Tiberias have also had days and nights of very bad luck when it seemed that all the fish in the lake had gone off to other waters. Was the lucky draught that day mere chance? Simon, who was an expert fisherman, did not think so, and he had expected a far different result. Nor was he the only one, for the fishermen in the other boat, James and John, were utterly astonished at the actual haul. The impulsive Simon threw himself at the feet of Jesus, exclaiming: Depart from me, for I am an unworthy sinner! — But Jesus answered: Do not be afraid. From now on you will be a fisher of men. — What had happened therefore was a symbol for the future, in addition to all that it implied otherwise.

When at last they had all come to land, Jesus extended the same invitation to James and John, who with their father Zebedee, were partners<sup>103</sup> of Simon and his brother Andrew. And the two pairs of brothers left their boats and all things, and from that day they were constantly with the Master.

## OTHER MIRACLES AND FIRST DIFFICULTIES

304. Jesus continued his ministry in Galilee and the Synoptics present several of its episodes without offering a very definite picture of the time sequence. But as the fame of the new prophet spread, difficulties too began to arise, first of all from the Pharisees, as we might expect, and then from other sources as well.

Once, perhaps shortly after Jesus had chosen the first four Apostles, a leper approached him and, falling at his feet, did not explicitly ask him for anything but merely said to him: “Lord, if thou wilt, thou canst make me clean!” (*Luke* 5:12.) The lepers in ancient Israel were the object of extreme horror. The Mosaic Law excluded them from all human intercourse, and they were obliged to live in isolation in lonely places and to shout, “Away! Unclean! Unclean!” (*Lam.* 4:15) whenever a wayfarer unknowingly approached the place where they dwelt. In recompense for this lugubrious warning, some food was sent out to them in their desolate solitude, but aside from this, society wanted nothing to do with them; they were the phlegm of humanity, the very

incarnations of impurity, the victims of the extreme wrath of Yahweh. Not rarely, however, the lepers violated the quarantine imposed on them, just as this leper did when he came to Jesus. Certainly, he had heard people speak of Jesus and of the miracles he wrought for all kinds of sufferers. Who knew but what the Galilean prophet, kind and powerful as he was, would do something for him too in his extreme misfortune?

His case, however, was so frightening that he did not even dare to express what he had come to implore; he could only express his confidence in the One he besought. Jesus "had compassion" on him and his recklessness, which had impelled him to break the law and come among clean men. So, he "stretched forth his hand," and then, to the utter horror of any who may have been watching him, "he touched him," touched that leprous mass of pus and stench. And answering the man's unspoken thought rather than his words, he said: "I will. Be thou made clean!" (*Mark* 1:41.) And the leper was instantly made clean. Jesus immediately sent him away, however, because as usual he wished to avoid the enthusiasm of the people; and he bade him sternly not to tell anyone what had happened. At the same time, he reminded him to fulfill what the Mosaic Law required in the rare instances of a leprosy cure, namely, to present himself to the priest to declare his cure and offer the prescribed sacrifice of purification. This was on Jesus' part an act of deference toward the Law and at the same time a kind of compensation for the violation the leper had committed against it when he came among men. It is probable that the cured man fulfilled the legal requirements later, but in the meanwhile he began by disobeying Jesus and spreading the news of what had happened. After all, even if he had kept silent, his face would have spoken for him, for it had been a monstrosity and it was now the face of a healthy normal man.

The consequences of this news were not long in coming. Other crowds ran to the wonder-worker to hear him and other unfortunates thronged to be cured, "so that he could no longer openly enter a town, but remained outside in desert places" (*Mark* 1:45). And he "was in retirement in the desert and in prayer" (*Luke* 5:16).

305. Later, when the general excitement had sufficiently abated, Jesus went back to Capharnaum. By this time his popularity had put the Scribes and Pharisees on the alert, and unable as yet to form a definite judgment of this new prophet, they began to watch him as they had John the Baptist (§269, §277). Hence, during this sojourn in Capharnaum we find Jesus in a house teaching, and "there were also Pharisees and doctors of the Law sitting by,

that were come out of every town of Galilee, and Judea, and Jerusalem” (*Luke* 5:17). It is significant that they had come even from Jerusalem to watch him. Apparently, however, their attitude was not aggressive; they seem to have been there only to learn like all the others who had filled the house and were clamoring for entrance at the door. While Jesus was speaking a group of men tried to open a way through the crowd jamming the entrance. They were carrying a paralytic on a pallet and they hoped to lay him before the Master. But it was impossible to push a way through that closely packed multitude; no one would budge to let them by. They had to act quickly or the opportunity would be lost. The Master might bring his discourse to an end at any moment and retire into some unknown desert place to pray as he usually did. So, while Jesus was still speaking in the main room of the house, the paralytic suddenly came floating down from the ceiling, pallet and all. What had happened? The sick man’s bearers had indeed been quick about their business. The houses of the poor people in Palestine generally consisted of only one floor roofed with a terrace of packed earth. They had mounted to this roof by the outside stairway, removed the earth, displaced one or two boards or small beams, and there was an opening big enough to allow the pallet and its burden to be lowered with ropes. Naturally at the unexpected appearance of this new listener, Jesus’ preaching stopped. His first reaction was one of admiration for the faith of those men and their charge; then turning to the paralytic he said to him only: “Son, thy sins are forgiven thee!”

The Hebrew word for sin (*het’* or *hetta’ ah*) may mean either the sin committed or its consequences; and one of the principal consequences of sin, according to the Hebrews, was physical deformity, especially if it was serious and chronic. In which sense did Jesus use the term? Probably his words included both the invisible moral guilt and the visible consequence. But no sooner were they spoken than his official watchers stiffened indignantly; “the Scribes and Pharisees began to argue, saying: Who is this man who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God only?” (*Luke* 5:21.) Evidently the objection concerned only one meaning of the word, that of moral guilt, the remission of which could not be ascertained physically by anyone. But there was the other meaning too, that of visible bodily illness; and here it was physically possible to see what happened and all could judge for themselves whether or not Jesus had spoken recklessly. Jesus answered his critics by performing a physical cure in proof of the invisible remission. “But Jesus knowing their thoughts, answered and said to them: What are you arguing in

your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Thy sins are forgiven thee,' or to say, 'Arise and walk?' The challengers must have understood immediately that they were cornered, for their challenge had been accepted. Nor was this some refinement of rabbinic casuistry as, for example whether it was lawful or not to untie a knot or carry a dry fig on the Sabbath (§70); it was a matter of making a paralytic leap to his feet, and one might expect anything from this worker of miracles. Hence Jesus' question must have been followed by the rather long and embarrassed silence of people afraid to say any more for fear of making matters worse. Receiving no answer, he continued: "But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins" - and at this point he turned to the paralytic — "I say to thee, arise, take up thy bed and go to thy house!" And the sick man immediately rose to his feet, rolled up his pallet and walked off. We are told that all present were astounded, but we do not know exactly how the Pharisees reacted. Probably they thought this was not a fair way to reply to an elegant question of Jewish theology, but in any case, they most certainly did not give Jesus the right of it.

306. In fact, they did not even relax their vigilance. Shortly after the cure of the paralytic, according to the sequence in all three Synoptics, a different kind of incident occurred. As Jesus was passing through Capharnaum he saw a publican, Levi, son of Alpheus, sitting in the tax collector's place, receiving payments, giving receipts, and certainly gathering far more curses and maledictions from his payees than coins. Perhaps this publican already knew Jesus by reputation, or it may be that he was personally acquainted with him and cherished some veneration for him. He may even have nourished a kind of envy for Jesus' disciples, poor but blessed and beloved by the people, while he, with his little piles of gold and silver coins in rows on the table before him, was looked upon as some sort of mangy dog. The fact is that Jesus, as he passed, looked at him and said only: "Follow me!" The words were a spark touched to tinder. As soon as the publican heard them, "leaving all things, he arose and followed him" (*Luke* 5:28). This publican, according to the prevailing custom, had besides the name Levi that of Matthew (Hebrew *Mattai*, contracted from *Mattenai*), equivalent to the Greek "Theodore" and the Latin "Adeodatus." He is the author of the first Gospel (§114).

Now this new follower of Jesus, who had so promptly renounced his social status, did not immediately renounce its material advantages, but used them to honor his new Master. Being a wealthy man, he gave a magnificent banquet to which he invited Jesus and his disciples, and right beside them he sat his

own former colleagues, that is, “many publicans and sinners” as he says himself (9:10; *Mark* 2:15), while the more tactful Luke (5:29) leaves out the opprobrious term “sinners” and says merely “publicans and others” (§143). But it was the very fact of such mixed company which seemed improper, indeed offensive to the Scribes and Pharisees, who were still busy with their watching. Highly scandalized, they refrained from entering the house of that sinner of a publican in order to avoid contamination, but at the door they approached the disciples of Jesus and remarked: How does this happen? You and your Master lower yourselves to eat and drink in company with publicans and sinners? Where is your self-respect? Where is your legal purity?

The remarks reached Jesus, who answered for all of them: “It is not the healthy who need a physician, but they who are sick. But go and learn what this means: I desire mercy, and not sacrifice. For I have come to call sinners, not the just.” The words Jesus quotes are from the prophetic writings (*Osee* 6:6), which shows that Jesus’ teaching, going back further than rabbinic traditions, was linked with that of the ancient prophets, who were much more concerned with the spiritual formation of their people than with the ritual formalities, just as John the Baptist had been shortly before this (§267).

307. Naturally the Pharisees were not at all persuaded by this reply, which appealed precisely to one of the most dangerous pronouncements of the already dangerous prophets. If taken literally, it would abolish the whole Law of Moses and all the observances of the Jewish religion. And then what could save the vast fortress of rabbinic legislation, the supreme delight of God in heaven and of men on earth? And, incidentally, what was Jesus’ opinion concerning the pious practices of the Pharisees, like fasting, for instance (§77)? On this point, those who were vigilantly spying on Jesus found support among certain disciples of John the Baptist who were jealous of the popularity of the new Master. One day they came together and asked Jesus: How is it that we, the disciples of John and the Pharisees both, fast frequently, but you and your disciples eat and drink? How can they win holiness before God and power among the people if they do not become thin and gloomy with fasting? —Jesus answered: “Can the wedding guests (i.e., the “friends of the bridegroom,” §281) mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come, when the bridegroom shall be taken away from them, and then they will fast” (*Matt.* 9:15). The answer turns on the person of Jesus himself though it defends the disciples: for them unquestionably the time will come for mourning and fasting, but it is not the present, in which the Master



is among them as the bridegroom among his groomsmen. They will grieve when the Master shall be suddenly taken from them and the wedding feast turn to mourning. The answer should have been at least partially understood, if not completely, by all who heard it. Only recently John had been violently taken from his disciples and had left them in mourning, and here Jesus predicts a similar fate for his own followers.

After all, why insist so much on the material fast? Though it had assumed supreme importance among the Pharisees, it had not been so important in the ancient Law, nor had the Pharisees achieved great spiritual results by introducing this cult of a specific practice. If the spirit was to be festively clothed, then it was necessary to change its garment completely, not mend the old: "No one puts a patch of raw cloth on an old garment, for the patch [being stiff] tears away from the garment and a worse rent is made. Nor do people pour new wine into old wineskins, else the skins burst, the wine is spilt, and the skins are ruined. But they put the new wine into fresh skins, and both are saved" (*Matt.* 9:16-17).

When they heard principles like these, the Pharisees, who certainly were not imbeciles, must have understood that they could expect nothing from the new Rabbi, that he would never associate himself with the school of any of the great teachers of "tradition." Nevertheless, they or others continued to shadow him if only to catch him in renewed assaults against their "tradition."

308. The opportunity soon presented itself. Several weeks had passed since the conversation with the Samaritan woman, which had taken place in May. Hence the harvest was good and ripe, even in Galilee, and here and there the reaping had perhaps already begun. On a certain Sabbath (§178), while Jesus and his disciples were crossing a field, one or two of them felt hungry; so, they began to pluck the ears of wheat and, crumbling them in their hands, they ate the kernels. This was not a theft, because it was expressly permitted by the Law (*Deut.* 23:25). What was involved was the violation of the Sabbath, because reaping was one of the thirty-nine categories of work prohibited on the Sabbath (§70) and according to the rabbis even rubbing the ears between the hands was a kind of reaping. Since they had declared it unlawful to eat a fruit fallen from the tree on the Sabbath or an egg laid on the Sabbath (§251) because both represented violations of the prescribed Sabbath rest, so much the more did they have to condemn the deliberate action of the disciples. Having thus taken the culprits by surprise in this fine, flagrant misdemeanor, they confronted Jesus with their accusation: Do you not see? They are doing

what is unlawful on the Sabbath day! And who had said that there were no lawful exceptions to the Sabbath? Jesus answered them with a discussion of this principle. He reminded them that David, when he fled hungry, entered the tabernacle of Yahweh with his companions and they ate the “loaves of proposition” which only the priests might eat lawfully (*1 Kings* 21:2-6). From this example, it was easy and natural to proceed to a consideration of the Sabbath itself. Evidently for those Pharisees, however, David’s case was too remote and belonged to a prehistoric era, while the true history of Hebrew institutions began with the rise of Pharisaism. Yet they could not have been very familiar with the history of the latter either. In the beginning, the Hasidim, the immediate ancestors of the Pharisees (§29) had refused to fight in defense of their lives in order not to violate the Sabbath (§70), and with perfect logic they had allowed themselves to be killed by their enemies without offering any resistance whatever. But their survivors had arrived at a less rigid point of view and established the legality of defending oneself with weapons from an assailant on the Sabbath (*1 Mach.* 2:40-41). There was, however, this difference, that those ancestors of the Pharisees had created and given freedom to their nation, fighting heroically on the field of battle. The typical Pharisees of Jesus’ day fought only with sophistries in the schools of the rabbis, and hence could permit themselves the luxury of being stricter and more uncompromising in their interpretations than those who had made it possible for them to have their schools. Going back to the basic principle involved, Jesus declared: “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath”; and this was exactly the opposite of what the Pharisees ordinarily thought.<sup>104</sup> And he concluded: ‘Therefore the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath’ (*Mark* 2:27-28). The relationship expressed in the “therefore” is important. The Sabbath was made for man and therefore he who had but recently demonstrated his authority over the sins of man (§305) had authority over the Sabbath as well.

309. But the Pharisees were too jealous of their Sabbath to let the matter rest there, with the simple statement that Jesus was lord of that too. This time the visible proof was not forthcoming as it had been in the case of the paralytic’s sins. It came shortly afterward, however, according to the order followed here by all three Synoptics.

It was again the Sabbath and Jesus had gone to a synagogue to preach as was his custom. And here the Pharisees who were still spying on him were presented with an excellent opportunity to re-engage him and corner him on

the matter of the Sabbath precept. A man with a withered hand had come to the synagogue and the miracle-worker might possibly be tempted to cure him. They would watch and see whether he would yield to so unseemly a temptation and violate the precept despite the public scandal. They were not content merely to watch, it seems, for certain ones set themselves to lead him on (*Matt.* 12:10), asking him if it was lawful to cure on the Sabbath. This was an extremely broad question, and the rabbis continued to discuss it even later through any number of special cases, as we have noted (§71). In any event, there did exist the rule that except in immediate danger of death, any cure or medical treatment was absolutely forbidden on the Sabbath.

As in the case of the paralytic let down through the roof, Jesus did not enter into discussion but furnished a visible proof of the lawfulness of healing on the Sabbath. Who, according to the Pharisees, had established the precept? God, certainly. Who was the Lord of all the natural laws? God, certainly. Then if a natural law is suspended on the Sabbath, that is the work of God.

This was the reasoning Jesus gave them in answer, but he expressed it by action rather than words.

“But he said to the man with the withered hand: Arise and stand forth into the midst. And he arose and stood forth. Then Jesus said to them: I ask you, is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do evil, to save a life or to destroy it? (*Luke* 6:8-9.) As in the case of the paralytic, Jesus’ question was followed by silence this time too, and for the same reason. But they kept silence. And looking round upon them with anger, and being grieved at the blindness of their hearts, he said to the man: Stretch forth thy hand! And he stretched it forth, and his hand was restored.” Then the Pharisees answered in their own fashion, for they “went out and immediately took counsel with the Herodians (§45) against him, how they might do away with him” (*Mark* 3:4-6).

The reason is clear. Since the Pharisees had already tried this method of answering John the Baptist and found it so effective (§292), they decided to use it on Jesus too. But he, well aware of their scheming, retired from the place, as he had done when he heard of John’s imprisonment; and many followed him (*Matt.* 12:15).

## THE TWELVE APOSTLES

310. Against the horizon of Jesus’ life, a cloud, still quite distant but foreboding certain storm, was by now clearly outlined; it was the cloud of the Pharisees. There was no mistaking the outcome, for the recent case of John

the Baptist was clear example of the fate of anyone caught in that storm. Hence Jesus provides a shelter, not for himself but for his work.

Six or seven months had passed perhaps since the beginning of his public life, and his ministry in Galilee had won him many enthusiastic followers. From among them he would choose the foundation stones of his spiritual edifice. These he would set in place and then begin to raise up the house that should resist the tempest to come pouring down from that cloud.

Later the theologian Evangelist reflected: "He came into his own [house] and his own [household] received him not!" (*John* 1:11.) Yet the ancient Scriptures had predicted that the Messiah was to appear in the house of Israel, that it might become the joint house of God and men and that all men without distinction might declare: "[God] dwelt among us!" (*John* 1:14.) But since his own house did not receive him, the Messiah began to draw away from it and to lay the foundations of the human-divine edifice which was the goal of his ministry. Since the original members of the household refused to permit the old dilapidated house to be repaired, the renovator was forced to build an entirely new construction. Strictly speaking, there was as yet no schism, but these were provisions made against the day when it should come.

Among Jesus' customary followers, there were already some who were bound to him in a special way and with a particular loyalty; these were Simon Peter and Andrew, James and John the sons of Zebedee (§302), then Levi or Matthew (§306), Philip and Nathanael or Bartholomew (§§279-280). Their number was increased by five others who certainly had been following Jesus for some time although we are not told when or how they came to be associated with him. Mark (3:13-19) and Luke (6:12-16) record the choosing of the Twelve before the Sermon on the Mount, and this is undoubtedly the correct chronological order. Matthew (10:1-4) lists the Twelve after the Sermon on the Mount on the occasion of their temporary mission in the cities of Israel, but he does not say that they were chosen at that particular time; rather it is evident from his narrative that they had been chosen earlier.

311. Just as he had done before beginning his public life, Jesus before this act, unique in his ministry, "went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God. And when day broke, he summoned his disciples; and from these he chose twelve (whom he also named apostles)" (*Luke* 6:12r-13).

In Greek the word apostle (apostoloz) meant “one sent, corresponding etymologically to the Hebrew *shalu<sup>a</sup>h* (or *shali<sup>a</sup>h*) and the Aramaic *sh<sup>e</sup>luha*. In civil life, an “apostle” was the one sent to arrange a marriage or divorce or to deliver a legal decision, as the prophets and others sent by God had also been “apostles” in the religious sphere. The Sanhedrin in Jerusalem had its “apostles” too, the messengers sent to carry information to the various outlying communities (§58), especially of the Diaspora (cf. *Acts* 9:1-2; 28:21). It seems, in fact, that these apostles continued to function even after the destruction of Jerusalem when the supreme Jewish authorities had moved to Jamnia.

But the ordinary “apostles” of Judaism (except the prophets and others who showed special charisms) and the Apostles instituted by Jesus had nothing in common except their name. The former were simply agents representing a certain person in a specific affair (that is the meaning also in *John* 13:16) or they might be quite literally the humble bearers of messages or letter carriers; they were “apostles” in the strict sense of the term, but they did not form a true juridical institution. The latter, however, did constitute a specific and permanent institution, while they were “sent” in a true and much higher sense for they were to be the actual and spiritual bearers of the “good tidings” (§§105 ff.).

The number twelve had an evident analogy with the twelve sons of Israel and the twelve tribes descended from them to form the chosen nation of Yahweh. Since the house of Israel now threatened not to receive the Messiah of Yahweh, the new house he instituted in place of the old would also be directed by twelve spiritual tribal heads. This was a memorial to the age that was past and a testimony for the age to come. The first generation of Christians so cherished the number twelve chosen by Jesus that they not only included unfailingly the name of the traitor Judas, but when he came to die the first concern of the chief of the twelve, Peter, was to choose a new twelfth disciple in his place and thus make the sacred number complete once more (*Acts* 1:15-26). In fact, the New Testament calls them the Twelve” (thirty-four times) much more frequently than “Apostles” (four times).

312. The list of the Twelve is given four times, in each of the Synoptics (*Matt.* 10:2-4; *Mark* 3:16-19; *Luke* 6:14-16) and in the *Acts* (1:13). No list is completely identical with another, not even the two which belong to the same author, namely, in the Gospel of Luke and in the *Acts*. But there are these

constant similarities: Simon (Peter) is always named first and Judas the traitor last (except in the Acts when he has already died); the names are always arranged in three groups of four, Simon invariably heading the first group, Philip the second, and James son of Alpheus the third. The list as given by Matthew follows:

Simon, who is called Peter,  
Andrew, his brother,  
James, the son of Zebedee,  
John, his brother;  
Philip,  
Bartholomew,  
Thomas,  
Matthew, the publican;  
James, the son of Alpheus,  
Thaddeus,  
Simon the Cananean,  
Judas Iscariot, the traitor.

The names vary in the third group only, due no doubt to the frequent Jewish custom of having two names. Instead of Thaddeus, which in some manuscripts is written *Lebbeus*,<sup>105</sup> there appears a Jude [son] of James, but it is the same person. The patronymic of James served to distinguish him from the traitor Judas, as the epithet the Cananean served to distinguish the second Simon from Simon Peter. The adjective Cananean is a simple transcription from the Aramaic, but in some lists, it also appears translated Zealot as we have noted (§43). In any case, the word has here its original meaning and not the later historical one' nor does it imply that this Simon belonged to the Zealot faction, which intensified its activity only later.

313. If Bartholomew is really Nathanael (§280), the first six in the list are already known to us, and so is the eighth, Matthew. We do not know definitely when or on what occasion the others began to follow Jesus. We know only that James, son of Alpheus, or James the Less (the “Greater” is James son of Zebedee) was the son of a certain Mary and that his brothers were Joseph, Simon, and Judas (cf. *Mark* 15:40; *Matt.* 13:55; 27:56) and that he was called the “brother of the Lord” (§264). Probably this last fact is the reason why he has first place in the third group. The name *Thomas* is the Greek transliteration of the Aramaic *toma* (Hebrew *teom*), which means

“twin.” Hence John adds after the name its Greek translation, *didumoz*, (11:16; 20:24). The traitor Judas is distinguished by the epithet “Iscariot,” *Iskariwthz*, but from John (6:17, Greek text) we learn that Simon the father of Judas was also called Iscariot and hence it was a designation handed down from father to son. It is almost certainly a transcription of the *Hebrew* *’ish Qeriyyoth*, “man of Qeriyyoth,” and therefore is an adjective referring to the city in Judea named Qeriyyoth (cf. *Josue* 15:25) from which Judas’ ancestors had come. In Mark’s list (3:17) we read that Jesus called the two brothers James and John *Boanerges* (*Boanhrgesz*), “sons of thunder. The etymology of the word is not clear nor is it easy today to trace an original Semitic form for it. The least improbable seems to be *bene-rigsha* (sons of the crash). Mark is the only one who records it and he does so when he gives the list of the Apostles. It obviously was not bestowed on the young men at this time of the Apostles’ selection, however, but only later, after various incidents in which they had occasion to display the ardent and impetuous nature which prompted it, as for instance, when they were anxious to call down fire from heaven to burn to ashes the Samaritans who refused to receive Jesus (*Luke* 9:54).

314. As for the social position and education of the Twelve, we may conclude from a vague hint here and there in their later conduct that they belonged in general to that class of Jewish society a little below the middle class of small proprietors and quite a bit above the lowest class of proletarians. Although it has no exact modern parallel its position may be compared in general to that of our small tradesmen or ordinary wage earners.

All of them worked at some form of manual labor, such as fishing, but then this was common also among the rabbis dedicated to the study of the Law (§167). Nor did it represent so imperative an economic necessity in those days as it does with us. The general way of life permitted them to stop working even for several days at a time, and this was even more true of those whose economic position was a little more solid, like that of the family of Zebedee, for instance, who operated a fishing business on a rather large scale. It is not too hardy to suppose that Jesus’ family was less comfortable, financially, than those of all or almost all the Apostles. But, after all, their material needs were few, and it was possible to live on very little without feeling either want or dissatisfaction.

On the other hand, many in this modest little category were intensely interested in spiritual problems, especially if these were in any way related to religious and national issues. They voluntarily left the comforts of their own

humble little homes to take part in a discussion, to listen to a celebrated teacher, or to follow even for several days in a row some forceful popular leader. What they learned in these meetings and gatherings they cherished fondly in their memories, the favorite archive of the Semitic people (§150), and it furnished the material for continued private reflection and frequent group discussions as well, and thus formed the principal cultural heritage of this particular class. They read and wrote little, but that does not mean that they were all illiterate. Illiteracy in Palestine must have been much more prevalent after the catastrophe of 70 than before. Previous to 70, there was a little elementary school attached to each synagogue (§63) where many learned their letters for better or for worse, though they may not have used them very much afterward.

This in general was the social and cultural background of the Twelve chosen by Jesus, although one or two of them may have been in some ways more favored than the others. We have seen, for example, that the former publican Matthew was chosen to set the apostolic catechesis in writing because of his greater skill with the pen (§117). If the Greeks who wanted to know Jesus personally appealed to Philip (*John* 12:20-21, Greek text), the Apostle with the Greek name, we are permitted to suppose that he was conspicuous among his colleagues either for breadth of training or for social position.

Naturally the Apostles were individuals of varying temperaments. Andrew seems to have been of a rather calm and tranquil nature, resembling very little his impetuous brother Peter. The two “sons of thunder” were not very much like the mistrustful and diffident Thomas (*John* 11:16; 14:5; 20:25). All of them, when they became Jesus’ disciples, were certainly afire with great love and enthusiasm for him, but within their own respective personalities they were much the same as other men, and, taken together, they more or less represented all of humanity. And that is why there had also to be a traitor among them.

## THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

315. The public choosing of the Twelve would have availed very little had it not been followed by a spiritual vocation, that is, by a fuller instruction in Jesus’ teachings. Notwithstanding their affection for the Master, the Apostles must have known very little of his thought and they would certainly have been in an embarrassing situation if some learned Pharisee challenged them to a complete and precise exposition of his doctrines. They had seen him work



miracles to help the afflicted, they had heard him preach as one “having authority” (§299) and affirm principles of justice and goodness; they themselves had felt dominated and attracted by him, and they loved him with all their hearts. And that was all they would have been able to say. The day Jesus chose them as his collaborators, it became too little, nor had he given them any separate instruction regarding his teachings and intentions.

Besides, the people, too, needed an exposition of the basic principles of Jesus’ teaching, for the crowds that had occasionally heard him preach until then must have had much vaguer and more inaccurate notions regarding it than the Apostles had. The increasing hostility of the Scribes and Pharisees also called for the laying down of a definite program, so that Jesus’ position and theirs might be more clearly defined. The people had immediately noticed that he “was teaching them . . . not as the Scribes” (§299), but if they had had to list the particular points of agreement and disagreement between the teachings of Jesus and those of the Scribes, they would certainly have been more at a loss than the Twelve.

The Sermon on the Mount filled all these needs.

(Figure 43, Figure 44)

316. Jesus was by now very well-known not only in Galilee but also beyond its borders. With the surprising fullness and rapidity with which news spread orally throughout the Semitic world, so parsimonious where letters and other written documents are concerned, his fame had spread to the south through Judea and Idumea, both Jewish regions, to the Hellenized Decapolis in the east (§4) and to the great Mediterranean centers of pagan Phoenicia in the west. Groups of people kept coming up from these countries to the Galilean prophet, to see him and to “listen to him,” but also and especially to “be healed of their diseases” (*Luke* 6:18). “For he healed many, so that as many as had ailments were pressing upon him to touch him” (*Mark* 3:10). The waves of people followed one after the other increasing in number until one day Jesus thought the right time had come to set his program before the multitude and his chosen Twelve together.

All three Synoptics set the discourse on “the mountain,” with the definite article but without any further description. Hence it was one of the hills of Galilee. The tradition which has chosen what is today called the “Mount of the Beatitudes” has several not inconsiderable arguments in its favor. Explicit evidence for this particular mount dates only from the twelfth century, but if

we consider the testimony substantially the same as the tradition concerning Tabgha (note 150), then it goes back to the fourth. In that case, the "mountain" is the hill, about 500 feet high, on the western shore of Lake Tiberias above Tabgha and about eight miles distant from Tiberias and two from Capharnaum. Jesus did not deliver the Discourse on the very top of the hill, where today rises the hospice of the National Association for Italian Missionaries, but somewhat further down on a level place on the southwest slope.<sup>106</sup> According to ancient tradition, this was a favorite spot with Jesus for addressing the crowds, and it was not far from Capharnaum, as the Synoptic narrative seems to require.

317. We have two reports of the Sermon, that of Matthew and that of Luke, but they present a number of differences, chiefly in the quantity and arrangement of the material. Matthew's account is about three and one-half times as long as Luke's (one hundred and seven verses as against thirty), but in other episodes of Jesus' life Luke records ample excerpts of the Sermon as it is given us by Matthew (about forty verses).

The fact that Luke assigns these statements to other circumstances is very important. Not only do we find this true of Mark, who, though he omits the entire Sermon, records separate parts of it here and there, but we also unexpectedly find it in Matthew himself, for he has Jesus repeat certain maxims of the Sermon on other occasions (cf. *Matt.* 5:29-30, with 18:8-9 and 5:32 with 19:9). All this is not surprising if we keep in mind what we have already observed regarding both the Evangelists' direct dependence on the living catechesis of the Church (§110 ff.) and also their respective aims and methods. On this last point we must remember particularly that Matthew is the Evangelist who writes with "order" (§§114ff.) and Luke is the one who proposes to set forth "in order" (§§140 ff.).

There is no difficulty, therefore, in assuming that Luke sometimes takes passages from the Sermon on the Mount and records them in other episodes and that, on the other hand, Matthew collects into the Sermon maxims which Jesus pronounced on other occasions.<sup>107</sup> To cite just one example of the latter sort, Matthew includes the Lord's Prayer in the Sermon (6:9-13), but Luke records it much later, toward the end of the second year of Jesus' public life and a few months before his death. In his account, besides, it is one of the disciples who occasions the teaching of the prayer when he asks how they should pray (*Luke* 11:1-4). It is certainly possible that Jesus taught the Lord's

Prayer more than once, especially since the two versions we have of it are different enough; but Luke's version has in its favor the disciple's question which elicits the prayer, while there is no such question asked in the Sermon on the Mount and the Lord's Prayer could be taken out of it without interrupting the sequence of thought. We might cite other examples in favor of one assumption or the other, but they are neither certain nor are they such as to give us a general criterion.

The possibility is even greater that the Sermon on the Mount as Jesus gave it was much longer than either of the two versions we now possess. Matthew's, which is the longer, could be delivered as a sermon today in about twenty minutes, and if we add the few verses peculiar to Luke, we lengthen it by only three or four minutes more. This would certainly not be a very long discourse for the crowds who came from far distant places to listen to Jesus, and so it is very probable that the early oral catechesis gave a much fuller account of this fundamental discourse than we possess today and that, while Mark omitted it altogether, the other two Synoptics reproduced only those parts of it which suited their particular aims. It is also possible that Jesus returned on occasion to certain points in his exposition, perhaps repeating the same maxims and using the same comparisons, just as teachers of every time and every subject have always done.

In conclusion, Matthew's account seems nearer to the form the Discourse had in the early catechesis, and it is therefore more suitable as the basis of our discussion.

318. The Sermon on the Mount may be compared to a majestic symphony, whose clear basic themes are resolutely and immediately proclaimed with full orchestra in the very first measures. And they are the most unexpected, the most unheard-of themes in all this world, totally unlike any others ever played by other orchestras, and yet presented as the most natural and spontaneous of all to a well-trained ear. And in truth, until the Sermon on the Mount, all the symphonies of the sons of men, though they varied in kind, united in proclaiming that blessedness for man was good fortune, that satisfaction came with satiety, that pleasure was the satisfaction of desire, and honor the product of esteem. On the other hand, in its very opening harmonies, the Discourse on the Mount announces that man's blessedness resides in misfortune, satiety in famished hunger, pleasure in unfulfillment, and honor in disesteem, all ultimately to resolve into the reward that awaits him in the future. The listener is dismayed as he hears such themes as these defined, but

the orchestra continues in all serenity to play them over one by one, to repeat and emphasize them, to weave variations about them. Then in the loud brilliant call of the brass winds it gathers up other themes timidly suggested by the violins, corrects, transforms, and sublimates them, to hurl them to the highest peaks of sound, drowning in a crash of cymbals the stray echoes of the old and far-off melodies of other orchestras. And from the material world and humanity as it is, the melting wave of music rises up and up until it reaches and breaks in blessedness over a humanity no longer human and a world no longer material but divine.

The ancient Stoics called anything asserted contrary to the common opinion a paradox (paradoxon). In this sense, the Sermon on the Mount is the most complete and radical paradox ever asserted. No discourse on earth was ever more subversive, or better, reversive than this. White is not called dark or gray but altogether black, and black is shining white. What has always been a good is now assigned to the category of evils, and an evil is called a good. The towering peak is sunk into the ground; the deep-sunk base is set where rose the peak. In comparison with the revolution implicit in the Sermon on the Mount, the greatest revolutions man has ever accomplished are as children's make-believe battles in comparison to Cannae or Gaugamela.

And this reversal of things is presented not as the fruit of long intellectual investigations, but with a tone of crisp, concise command justified by the authority of the speaker alone. — This is so, because I, Jesus, tell you it is so; others have told you white, but I tell you black; fifty has been prescribed, but that is only partly good, and I, Jesus, prescribe the whole hundred.

319. And what are the sanctions of this new order of things? It has no human sanctions, only divine ones; they are not terrestrial sanctions but entirely supramundane.

The poor are blessed because theirs is the kingdom of heaven, not a kingdom on earth. The sorrowful are blessed because they shall be comforted, but in a distant and unspecified future. The clean of heart are blessed because they will see God, not because their purity is to be prized and praised by men. All those who suffer for love of justice are blessed, but once again because theirs is the kingdom of heaven, not because an ample recompense on earth awaits them. Thus, the new order promulgated by Jesus has a true juridical basis only for those who accept and await the kingdom of heaven. On the other hand, any Nicodemus, "born of the flesh," who understands only the

material and neither accepts nor awaits a kingdom of heaven, can see no foundation for Jesus' standard of values and considers it, more than a paradox, an outright absurdity. But Jesus had foreseen just this, and has explained the reason for it when in his conversation with Nicodemus he warned him: "Unless a man be born from above, he cannot see the kingdom of God..." for "that which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is Spirit" (§288).

Finally, the Sermon on the Mount does not ignore historical fact, but fits in with the realities of past and contemporary Hebraism on many and essential points. The Mosaic Law is not abolished, but integrated and perfected; it is kept as a kind of first floor to which an upper story is added. The customs and even the casuistical lucubrations of the Scribes and Pharisees are not overlooked, but they are treated as an inanimate body into which a soul must be infused. The chief concern is always for the moral and the spiritual rather than for the material act in itself. Not even the economic and financial question is slighted, but it is given a new setting in an act of faith, in a vision of the providence of God. Love governs all, in its twofold expression toward God and toward men. God is not a despotic monarch who, from the far-off distance, dispatches his orders to humanity and sits awaiting its tribute. He is the Father of the whole human family who knows when his children are hungry and requires only the tribute of their persistent prayer for bread. All men, equally the children of the supernatural Father, are brothers one of another; they have the same spiritual blood; they are so many other "egos" before which the individual "ego" must disappear. So great is the importance of this love we must bear our fellow men that not even our love for God is true and legitimate unless it is accompanied by this other love. Whoever is about to make his offering at the altar with purity of intention and remembers at that moment that he has been unjust to another must first go and repair the injustice and then return to make his offering; for God waits serenely, gladly ceding to man the priority in time for obtaining what is his due. But he is not pleased with offerings from one whose conscience toward his brother is not at peace.

320. The Sermon on the Mount follows a quite clear outline, especially in Matthew's version; but though he is the Evangelist par excellence of "order" (§114), he probably did not invent this arrangement, rather finding it ready to hand in the early catechesis. He may, it is true, have modified the arrangements slightly here and there.

The prologue, which plunges resolutely *in medias res*, is represented by the beatitudes (5:3-12). This is true in Luke also (6:20-26), though with some differences in arrangement. In Matthew the felicitation "blessed...!" is repeated nine times, but there are in reality only eight beatitudes because the last is almost a repetition of the one preceding and a kind of summary of all of them. In Luke the felicitation is repeated only four times, immediately followed by four maledictions, "Woe....!" addressed to categories opposed to those called blessed. This arrangement, in which the affirmation of an idea is followed immediately by the denial of its contrary, is used with great frequency in biblical poetry (antithetic parallelism),<sup>108</sup> and it is important to note that this alternation of benedictions and maledictions had also been used in the ancient promulgations of the Mosaic Law (*Deut.* 11:26-28; 27:12-13; 28:2 ff. and 15 ff.; Josue 8:33-34). Now since the Sermon on the Mount is unquestionably intended to be, both for content and setting, the messianic counterpart to the Mosaic Law (§322), it is very likely that this prologue in the early catechesis consisted of a list of beatitudes followed by the same number of maledictions. From the lot of them, Matthew took only eight beatitudes, while Luke took only four beatitudes but reinforced them with four maledictions.

321. If we list the two versions in parallel columns, we get the following synopsis, which brings us closer to the outline of the first catechesis:

Matthew 5	Luke 6
3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven	20 "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
	24 "But woe to you that are rich! for you are now having your comfort.
(Vulg. 5) 4 "Blessed are they who mourn, for they shall be comforted.	(21b "Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh.) 25b "Woe to you who laugh now! for you shall mourn and weep.
(Vulg. 4) 5 "Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land.	

6 "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied.	(21a "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you shall be satisfied.) 25a "Woe to you who are filled! for you shall hunger.
7 "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy. 8 "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God. 9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God. 10 "Blessed are they who suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.	
11 "Blessed are you when men reproach you and persecute you, and, speaking falsely, say all manner of evil against you for my sake	(22 "Blessed shall you be when men hate you, and when they shut you out, and reproach you, and reject your name as evil because of the Son of Man.
12 "Rejoice and exult because your reward is great in heaven; for so did they persecute the prophets who were before you." <sup>109</sup>	23 "Rejoice on that day and exult; for behold, your reward is great in heaven. For in the selfsame manner their fathers used to treat the prophets.)
	26 "Woe to you when all men speak well of you! for in this way their forefathers used to treat the false prophets."





This astounding prologue presents the general spirit of Jesus' program, or the messianic Law. It concludes with the announcement that this spirit must be as a salt which shall preserve the entire world from corruption and as a light that shall illumine all the earth (*Matt.* 5:13-16; in other context, *Luke* 14:34-35, and 8:16; 11:33). But immediately after this glance toward the future, the Discourse turns back to the past and faces the question of the relationship between past and future where the Hebrew Law is concerned. The outline follows:

322. Jesus does not destroy the Law but renews it, in part abrogating and in part retaining and perfecting it (*Matt.* 5:17-20). — The messianic Law perfects the Mosaic Law in the precepts regarding fraternal peace and concord, chastity, matrimony, the taking of oaths, revenge and charity (*ibid.*, 21-48). — It surpasses by far the practice of the Pharisees with regard to almsgiving, prayer, and fasting (6:1-8). — It is the one true treasure for those who accept it and frees them from all other solicitude (*ibid.*, 19-34). — It demands more perfect charity and more constant prayer (7:1-12). — It is a narrow gate but a protection against false prophets, and it induces good works (*ibid.*, 13-23). — In short, the New Law is a house built on living rock and will withstand the floods and tempests that beat against it (*ibid.*, 24-27).

Even this sketchy summary makes it clear that the Sermon on the Mount is intended, among other things, as a counterpoise to the Law of Moses, which it does not destroy but perfects. This is also reflected by the setting in which the Discourse was delivered. Just as Moses, assisted by the ancients of the nation, had promulgated the Old Law on Mount Sinai in the presence of the people, Jesus, attended by the twelve Apostles, promulgated the New Law on a hill in Galilee in the presence of the multitude. This parallel setting has, it is true, led to the conclusion that the whole thing is an invention, that the setting is ideal and that the Discourse was never given. But though the conclusion is arbitrary, its premises are not thereby rendered false. The setting is parallel precisely because there is a deliberate intention to show even in a material way the connection between the Old Law and the New, just as immediately before this there had been a deliberate association between the twelve Apostles and the twelve tribes of Israel (§311), and just as the alternation of benedictions and curses is probably intended to follow the pattern of other ancient promulgations of the Law of Moses (§320).

The Sermon on the Mount is popular in style and Oriental in expression. It contains no subtleties or abstractions but abounds in concrete and practical examples, which have always been dear to the people and from which they are expert in extracting the general rules. Typical Oriental hyperboles are frequent, but the audience knew how to give them their true value and without them the Discourse would have seemed colorless. For an Oriental, phrases like, "If thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee," or "if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other," added spice and flavor to the discourse. But Jesus' first followers never did cut off their right hands or offer the left cheek for the simple reason that they understood the way men spoke in their country and besides they had good common sense. When, however, the worship of the letter appeared and fanaticism took the place of good sense, there came the case of Origen in antiquity and of Leo Tolstoy in our own day. But in contrast to the allegorizing Alexandrian, unexpectedly become a literalist, and the Russian dreamer, who preached meekness aggressively and remained a sensualist through all his mystic utopias, Francis of Assisi will always seem the perfect interpreter of the Sermon on the Mount, an interpreter as keen in his perception of its true spirit as he was enthusiastic in practicing it.

323. The rest of the Discourse follows: (*Matt.* 5). <sup>13</sup> "You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its strength, what shall it be salted with? It is no longer of any use but to be thrown out and trodden underfoot by men."<sup>110</sup>

<sup>14</sup> "You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Neither do men light a lamp and put it under the measure, but upon the lamp-stand, so as to give light to all in the house."<sup>16</sup> Even so let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father [he who is] in heaven.<sup>111</sup>

<sup>17</sup> "Do not think that I have come to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill. For amen I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass away, not one jot or one tittle shall be lost from the Law, till all things have been accomplished. Therefore, whoever does away with one of these least commandments, and so teaches men, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven. But whoever carries them out and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you that unless your justice exceeds that of the Scribes and the Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven."<sup>112</sup>

324. <sup>21</sup>"You have heard that it was said to the ancients: 'Thou shalt not kill'; and that whoever shall murder shall be liable to judgment. <sup>22</sup>But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother, shall be liable to judgment; and whoever says to his brother 'Raca,' shall be liable to the Sanhedrin; and whoever says, 'Thou fool!' shall be liable to the fire of Gehenna. <sup>23</sup>Therefore, if thou art offering thy gift at the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath anything against thee, leave thy gift before the altar and go first to be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift. <sup>113</sup>

<sup>25</sup> "Come to terms with thy opponent quickly, while thou art with him on the way; lest thy opponent deliver thee to the judge, and the judge to the officer, and thou be cast into prison. <sup>26</sup> Amen I say to thee, thou wilt not come out from it until thou hast paid the last penny. <sup>114</sup>

325. <sup>27</sup>"You have heard that it was said: 'Thou shalt not commit adultery.' <sup>28</sup> But I say to you that anyone who even looks with lust at a woman has already committed adultery with her in his heart. <sup>29</sup> So if thy right eye is an occasion of sin to thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee that one of thy members should perish than that thy whole body should be thrown into hell. And if thy right hand is an occasion of sin to thee, cut it off, and cast it from thee; for it is better for thee that one of thy members should be lost than that thy whole body should go into hell. <sup>115</sup>

<sup>31</sup> "It was said, moreover: 'Whoever puts away his wife, let him give her a written notice of dismissal.' But I say to you that everyone who puts away his wife, save on account of immorality, causes her to commit adultery; and he who marries a woman who has been put away commits adultery. <sup>116</sup>

326. <sup>33</sup> "Again you have heard that it was said to the ancients: Thou shalt not swear falsely, but fulfill thy oaths to the Lord." <sup>34</sup> But I say to you not to swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is the throne of God; nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of his feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. <sup>36</sup> Neither do thou swear by thy head, for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your speech be: 'Yes [if it is] yes,' no [if it is] no' and whatever is beyond these [words] comes from the evil one. <sup>117</sup>

327. <sup>38</sup> "You have heard that it was said: 'An eye for an eye,' and 'a tooth for a tooth.'" But I say to you not to resist the evildoer; on the contrary, if someone strike thee on the right cheek, turn to him the other also; <sup>40</sup> and if anyone would go to law with thee and take thy tunic, let him take thy cloak as

well; and whoever forces thee to go for one mile, go with him two [miles].<sup>42</sup> To him who asks of thee, give; and from him who would borrow of thee, do not turn away.<sup>118</sup>

<sup>43</sup> "You have heard that it was said: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor, and shalt hate thy enemy.'<sup>44</sup> But I say to you: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who persecute and calumniate you,<sup>45</sup> so that you may be children of your Father [he who is] in heaven, who makes his sun to rise on the good and the evil, and sends rain on the just and the unjust.<sup>46</sup> For if you love those who love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans do that?<sup>47</sup> And if you salute your brethren only, what are you doing more than others? Do not even the pagans do that?<sup>48</sup> You therefore are to be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect.<sup>119</sup>

328. Chapter 6 —<sup>1</sup> "Take heed not to practice your good [justice] before men, in order to be seen by them; otherwise, you shall have no reward with your Father [who is] in heaven.<sup>2</sup> Therefore when thou givest alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, in order that they may be honored by men.<sup>3</sup> Amen I say to you, they have had their reward. But when thou givest alms, do not let thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing, so that thy alms may be given in secret; and thy Father, who sees in secret, will reward thee.<sup>120</sup>

5 "Again, when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites, who love to pray standing in the synagogues and at the street corners, in order that they may be seen by men. Amen I say to you, they have had their reward.<sup>6</sup> But when thou prayest, go into thy room, and closing thy door, pray to thy Father [who is] in secret; and thy Father who sees in secret will reward thee.<sup>121</sup>

329. <sup>7</sup> "But in praying, do not multiply words, as the pagans do; for they think that by saying a great deal, they will be heard.<sup>8</sup> So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. In this manner therefore shall you pray:

'Our Father who art in heaven hallowed be thy name,

<sup>10</sup> Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth, as it is in heaven.

<sup>11</sup> Give us this day our daily [necessary] bread

<sup>12</sup> And forgive us our debts, as we also forgive our debtors.

<sup>13</sup> And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'

(Luke 11:2-4)

"Father, hallowed be thy name Thy kingdom come.

Give us this [every] day our daily [necessary] bread.

And forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who is indebted to us.

And lead us not into temptation.

<sup>14</sup> "For if you forgive men their offenses, your heavenly Father will forgive you your offenses. But if you do not forgive men, neither will your Father forgive you your offenses.<sup>122</sup>

330. <sup>16</sup> "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, who disfigure their faces in order to appear to men as fasting. Amen I say to you, they have had their reward. <sup>17</sup> But thou, when thou dost fast, anoint thy head and wash thy face, <sup>18</sup> so that thou mayest not be seen by men to fast, but by thy Father who is in secret, and thy Father, who sees in secret, will reward thee.<sup>123</sup>

<sup>19</sup> "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where rust and moth consume, and where thieves break in and steal; <sup>20</sup> but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither rust nor moth consumes, nor thieves break in and steal. <sup>21</sup> For where thy treasure is, there thy heart also will be.<sup>124</sup>

<sup>22</sup> "The lamp of the body is the eye. If thy eye be sound, thy whole body will be full of light. <sup>23</sup> But if thy eye be [in] evil [state], thy whole body will be full of darkness. Therefore, if the light that is in thee is darkness, how great is the darkness itself?<sup>125</sup>

331. <sup>24</sup> "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will stand by the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. <sup>25</sup> Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life a greater thing than the food, and the body more than the clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are not you of much more value than they? <sup>27</sup> But which of you by being anxious about it can add to his stature [or, age] a single cubit? <sup>28</sup> And as for clothing why are you anxious? See how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is

thrown into the oven, how much more will he clothe you, O you of little faith?  
<sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying: 'What shall we eat?' or, 'what shall we drink?' or 'What are we to put on?' <sup>32</sup> (for after all these things the Gentiles seek); for your Father knows that you need all these things. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides. <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow; for tomorrow will have anxieties of its own. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.<sup>126</sup>

332. Chapter 7 —1 "Do not judge [condemn] that you may not be judged [condemned]; <sup>2</sup> for with what judgment you judge, you shall be judged; and with what measure you measure, it shall be measured to you.<sup>3</sup> But why dost thou see the speck [that is] in thy brother's eye, and yet dost not consider the beam [that is] in thy own eye? <sup>4</sup> Or how canst thou say to thy brother, 'Let me cast out the speck from thy eye'; and behold, there is a beam in thy own eye? <sup>5</sup> Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam from thy own eye, and then thou wilt see clearly to cast out the speck from thy brother's eye.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>6</sup> "Do not give to dogs what is holy, neither throw your pearls before swine, or they will trample them under their feet and turn [against you] and rend you.<sup>128</sup>38

<sup>7</sup> "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you. <sup>8</sup> For every one who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it shall be opened. <sup>9</sup> Or what man is there among you, who, if his son asks him for a loaf, will hand him a stone; <sup>10</sup> or if he asks for a fish, will hand him a serpent? <sup>11</sup> Therefore, if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father [who is] in heaven, give good things to those who ask him!

<sup>12</sup> "Therefore all things whatever you would that men should do to you, even so do you also to them; for this is the Law and the Prophets.<sup>129</sup>

333. <sup>13</sup> "Enter by the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many there are who enter that way. <sup>14</sup> How narrow [is] the gate, and close the way that leads to life! And few there are who find it.

<sup>15</sup> "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves.<sup>16</sup> By their fruits you will know them. Do men gather grapes from thorns, or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> Even so, every good

tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit.<sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.<sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.<sup>20</sup> Therefore, by their fruits you will know them.

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of my Father [who is] in heaven shall enter the kingdom of heaven.<sup>22</sup> Many will say to me that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in thy name, and cast out devils in thy name, and work many miracles in thy name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of iniquity!’<sup>130</sup>

334.<sup>24</sup> “Everyone therefore who hears these my words, and acts upon them, shall be likened to a wise man who built his house on rock.<sup>25</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, but it did not fall, because it was founded on rock.<sup>26</sup> And everyone who hears these my words and does not act upon them, shall be likened to a foolish man who built his house on the sand.<sup>27</sup> And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and was utterly ruined.”

With this simile of the house, in both versions, the Sermon on the Mount comes to a close. If whoever heard and practiced its precepts was like one who builds a house on rock, then so much the more is this true of Jesus when he spoke it so far as the aims of his ministry were concerned. As we have said, he too was building a shelter against the gathering storm clouds (§310). He had chosen and set in place twelve foundation stones, according to the number of the tribes of Israel (§311), and other smaller stones were represented by the many other Israelites who were following him. Now he was cementing all together with a teaching which was in part the ancient teaching of Israel and in part his own. There was more building still to be done and many places remained to be smoothed and finished, but the frame of the house was firmly erected in the Sermon on the Mount.

335. What does this Sermon represent in the general teaching of Jesus? It has been defined as the “fundamental code,” or the Summa of his doctrine, but these must be considered extremely vague definitions at best for they only partly parallel the truth. It is not so elaborate as a code, nor is it even a Summa, because it leaves too many doctrines of prime importance yet to be stated without so much as hinting at them. The Sermon does not mention the



Redemption wrought by the death of Christ, Baptism, the Eucharist, the Church, or the end of the world, and without these we do not have a true historical picture of Christ's teaching. Nor is the Discourse, strictly speaking, a refutation of Pharisaic teaching or, better, a correction and perfection of Judaism, although these things are included in its purpose; after all, they are secondary only, the consequences of a wider and more general purpose. Actually, the Sermon on the Mount is nothing but the description of the *metanoia*, the "change of mind" which both Jesus and John the Baptist had already been preaching (§266, §299) as the prerequisite for the fulfillment of the kingdom of God. And what "change of mind" could possibly represent so complete a subversal and reversal of ideas as this which proclaimed that the poor, the weeping, the hungry, the meek, and all others whom men until then called unhappy were instead the blessedly happy because of a remote future? The Sermon, then, rather than a "code," is 'the spirit which will later animate a whole new code; more than a Summa, it is the central idea around which a full rich commentary will later develop.

The unique and personal character of the Sermon on the Mount and especially of the Beatitudes which introduce it is too obvious to need demonstration or comment. Those modern scholars, small in number and authority, who have rejected a reality so evident do not merit any answer and are not to be taken seriously. The Sermon does present numerous points of contact with the spiritual heritage, both biblical and rabbinic, of the time, and it is to the credit of recent research that it discovered this. The last half of the Sermon, especially, contains many thoughts and expressions similar to those in the Talmud and other Jewish writings.<sup>131</sup> Nor is there anything unusual about this, for Jesus was talking to people of his own time who were used to certain specific phrases and expressions, and, above all, he had come not "to destroy but to fulfill." In any case, even these resemblances only serve to underline the boundless superiority of the Sermon on the Mount — which gathers neatly into a few pages what can be gleaned only partially and laboriously from the whole immense field of Jewish writings — and to highlight the more the inimitable spirit which pervades it.

It is this spirit which makes it the most revolutionary of all human discourses, precisely because it is divine.

## THE CENTURION OF CAPHARNAUM AND THE WIDOW OF NAIM



336. Luke as well as Matthew records the episode of the centurion of Capharnaum after the Sermon on the Mount. This seems to establish definitely its chronological setting, and there is enough internal evidence to distinguish it from the other episode of the royal official (§298) although the two incidents do bear many similarities. Shortly after the Discourse, Jesus returned to Capharnaum. There was a centurion garrisoned there, probably in the mercenary troops of the local tetrarch, Herod Antipas, and not in any Roman detachment. He was a pagan but kindly disposed to Judaism; he had, in fact, built the synagogue of Capharnaum (§285) at his own expense. His goodness of heart is further evidenced by the fact that he was devotedly fond of his slave, whom he treated more as a son than a servant. Now this slave had fallen ill and was on the point of death. The grief-stricken centurion, who must certainly have tried all the known remedies in vain, knew Jesus by reputation. On that very day Capharnaum must have been almost empty because so many had gone out to the neighboring hill where the famous wonder-worker was preaching a great sermon. Having lost all hope in physicians, the centurion naturally thought of the miracle-worker, but he did not quite venture to present his plea to him, perhaps because he did not know him personally. He appealed therefore to the prominent Jews of the city to speak to Jesus and beg him to do something for the dying man. The Jews delivered the message and earnestly recommended that Jesus grant the centurion's request: "He is worthy that thou shouldst do this for him, for he loves our nation and himself has built us our synagogue" (*Luke 7:4-5*).

Jesus, himself a Jew, was naturally touched by the Jewish appeal in the request. This pagan had been his benefactor too, because Jesus had preached and prayed in the synagogue of Capharnaum. So, with the messengers he set out immediately for the centurion's house. It was already in sight when they were met by other messengers sent by the centurion. He felt a certain hesitancy, prompted by scruple and respect. His was a pagan house, and a practicing Jew could not enter it without being defiled. Would not the famous Jesus feel an inner repugnance about entering it, or would he not at least suffer a certain loss of respect among his coreligionists? Hence the second group of messengers tactfully suggested to Jesus in the words of the centurion: "Lord, do not trouble thyself; for I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof; this is why I did not think myself worthy to come to thee. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I too am a man subject to authority, and have soldiers subject to me; and I say to one:

‘Go,’ and he goes; and to another: ‘Come,’ and he comes; and to my servant [slave]: ‘Do this,’ and he does it” (*Luke 7:6-8*). The centurion was trying to explain and justify his deference toward Jesus with his own soldier training. He was well acquainted with what the Romans of the time called *imperium* and we call military discipline, and he exercised it over his own soldiers. Hence Jesus was not to humble himself to come into his house; let him speak a single word of *imperium* and his command would be recognized and executed by the forces of nature which were conquering the dying man.

“Now when Jesus heard this he marveled, and turning to the crowd that followed him, said: Amen I say to you, not even in Israel have I found so great a faith!” The order expected of him was immediately given and the sick man was cured on the instant. But this, in the gospel narrative, seems to take second place; what we remain conscious of most is the “great faith.”

337. Luke alone follows this episode with the account of Naim. In Greek, the word is Nain, preserved in the modern Arab name of the village. It is on the slopes of Little Hermon, about eight miles from Nazareth and thirty from Capharnaum by the modern highway. Today it consists of a handful of pitiful little houses and numbers less than two hundred inhabitants, all Moslems. It was certainly in a better state in Jesus’ time, but it was just as tiny a village and seems to have had only one gate in its walls.

To this little hamlet Jesus came one day accompanied by his disciples and a great crowd of people. As he was about to enter the gate, along came a funeral procession, on its way, no doubt, to the cemetery which is still to be seen there a short distance from the dwellings and which contains a number of ancient tombs cut in the rock. A young man was being carried out for burial, the only son of his mother, a widow, who was following the bier. It was a particularly pitiful case, and perhaps that explains why “a large gathering from the town was with her” (*Luke 7:12*); certainly, all the townspeople knew of the unhappy mother’s grief and they had come to keep her company with their sympathy. Whatever else Jesus may have seen in this encounter at the gate, the thoughtful Luke does not mention. For the physician-Evangelist, the whole mournful procession is personified in the weeping mother, and Jesus sees no one but her. “And the Lord, seeing her, had compassion on her, and said to her: “Do not weep.” The poor woman had probably heard those words a hundred or a thousand times that day, but they had been no more than just words. Jesus goes further: “And he went up and touched the stretcher; and

the bearers stood still. And he said: 'Young man, I say to thee, arise.' And he who was dead, sat up, and began to speak. And he gave him to his mother."

As everyone can see, the picture here presented is as lively and vivid as can be. So realistic is the whole account that we are even told how the bearers stopped in surprise at the unexpected interruption and how the young man returned to life, far more stunned than the bearers, just sat on the stretcher at first until he recovered himself sufficiently to realize what had happened. If this had been a wedding procession, or if the description merely concerned Jesus' fondling little children, the critics would have had nothing to say; they would have unanimously accepted the account as it was without discovering any hidden meanings in it. But here there is that impossible dead man who comes to life again, and so Luke's text has been lumped with the supposed allegories of the fourth Gospel and treated as a sustained metaphor. The widowed mother is supposedly Jerusalem, her only son is Israel, snatched from death and restored to his mother by the power of Jesus (Loisy). All one has to do, however, is reread Luke's text to discover for himself whether or not such interpretations are dictated by "historical criticism" or by "philosophical" preconceptions, and whether these preconceptions respect the true character of the narrative or distort it altogether.

## THE MESSAGE OF JOHN THE BAPTIST

338. Meanwhile in the dungeon of Machaerus (§292), John the Baptist was as restless as a caged lion. As time passed and his imprisonment continued, his spirit was consumed the more with the fervor of his hope. He had been born and he had lived to be the precursor of the Messiah, nor had he stolen a single day of his existence away from that mission. But now that human tyranny might cut off his life from one day to the next, he still did not see his mission crowned by an open and solemn manifestation of the Messiah. This anxious waiting was much harder for the prisoner to bear than the enervating inactivity to which he had been condemned or the sword of Herod Antipas dangling over his head.

He was not, however, completely isolated. The tyrant, who nourished a superstitious veneration for John (§17), permitted him to receive in prison the disciples who had remained faithful to him even after Jesus began his public ministry, some of whom nourished a certain resentment (§291. , §307) toward Christ. Through the information brought him by these visitors, the prisoner followed the progress of Jesus' ministry and the extraordinary happenings

which accompanied it. But while this information increasingly strengthened in his spirit the conviction which he had of Jesus and had even publicly expressed, it also increased the yearning anxiety of his waiting. The visitors told him that the new Rabbi worked miracles, yes, but never on any occasion had he proclaimed that he was the Messiah; in fact, he sternly rebuked those who so proclaimed him and fled every occasion when the crowd seemed about to declare him such (§300). It is not unlikely that the visitors, jealous as they were of Jesus in their affection for John, took some satisfaction in these things they were reporting; but they must have saddened the prisoner. Perhaps he wondered if his mission as precursor was truly ended or whether even from his prison there was not something he must yet do to have Jesus recognized as the Messiah. Why did Mary's Son delay so long in asserting who he was? Only with his solemn declaration would John's mission come to a close; without it, he would be the precursor of one who failed to appear. Yet John was now cut off from the life of the people, and from one minute to the next he might be forced to leave this world without the consolation of seeing that people thronging as one to the Messiah whom he had pointed out to them; in fact, he sensed that even his own disciples felt a certain grudge against Jesus. What could he still do from his prison? How could he impel Jesus to make the declaration that he was yearning to hear and at the same time urge on toward Jesus his own reluctant disciples?

339. One day the prisoner came to a decision. From the Machaerus he dispatched two of his disciples to Jesus to ask him this question: "Art thou he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (*Luke* 7:19-20.) The expression "he who is to come" (o ercomenoz) denoted for the Jews "the fixed goal of the eternal plan" [Dante, *Par.* 33, 3], that is, the Messiah who "was to come" (§213, §296, 374, 505), whose distant heralds had been the prophets and whose immediate precursor John the Baptist claimed to be.

The question, therefore, required a specific declaration both from Jesus, to whom it was addressed, and from John's disciples, who were asking it. Jesus could not publicly deny his messianic nature, of which John was absolutely certain. The disciples who brought John's question, when they heard from Jesus' lips what they had heard concerning him from their own revered John, could no longer maintain their diffidence toward him and fail to become his followers. On the other hand, compelling as the question was, there was something general about the tone of it; substantially it was the

same question the ancients of Jerusalem had asked John himself only a few months before (§277).

Jesus did not answer as he was expected to. He did not say the "no" which was impossible, but neither did he reply with the clear and explicit "yes" which John had tried to elicit. When the messengers stated their question "in that very hour he cured many of diseases, and afflictions and evil spirits, and to many who were blind he granted sight. And he answered and said to them: Go and report to John what you have heard and seen: the blind sees, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead rise, the poor have the gospel preached to them. And blessed is he who is not scandalized in me" (*Luke* 7:21-23). In short, Jesus answered not with words but with actions which could prove whether or not he was the Messiah "to come." Now, these miraculous actions appealed to prophetic words of the past, for *Isaias* had predicted that in the time of the Messiah the blind would see, the deaf hear, the lame walk (*Isa.* 29:18; 35:5-6), and the poor would receive the good tidings (*Isa.* 61:1). If Jesus verifies with his works the messianic prophecies, then those very works proclaimed him the Messiah. But the explicit proclamation from his lips was not forthcoming.

This unexpected reply was certainly reported to the prisoner, but we are not told what impression it made on him. John would, no doubt, have preferred to hear that Jesus declared himself the Messiah in clear and ringing tones, and that all the Jews of Palestine and abroad had come running to sing hosanna to their king. Much later than this, Jesus' own disciples, though trained for long months in his school, still expected something similar to happen. If this is what John really expected, then we should have to say of him what *Luke* says of Jesus' parents, who "did not understand the word that he spoke to them" (§262). For various reasons, John may not have understood Jesus' reply; he need not have known that Jesus, from profoundly spiritual motives, was revealing only gradually that he was the Messiah (§§300 ff.).<sup>132</sup>

340. Though he did not answer John's respectful invitation, Jesus was nevertheless pleased by it. Immediately after the departure of the two messengers, to show that the Precursor was certainly not among those who would be scandalized in him, Jesus spoke of John in terms of highest praise, declaring him "more than a prophet," second to no one among those born of woman," the Precursor of the Messiah according to the prophecy of *Malachias* (3:1). But while the poor people and the publicans had accepted

Johns preaching and received his baptism, most of the Scribes and Pharisees had hung back, bringing to naught “God's purpose concerning themselves” (*Luke* 7:30). And here Jesus adds a similitude: To what then shall I liken the men of this generation? And what are they like? They are like children sitting in the market place, calling to one another and saying,

‘We have piped to you, and you have not danced;  
We have sung dirges, and you have not wept.’”

The similitude is drawn from the customs of the time. The children in Palestine used to play in the market place imitating the various social habits of their elders, including their wedding and funeral processions. In the first instance, some would play or pretend to play the flute, while the others were supposed to dance pretending that they were the “friends of the groom” (§281). In the latter instance, some would imitate the lamentations of the professional mourners while their playmates were supposed to weep like the relatives of the deceased. But sometimes the game did not proceed according to schedule; the children supposed to dance or weep did not show the proper enthusiasm for their roles, and then followed the usual interminable childish complaints and arguments. Jesus himself explains the comparison: “For John the Baptist came neither eating bread nor drinking wine, and you say: ‘He has a devil.’ The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and you say: ‘Behold a man who is a glutton, and a wine-drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners’” (*Luke* 7:33-34).

The Pharisees had not accepted John's preaching because, among other things, he was too rigorous and austere, and seemed an obsessed fanatic (even today the Arabs would call such a man *majnun*, one possessed by the *jinn* or “goblins”).<sup>133</sup> But when Jesus appeared, his preaching was rejected also on the pretext that he ate like all other men, let his disciples eat when they were hungry (§§307-308) and treated with publicans and sinners. Hence, whether one played the flute or wailed a funeral chant, the game could not be played with the Pharisees simply because they did not want to play it. Yet it was going to be well played just the same, for “wisdom [divine] is justified by [all] her children” (in *Matt.* 11:19; the Greek has, “by her works”).

## THE PENITENT WOMAN

341. At this point Luke, the *scriba mansuetudinis Christi* as Dante calls him (§138), records an episode that illustrates that gentleness, and occurs only in his narrative.

The Pharisees continue to watch Jesus, but their vigilance need not always be aggressive; in fact, sometimes it is shrewder to cloak it with a seeming friendliness. For this reason, a Pharisee, with the very common name of Simon, invites Jesus to dinner. The place is not named, but it must have been some town in Galilee. According to the custom of the time, the dinner is held in a room with a U-shaped table in the middle (see the diagram in §542). The guests recline on small divans arranged like rays around the table, while the servants pass the food from the other side of it. Hence each is leaning on one elbow with his head toward the table, while his feet extend somewhat beyond the end of the divan away from it. There are several guests at Simon's dinner and it probably is not being given especially for Jesus. Simon has merely taken this opportunity to include the indomitable preacher among his guests in order to study him comfortably at close range with benefit of the sincerity induced by a banquet atmosphere. In any case, Jesus, who has been invited more to an examination than a dinner, has not received the honors ordinarily given a prominent guest, who had his feet washed as soon as he entered, was embraced and kissed by the master of the house, and had his head sprinkled with perfume before he sat down to the table. Jesus notices the omissions but says nothing and takes his place at table with the rest.

But lo and behold, when the banquet is at its height, a woman enters the room with the servants. She speaks to no one but goes straight to the divan of Jesus, kneels at the foot of it, the end farthest from the table, and bursts into tears so abundant that they trickle down upon the feet of Jesus. Unwilling that those feet should be lined with her grief and having no cloth with which to wipe them, she proceeds, with great deference, to loosen her hair and dry them with that. Then she kisses them over and over again and sprinkles them with the ointment from the little alabaster vase she has brought with her to anoint the head of the Man she so revered (§501). This all takes place without a word spoken either by the woman or by Jesus. Perhaps a thin smile marks Simon's face. The examiner feels he has already tested and judged his candidate; as he watches the incident, he says to himself: "This man, were he a prophet, would surely know who and what manner of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner!" (*Luke 7:39.*)

For the Pharisees the term "sinner" (*amartwloz*) had various meanings: it might denote an immoral woman or merely a woman who did not observe the Pharisaic precepts. In the Talmud the wife who gives her husband food on which the tithe has not been paid is also considered a sinful woman. We may

strike a happy medium and suppose that the woman who unexpectedly arrived at Simon's banquet was a person of doubtful reputation, for if she had been a public sinner, the Pharisee's servants would hardly have permitted her to enter; the scandal would have been too great. The unnamed woman already knew Jesus at least by sight; she may have heard him speak in public and listened to those words which relentlessly summoned everyone to a "change of mind" (§335) and yet were so kind and comforting to the most abject and sinful. She had at first been deeply shaken, prostrated by the consciousness of her miserable life; but then, comforted and sustained by the compassionate hope those same words spoke to her heart, she had come to believe firmly in a new life. And now, to begin it, she presented herself before the One who had given it to her to show him her change of heart in a manner that was exquisitely feminine.

342. Perhaps Jesus noticed the slight smirk on Simon's lips; certainly, he read the disapproval in his thoughts and so he turned quietly to speak to him: Simon I have something to say to thee! — And Simon, with some condescension: Please speak, Master! — And Jesus: There was once a money-lender who was to collect five hundred denarii from one debtor, and from another a sum ten times less, fifty denarii. But since neither of the two could pay and the creditor was a kindhearted man, he forgave both their debts. Now which of these two debtors do you think, Simon, would be more grateful to this generous creditor and love him more? — And Simon answered: I suppose the man who had more forgiven him. — The answer was as elementary as it was correct. Jesus then replied: "Dost thou see this woman? I came into thy house; thou gavest me no water for my feet; but she has bathed my feet with tears, and has wiped them with her hair. Thou gavest me no kiss; but she, from the moment she entered, has not ceased to kiss my feet. Thou didst not anoint my head with oil; but she has anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say to thee, her sins, many as they are, shall be forgiven her, because she has loved much. But he to whom little is forgiven, loves little" (*Luke 7:44-47*).

There have been dabblers in logic who have dubbed Jesus' conclusion illogical: the legitimate conclusion, to parallel the example of the two debtors, would be that the woman should love more because more had been forgiven her. But the objection supposes that Jesus wants to take over Aristotle's profession and teach men how to make measured syllogisms according to rule. Jesus had other things to do, and when he reasoned he used common



sense, man's practical logic, which frequently skips over the obvious premises and goes straight to the conclusion.

In our case, the sinner was forgiven much because she loved much; but if she loved much, the reason, in its turn, was that she sought and almost anticipated the forgiveness of much. It was one love; it first impelled the sinner to seek the forgiveness of which it was the cause, and then confirmed the forgiveness and was its effect, as in the case of the debtor in the parable. The two consequences are interwoven, and Jesus does not confine himself to the strict application of the parable but emphasizes the other point instead, for he is speaking to Simon, who, being a good Pharisee, has little exteriorly to be forgiven but also has little love in his heart. Now for Jesus, sins are certainly an obstacle to one's entrance into the kingdom of heaven, but sins can be forgiven. The insurmountable obstacle, on the other hand, is the lack of desire to enter, the lack of love. A Pharisee, though he were set on the very threshold of the kingdom, would probably not enter it because he was satisfied with himself and he would feel no impulse to take those two or three extra steps which would bring him inside. But a harlot, once she saw herself as she really was, would feel an utter loathing of herself and run a thousand miles to enter the kingdom, sped on her way by love. Love *pondus* and love *praemium*, as the expert Augustine reflects later.

After all, by going to Simon's house Jesus had truly given him much, though the Pharisee had returned him ill. But the sinful woman had sought out Jesus of her own accord and offered him every proof of her devotion, and so she had given much without any apparent encouragement from Jesus. That is the reason for her abundant retribution, which will, besides, now serve to confirm her more and more in her great love.

When he finished speaking with Simon, Jesus turned to the woman and said to her: "Thy sins are forgiven." We do not know how Simon reacted to this; we are told only that the other guests, who were of the same stamp as he, began to say to themselves: "Who is this man, who even forgives sins?" The Pharisees who had witnessed the incident of the paralytic let down through the roof had asked themselves the same question (§305), and then Jesus had silenced them with a miracle. This time there was no miracle because there was no reason why Jesus should perform one every time the geese who had undertaken to guard some hypothetical capitol of orthodoxy began to cackle.

He preferred rather to confirm the woman in her new way of life and so he said to her: Thy faith has saved thee. Go in peace!" Peace and love were the same thing.

## THE MINISTRY DAY BY DAY

343. Immediately after the account of Simons banquet, Luke adds: And it came to pass afterwards (en tw katexh; cf. §140), that he himself was journeying through towns and villages, preaching and proclaiming the good tidings of the kingdom of God. And with him were the twelve" (*Luke* 8:1). These words may be taken as a general summary of Jesus' activity in Galilee until the second Pasch of his ministry. This activity must have been intense though not particularly varied, and probably the early catechesis of the Church told other episodes much more numerous than the few which have been handed down to us. Jesus led the life of a traveling missionary, journeying from region to region and from town to town, preaching in public and private, in the synagogues and houses, and confirming his preaching with miracles. Naturally the crowds thronged to him, attracted not only by the effectiveness of his teachings, but even more by the immediate benefit of his miracles.

Jesus was not journeying alone; there was with him a small group of persons who had dedicated themselves to him as well as a constantly changing trail of people who were animated by a variety of motives.

Among those devoted to him were first of all the twelve Apostles he had chosen, who habitually worked with him in his ministry and perhaps left him for brief intervals only now and then. And there most certainly were other disciples also who, though not Apostles, were bound to the Master by particular ties of affection. But in that life of continuous traveling, Jesus and his helpers needed some material assistance to take care of their daily wants, especially since this constant and uninterrupted ministry did not leave them the time to provide these things themselves, nor could a group of twenty or more expect to find free food and lodging waiting for them in every poor little village of Galilee. For this reason, the careful Luke adds that with Jesus and the Twelve there were also certain women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities; Mary who is called Magdalene, from whom seven devils had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who used to provide for them out of their means" (8:2-3). We have already noted that these women must later have been sources of information

for the Evangelist (§142); here he tells us that they were also the careful housewives of the little group about Jesus, and this seems extremely natural. We do not need, however, to suppose that all of them were constantly with Jesus in his travelings; probably they had some kind of arrangement among themselves for taking turns in attending to the needs of the missionaries, both providing things for them at their own expense and often waiting on them personally as well.

These women “had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities” by Jesus. Hence it was their gratitude which had impelled them to assume a work particularly suited to women, that is, caring for the material needs of what was a kind of family. They no doubt had sufficient means to meet the expenses, which, after all, could not have been very great. Joanna, as the wife of one of Herod’s (Antipas) stewards, was unquestionably wealthy and perhaps the others were also in comfortable circumstances. Those whose resources were less generous would naturally contribute their personal services.

Of the women mentioned here, Joanna and Susanna are recorded for us only by Luke, while Mary Magdalene is mentioned also by the other Evangelists. The epithet, “Magdalene,” indicates that she came originally from Magdala, that is, Tarichea (§303) on the western shore of the lake, and hence she was a native of Galilee and not of Judea. The statement that “seven devils had gone out” from her means only that Jesus had freed her from some powerful diabolical obsession, but the gospel narratives do not furnish the slightest basis for supposing that she had previously been a public sinner and much less the anonymous penitent at Simons banquet (§341).

344. But besides this group of faithful followers, there also swarmed about Jesus a train of people some of whom were definitely hostile to him, like the Pharisees, and some of whom were diffident or at least uncertain about him. Mark incidentally gives us a brief bit about the latter (3:20-21). During a short trip which Jesus made at this time, probably to some town in the region between Capharnaum and Nazareth, he “came to the house, and again a crowd gathered so that they [Jesus and his disciples] could not so much as take their food.” It was the customary rush of people, but this time it was more inconvenient than usual because there was so little room. Now this constant thronging of the people about Jesus as well as his tireless activity had attracted the attention of neutral and indifferent persons as well, who felt neither the love and devotion of his disciples nor the antipathy of the

Pharisees. And they also had expressed their opinion of Jesus, “for they said he is beside [out of] himself” (exesth).

Although this expression could be disparaging, it was not necessarily so by any means. One who was abnormal mentally could be “out of himself” but so could a perfectly normal person be completely possessed by a wise and holy enthusiasm (cf. 2 *Cor.* 5:13). These indifferent neutrals, then, got out of the difficulty with this equivocal opinion of Jesus, referring only to what was clearly evident to everyone, namely, his incessant missionary activity which implied a state of mind that was not usual. But on the true nature of that state of mind they had not ventured a judgment. The ambiguous remark reached the ears of Jesus’ relatives, and when they learned that he was in a house nearby, practically besieged by the crowd, “his [own people] . . . went out to seize him, for they said: He is beside himself.” The expression “his own people” (oi par autou) unquestionably refers to Jesus’ kin, some of whom we know did not look on him too favorably (§264); but that is not enough to ascribe to them the opinion “he is beside himself,” because the main verb, they said (elegon) could just as well be an impersonal ( it was said,” “people said”) as it is elsewhere in *Mark* (3:30, etc.). Whoever expressed the opinion, Jesus’ relatives most probably came in all kindness and friendliness to do him a service. They came immediately, not to tie him up and carry him off as a lunatic, but to persuade him to moderate his missionary zeal and take care of himself, in short to come home and live a normal and comfortable life where the Pharisees’ threats could not bother him

But even when viewed in this kindlier light, Jesus’ relatives still play the part of heroes of mediocrity that found it impossible to understand and accept this singular kinsman of theirs who, though he knew nothing of schools or academies, had taken it into his head to challenge the Pharisees and turn all of Galilee upside down instead of staying home like a good and peaceful citizen.<sup>134</sup>

345. Thus regarded as “out of himself,” Jesus answered precisely as he was regarded, namely, as a person totally consecrated to a sublime moral ideal. Right after the above information, Mark describes his discussion with the Pharisees regarding Beelzebub and the matter of casting out devils (§444), but then he immediately brings Jesus’ relatives back on the scene together with Mary, his mother. The whole incident would lead us to believe that the two references here to Jesus’ kin belong to one and the same episode. Jesus is still

being besieged by the throng in the house when he is told that his mother and “brethren” are outside anxious to speak with him but unable to enter.<sup>135</sup> So the heroes of mediocrity, the more successfully to prevail upon Jesus, had counted also on Mary’s authority, which had proved so effective at the wedding in Cana (§283). This does not mean that Mary agrees with them; if she came with them, it was partly because a woman of Palestine could hardly exclude herself from the decisions made by the head of the family who claimed to be acting in the interests of the family honor and for the good of a kinsman, and partly because she could have had any number of reasons of her own for wanting to see her itinerant son again; she may even have wanted to be there to intervene when their relatives met him. When Jesus was informed of the visit, he answered that his mother and brothers were all those who heard and did the will of God, and with a gesture he indicated the listeners packed so closely around him. At this, the heroes of mediocrity probably perceived that there was nothing they could do with him and so they too repeated: “He is beside himself.” But Mary must have found this answer very similar to the one her twelve-year-old son had given her in the Temple (§262), and so she laid it too in the treasury of her heart to keep and ponder with the other things (§142).

## THE CALMING OF THE TEMPEST AND THE GERASENE DEMONIAK

346. We are given only a few particulars of Jesus’ unvaried activity in Galilee. To this period certainly belongs the day he devoted to parables, which it suits our purpose better to discuss later, apart from its real chronological setting (§360). The other episodes recorded for us are the following.

Possibly on the evening of the day of parables (cf. *Mark* 4:35) Jesus, who had been speaking to the crowds on the western shore of Lake Tiberias, got into a boat with his disciples and told them to make for the opposite shore. The departure seems to have been sudden and hurried. Perhaps this time, too, Jesus was trying to escape the zealous demonstrations of the crowd that had been listening to him. The crossing is only a matter of a few miles (§376) but it can be dangerous, especially toward nightfall, as in this case, because cold winds come tumbling suddenly down from the snowy heights of Hermon and blow-up storms which are extremely violent for that lake and for the frail craft which sail it. This is what happened that evening. Jesus, wearied from the long, laborious day, lay down in the stern of the boat and went to sleep. *Mark* (4:38), who must have heard Peter tell the story many times, even mentions

the cushion on which Jesus laid his head, the small cushion with which even the poorest boats were always provided. Mark is, besides, the only one who tells us that the other boats were sailing along with that of Jesus. Suddenly a violent gale strikes the lake and before long Jesus' boat begins to ship water and is in danger of sinking.

Its crew try to maneuver it to safety but all in vain, and from one minute to the next the lake may close over them; yet Jesus continues to slumber peacefully in the stern.

In the first vision Dante has of purgatory, he sees "a little boat both light and swift piloted by an angel. "In the stern stood the celestial steersman," but he was standing straight and vigilant with "his wings . . . pointed heavenward. Unlike Dante's angel, Jesus lies fast asleep in the little boat on Galilee's sea, seeming entirely oblivious of all that is happening about him; one could, in the darkness, easily mistake him for a coil of rope or a folded sail lying there. The disciples cannot understand how he can sleep through the raging fury of the wind and sea and they hesitate between their desire not to disturb him and their terror of the impending disaster, between their respect for the Master and their instinctive habit of turning confidently to him for help. But after a little they are convinced; they cannot hesitate any longer. They simply have to waken and warn him so that he may somehow save himself as well. So, they go up to him and shout: "Master! We are perishing! Save us!"

Jesus awakens and sees the disturbance in the elements and also in his disciples' hearts. Turning to the winds, he commands them to be silent, and on the instant, there follows a great calm. Then to those troubled hearts, he exclaims compassionately: "What are you afraid of? You still have little faith!" — But they are troubled now in a different way and begin to ponder: Who, then, is this that even the winds and the sea obey him?

For the rationalists, naturally, the whole miracle is fictitious. The followers of Paulus (§198) will perhaps explain it by imagining that there were several skins of oil in the boat and that the resourceful Master at a certain point had them emptied over the lake to settle the waves. The more modern mythologists will maintain that it is all sheer allegory. And for once the believing scholars will agree to some extent with the mythologists for in the historical fact recorded in this episode, they also find an allegorical meaning.

The storm and the calm that enveloped the boat were both real. But when Jesus worked this miracle, he foreshadowed the storms and the calms that for

centuries were to follow one after the other about another boat, not of wood but no less real and historical, whose sailors will be the same as those of that night on Lake Tiberias. "In the stem stood the celestial steersman." This time the allegorical interpretation is not a philosophical postulate, as is the case with the mythologists, but it is founded on historical facts which everyone can check for himself and which no historian should pretend not to know.

(Figure 45, Figure 46, Figure 47, Figure 48)

347. In the calm the boat slid quickly to land and Jesus and his disciples disembarked, undoubtedly on the eastern shore of the lake almost opposite Capharnaum or Magdala; but the name of the place varies in the Synoptics. Matthew calls it the "region of the Gadarenes," Mark "of the Gerasenes" Luke of the "Gergesenes" or more probably the "Gerasenes."<sup>136</sup> The two adjectives to be considered, "Gadarene" or "Gerasene" refer respectively to the two cities of Gadara and Gerasa, both of which belonged to the Decapolis in Transjordan (§4)- Both, however, lay to the south of the lake and, Gerasa especially, at a great distance from it; hence it is hardly possible that their respective territories extended to the lake shore, which would in that case be named for them. But if we consider only the adjectives themselves, it is not impossible that the inhabitants of the western shore should use the name of the most important cities in the direction toward which they were facing to indicate the opposite shore. Geographical designations which indicate merely a general direction are not rare in peasant usage. The explanation of this apparent inconsistency, however, may perhaps be suggested by the third epithet, "of the Gergesenes," which does not have so much documentary evidence in its favor but is more recommended than the other two by archeological findings (§348).

Now Jesus has arrived with his following on the eastern shore of the lake, and on a certain day after the night of the tempest an incident occurred which is narrated by all three Synoptics; Matthew gives us the briefest account of it and Mark the fullest. Matthew's short summary, however, furnishes one detail not contained in the other two Synoptics, namely, that there were two demoniacs, and not one as we should suppose from Mark and Luke. It is the same incident certainly in all three and this difference in presentation is another fine example of the absence of slavish literalness in all the Evangelists (§122) as well as of their highly individual manner of treating their subject. Mark and Luke concentrate on the principal actor in the strange scene and do

not even mention the lesser one. Matthew, though more concise in his treatment, records them both. The same thing happens again in the case of the two blind men of Jericho (§497).

A demoniac, then, came rushing to meet Jesus. He was a wild and savage creature who lived among the unclean tombs and went wandering naked through the countryside. He had the strength of a monster and had repeatedly broken the ropes and chains with which the people tried to bind him. Sometimes he would set up a wild howling and at others he would beat himself with stones; and such was the terror he inspired that no one would travel through the district where he wandered. When he saw Jesus in the distance, he ran to meet him, but instead of attacking him he fell prostrate before him, shrieking: “What is there to me and to thee (ti emoi kai soi; cf. §283), Jesus, Son of God the Most-High? I adjure thee by God, not to torture me!” (*Mark* 5:7.) It was the poor brutish creature speaking, but Jesus answered the one who was within the man and had so brutalized him. For Jesus said: “Begone, foul spirit, out of the man!” This was not so much a command as an announcement; Jesus, in fact, immediately questioned the degrading spirit: “What is thy name?” And it answered: “My name is Legion, for we are many.”

The word “legion” was never spoken then in Palestine or elsewhere without inspiring a vague fear. That multitude of armed men, welded into such wonderful compactness as to form an invincible war machine, seemed a superhuman institution, and later Vegetius, echoing what was certainly an earlier opinion, speaks of it as something divine: “The Romans created the legions not by human design only, as it seems to me, but with divine aid” (Vegetius, II, 21). At the time of Jesus, the Roman legion varied between five and six thousand men. Here the word is obviously used to denote in general a large and compact crowd.

348. After this confession, the troop of spirits “urgently pleaded” with Jesus not to “send them away out of the country,” meaning certainly the surrounding district. But Luke (8:31) substitutes here their logical destination, for he says the demons besought Jesus not to send them “into the abyss.” The plea was bolstered with a concrete suggestion: “Now a great herd of swine was there on the mountainside feeding. And the spirits kept entreating him, saying: Send us into the swine that we may enter into them. And Jesus immediately gave them leave. And the unclean spirits came out and entered into the swine; and the herd — in number about two thousand — rushed



down with great violence into the sea, and were drowned in the sea" (*Mark* 5:11-13). The presence of a herd of swine confirms the impression that we are now out of Jewish territory, because in Palestine itself the well-known prescriptions of the Law were such that no one raised these animals, considered unclean; hence here they seem a fitting refuge sought by the unclean spirits driven out of the man. When the swineherds saw what happened, they took to their heels and raced to the neighboring town to report the adventure and to persuade their masters that they were not to blame for the loss of the herd. Out came the people from the city to see what had really taken place, and they found the notorious demoniac, but recently so fierce and brutish, "sitting" quietly near Jesus, "clothed, and in his right mind." And their questions were answered with the detailed account of eyewitnesses. These Greeks did not in the least doubt the prodigy; in fact, precisely because they did believe it completely miraculous, they began to worry about the future. Practical and economical men that they were, they could not help reflecting that with a wonder-worker of that power traveling through their territories there was no telling what might happen. Hence, turning to Jesus, "they began to entreat him to depart from their district." Jesus consented and went back to his boat, but the man who had been healed wanted to be received among his followers. Jesus, however, bade him to return to his own family and make known how great a favor he had received from the Lord. And he obeyed and departed, and began to publish in the Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him. And all men marveled.

It is quite probable that we can determine today where this episode took place. On the eastern shore of the lake, almost entirely opposite Magdala, there extends the region of the ancient city of Hippos, where, actually, the hills slope down to the shore at some distance from the lake's edge. To the north of this district, however, lies the mouth of the *Wadi es-Samak*, which is blocked off on the south by a small promontory about three hundred feet high rising abruptly from the water and leaving only a few feet of beach at its base. Various caves in the side of the promontory look very much as if they had been tombs in ancient times. Geologically, then, this setting corresponds with our needs, for the promontory would be the precipice down which the swine hurled themselves into the lake, and the tombs would have been the usual dwelling of the demoniac.

But perhaps we may include also a similarity of name. Near the mouth of the *Wadi es-Samak* there is a village which the Arabs today call *Korsi*, but its

name was actually taken over from an older settlement dating back to Byzantine times and called Korsia, which was situated about a mile further east. Now, when we consider the numerous variations, a name can undergo through the centuries — variations so common that even today *Korsi* is pronounced also *Kersa* or *Ghersa* by its inhabitants—it is easy to understand why Origen associated the *Kersa* or *Ghersa* as he heard it pronounced with the Gergesa and Gergesenes of the Old Testament (note [136](#)) and substituted the latter, thinking that he was justified by a local tradition. But while that tradition was good, and still is, the substitution was arbitrary. Hence, we have not only a geological but also a toponymic argument that the ancient *Korsi* was the city from which the townsmen went out to beg Jesus to leave. Since, however, it was a name known little or not at all, the copyists or translators of the gospel texts were probably responsible for the variations with which it has come down to us.

#### THE DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS—THE WOMAN WITH A HEMORRHAGE — THE TWO BLIND MEN

349. Having recrossed the lake, Jesus returned to Capharnaum, where the "crowd welcomed him, for they were all waiting for him" (*Luke* 8:40). Waiting perhaps more anxiously than all the rest was a prominent Jew of the city, named Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue (§[64](#)). As soon as he learned of Jesus' arrival, he ran "and fell at his feet, and entreated him much, saying: 'My [little] daughter is at the point of death; come, lay thy hands upon her, that she may be saved and live'" (*Mark* 5:22-23). Luke's account is not quite so lively, but it adds that the dying girl was about twelve years old and Jairus' "only" daughter.

Jesus sets out immediately with the distraught father, and is followed, naturally, by a great crowd, which swarms and surges about the wonderworker-pushing, shouting, pleading, and kissing his garments, while others try valiantly to clear a path for him. As they proceed Jesus suddenly stops, turns around and, looking about him, asks: "Who touched me?"

They are all puzzled by that unexpected question, not knowing exactly what he means, while Peter and the other disciples voice their perplexity: "Master, the crowds throng and press upon thee" (*Luke* 8:45). But Peter's explanation explains nothing; the Master replies that he has felt a power go out from him at the particular touch of some one person. And indeed, a humble little

woman comes forward trembling to fall at Jesus' feet and tell the crowd what has happened.

The woman had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years and "had suffered much at the hands of many physicians, and had spent all that she had, and found no benefit,' but rather grew worse." Mark's blunt information is quietly condensed by Luke as we have noticed (§137).

There were indeed a number of cures for this particular ailment, and the rabbis, who were often physicians as well, have handed down to us a sizeable list of prescriptions (cf. *Shabbath*, 110 a). For example, a very effective remedy for a woman so afflicted was to sit at a crossroad with a glass of wine in her hand. Then someone was to come up quietly behind her and suddenly shout that the hemorrhaging was to stop. An absolutely unfailing remedy, however, was to pick a grain of barley from the dung of a white mule; if this was done one day, the hemorrhage would stop for two; if it was done for two days the hemorrhage would stop for three, and if it was done for three days, the cure would be complete and final.<sup>137</sup> Other prescriptions require the use of rare and very expensive drugs.

The woman who had come to Jesus had perhaps tried them all, for she "had spent all her substance," without obtaining any relief. Having lost all faith in medicine, she found medicine in faith. The Jesus everyone in all that region was talking about so much would certainly be able to cure her. So firmly did she believe this, that she kept repeating to herself: "If I touch but his cloak, I shall be saved." Confident as she was, she did not presume to touch the person of the wonder-worker, but only his garment, or perhaps only the border or fringe (Hebrew *sisith*, pl. *sisiyyoth*; Gr., *kraspedon*, Vulgate, *fimbria*: *Matt.* 9:20) which every practicing Israelite had to have at the four corners of his cloak according to the Law (*Num.* 15:38 ff.; *Deut.* 22:12). With the courage of her faith, the woman had secretly touched the border of Jesus' cloak and felt herself cured on the instant.

And the physician approved the medicine she had chosen, for turning to her, he said: "Daughter, thy faith has saved thee. Go in peace, and be thou healed of thy affliction!"

350. This incident was ended, and Jesus was about to proceed to the house of Jairus when, from that very house, there came others to announce to the poor father: "Thy daughter is dead; do not trouble the Master!" Jesus hears the message and, almost as if continuing his words to the woman on faith, he

says to Jairus: "Fear not, only believe and she shall be saved!" They soon reach the house but Jesus permits no one to enter except his favorite disciples, Peter, James, and John, and the parents of the dead child. The customary flute players and mourners have already gathered, but Jesus tells them their presence is unnecessary: "Why do you make this din, and weep? The girl is asleep, not dead." The mourners think this play on words bad taste in the presence of the corpse, and they answer with scorn and sarcasm. Between the reality lying before them and the firm confident words of the wonderworker whose help they have invoked, the parents of the girl stand in dazed bewilderment. Jesus urges them together with his three disciples into the dead child's room after every one else has left it. It now holds five grief-stricken mortals, the dead girl, and One who is more than mortal. From without comes the confused murmuring of the crowd. Jesus walks up to the little girl, takes her cold hand in his and speaks only two words. The disciple of Peter, who witnessed the scene, has preserved these two words for us in their original form: *Telita qumi*, which means, "Girl, arise!" Their effect is described by the physician Evangelist: "And her spirit returned, and she rose up immediately. And he [Jesus] directed that something be given her to eat. And her parents were amazed, but he charged them to tell no one what had happened. This is what Jesus usually did as we have seen (§300); but these parents who had been made glad again, could not, with all the good will in the world, obey Jesus except to the tiniest extent, for the very presence in their house of the little daughter whom all had seen depart for the next world and who had so suddenly returned from it, spoke for them only too eloquently. Indeed, the realistic Matthew concludes the episode with the words: "and the report of this [event] spread throughout all that district" (9:26).

What happened after that to the little maid restored to life? She was twelve years old and therefore of an age to marry (§231). Perhaps she did marry soon afterward, and had children and grandchildren, but in the end, she returned to stay in the world beyond the tomb which she had already visited for so brief a time. The apocrypha and later legends weave no fancies around her appealing case, but they do sketch a few about the woman with the hemorrhage. The apocryphal *Acts of Pilate*, VII, call her Ber(o)nikn or Veronica (§193). According to a rumor recorded by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.*, VII, 18) she was a pagan and a native of Paneas, or Caesarea Philippi (§§395 ff.), and when she returned to her own city she erected before the door of her house a bronze monument which pictured herself kneeling in front of Jesus. At his feet

blossomed an exotic plant which cured every kind of malady. Eusebius saw the statue and says only: "They say that this statue is the image of Jesus." It is very probable that it originally represented some pagan deity whose power was invoked to cure diseases and that later Christian legend interpreted it as Eusebius says. According to Sozomen, the statue was thrown down by Julian the Apostate.

351. The miraculous teachings of faith did not end with the woman's cure and the little girl's return to life. As Jesus came out of Jairus' house, two blind men followed him, unfortunates of a sort that must have been as numerous in ancient Palestine as they are today. Even now, for that matter, the blind frequently go in pairs to give each other what help they can and like all other beggars they display the same persistence shown by these two. When they heard about the miracles just performed, they saw a ray of hope for themselves too, and, having been led to Jesus, they began to follow him, crying out repeatedly and tenaciously: "Have pity on us, O Son of David!" Given Jesus' habitual prudence (§300), that particular title could not have pleased him very much, for it was a messianic epithet usually denoting the great One to come and so was doubly dangerous at the moment, when the people were still bubbling with excitement and enthusiasm over the miracles he had just wrought. Jesus did not stop nor did he glance in the direction of the insistent cry, but it continued nevertheless. He finally entered the house where he lived, certainly in Capernaum, and the two beggars went right in after him.

After all, the persistence of these two blind men was nothing but faith, the very same faith which Jesus had praised and encouraged in the sick woman and Jairus. Besides, once inside the house the messianic epithet was no longer dangerous, and so Jesus began to talk to the two suppliants. His first and perhaps his only question to them concerned their faith: "Do you believe that I can do this to you?" The two naturally answered: "Yes, Lord!" Then Jesus touched their eyes, saying: "Let it be done to you according to your faith." And the two blind men were able to see. Then Jesus commanded them with the greatest earnestness — the word *enebrimhqh* (*Matt.* 9:30) generally indicates a stormy rebuke — not to tell anyone what had happened; but they, going out with the light in their eyes and in their hearts, spoke of it throughout all that region.

Was it really disobedience? Various Protestant scholars have deemed it such. The early Fathers considered it the irrepressible impulse of gratitude.

Perhaps the ancients understood the human heart better than the modems do.

## THE MISSION OF THE TWELVE APOSTLES

352. In between these separate events, Jesus continued in all of Galilee the same general activity summed up by Luke (§343.). But meanwhile the multitudes were growing and despite the co-operation of the Twelve, the responsibilities were growing immeasurably too. And Jesus, “observing the crowds . . . felt compassion for them, because they were harassed and scattered like sheep that have no shepherd (cf. *Num.* 27:17). Then he said to his disciples: The harvest [indeed] is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray, therefore, the Master of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest. — And calling to him his twelve disciples, he gave them authority over foul spirits, so as to cast them out, and to cure every disease and every infirmity” (*Matt.* 9:36 — 10:1). Invested with this power, then, the Twelve were sent out alone without the Master, like a select detachment on a special mission with very definite instructions.

Their mission was to announce that the kingdom of God was at hand, as John the Baptist had done and as Jesus had too up to that time. But this detachment was sent ahead into districts not yet covered, which, however, were still to be districts belonging to Israel; for to Israel first among all nations the good tidings of salvation had been promised by the ancient Prophets. The Twelve, therefore, were not to set out into the countries of the Gentiles or the Samaritans, but to turn rather to the scattered sheep of the Israelite fold. In proof of their tidings and by virtue of the power they had just received, they were to cure the infirm, cleanse lepers, drive out unclean spirits, and even raise the dead to life.

In short, theirs was the mission of Jesus, transmitted now from one to twelve, but with the same purpose and methods.

In practical matters, too, they followed Jesus; that is, theirs was a complete indifference to political subjects, financial considerations, and economic worries of any sort. The proclamation of the kingdom of God was to ignore completely the kingdoms of men because it had no connection with them whatever.

The spiritual revenues with which the kingdom of God was accredited were the proofs of its solvency, namely, curing the sick, cleansing lepers, casting out devils, and raising the dead. But just as the bankers to whom this credit was

entrusted had received it gratis, so were they to share it gratis: “freely you have received, freely give” (*Matt.* 10:8).

Any economic worries were equally forbidden the heralds of the kingdom of God, except for what was strictly indispensable.

Finally, the messengers were to set out two by two, like the messengers of the Sanhedrin, both to help and to watch each other, and throughout their journeyings they were to be distinguishable from other wayfarers for several reasons.

353. In the first place, the usual travelers were likely to have a donkey, the ordinary means of transport in the Orient. Before their departure, they packed some food, wound gold and silver coins in their belts or turbans, and took along a second tunic to protect them from the cold or to provide a change of clothing after a storm, a pair of good stout sandals to carry them over the rough roads, a knotted staff in the shape of a club for self-defense, and a wallet to hold other lesser provisions for the journey or whatever might be purchased on the way. This wallet was especially important for those traveling to take up religious collections, because the latter were very generous in the Orient even among the pagans. A Greek inscription found in the region east of Hermon (§1) records that a certain Lucius of Aqraba, who was going about making a collection in the name of the Syrian goddess Atargatis, brought home seventy wallets full from every trip.

Now the very lack of all these accessories was to distinguish the Twelve sent by Jesus from all other travelers: “Do not keep [take] gold, or silver or [copper] money in your girdles, no wallet for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals nor staff (*Matt.* 10:9-10). Mark (6:8-9) adds that they are to take no provisions (bread) with them, but says they are to be shod with sandals and are to carry “a staff only.”<sup>138</sup>48

The Twelve were not even to be concerned about lodgings. When they reached a cluster of dwellings, they were to seek out some worthy householder of good reputation and stay with him in his house, without moving from one house to another. The caravansary (§242) with all its comings and goings was not a suitable place for these heralds of the kingdom of God, who were too busy about spiritual business only and were in no way to waste time on political or commercial matters.

All their precious time was to be employed solely in their mission. Almost certainly, the Twelve, like the seventy-two a little later (§437), were forbidden



to lose time in greeting those they met along the road (*Luke* 10:4). In the Orient, the “greeting” exchanged between travelers, especially if they met in lonely places, could last for hours on end, drifting off into all sorts of discussions, entered into partly as a token of confidence and almost as a requirement of good manners. Even today, for that matter, the Beduin who approaches the ticket window in a railway station for the first time often thinks he is obliged to ask the ticket clerk first if he is well, if his children are growing strong and sturdy, if his flocks or his harvest are satisfactory, and only after furnishing these and other evidences of his good breeding does he ask for his train ticket. The messengers of the kingdom of God were to do without these polite little conventionalities, for their norm was *Maiores premunt*.

If some town should not receive the messengers of the kingdom of God or should pay them scant attention, then they were to leave it without protest of any sort, but they were at the same time to show that the responsibility for their leaving lay entirely with the townsmen. Hence as they left, they were to make the symbolic gesture of shaking the dust of the place from their feet. It was the dust of pagan earth, as it were, and not to be carried back to the sacred territory of Israel.

354. Having received these instructions, the Twelve departed on their mission. It is probable that Jesus also set out at the same time but not with them (cf. *Matt.* 11:1). Their journey could not have lasted more than a few weeks, toward the beginning of the year 29 (§355), nor are we told what its result was. We learn only in general that the missionaries preaching the change of mind “cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many sick people, and healed them” (*Mark* 6:13). Their preaching of the kingdom of God, then, is accompanied by miraculous signs as Jesus' is, for the cures here mentioned are unquestionably presented as miracles, even though an anointing with oil is listed among them. Oil was in those days a common and important medicament (§439), but here the context clearly shows that it was not used as an ordinary treatment but a symbol, at the most, of a higher and a spiritual cure. In the same way, an ordinary ablution had already been used by John as well as by the disciples of Jesus to symbolize the spiritual cleanliness of the “change of mind” (§291. ). Later, when Christianity is fully established, the anointing with oil will be a specific and permanent rite (*James* 5:14-15).

## THE DEATH OF JOHN THE BAPTIST



355. About the time of this journey of the Apostles occurred the execution of John, perhaps between February and March of the year 29. If he was imprisoned around May of 28 (§292), then about ten months had passed. But many more would have been allowed to pass still had it not been for an unforeseen event. Antipas conversed willingly with his venerated prisoner and in reality, did not desire his death (*Mark* 6:20, Greek text), but Herodias did desire it, for the various reasons noted (§17), and her feminine shrewdness and rancor prevailed.

She had been biding her time and she now pounced on the occasion offered by the celebration of Antipas' birthday. It was a formal celebration, and the ancients of the court and of the whole tetrarchate had been invited, all influential and wealthy people, but provincials, very anxious to keep "in the know" and to admire the latest refinements of metropolitan society. The whole situation was extremely convenient for Herodias, because she possessed the means to set those poor provincials gaping with wonder and at the same time to obtain what she so passionately desired. She had with her Salome, the daughter of her real husband in Rome, who, in the high society of the Urbs, had learned to dance enchantingly, such dances as these country people could not possibly imagine. The mother played on her daughter's vanity and the girl responded wonderfully.

Introduced into the banquet chamber at just the right moment when the fumes of wine and lust had already befogged the guests, the dancer's shimmering legs whirled her drizzling spectators into delirium. Antipas literally melted with tenderness. Spectacles like this proved his court was truly up to date and superior to all other Oriental courts. Performances were seen here which could be found elsewhere only in the court on the Palatine or in some of the more aristocratic insulae in Rome. Indeed, the monarch grew so soft and mellow that he called the breathless and perspiring little dancer to him and said to her: Ask anything that you wish and I shall give it to you! — And he made his promise sacred with an oath: "Whatsoever thou dost ask, I will give thee, even though it be the half of my kingdom!" (*Mark* 6:23).

Between the delirious applause of the guests and the breath-taking offers of the king, our dancer became an inexperienced little girl again and she perhaps would not have known how to answer. But her seasoned mother had already foreseen this delicate moment and had told her what to do. The maternal warnings rescued her perplexity and off she ran immediately to consult Herodias who was at banquet in the room reserved for the women. —

Mamma, the king is ready to give me even half of his kingdom and he has sworn it publicly! ‘What am I to ask for?’ (*Mark* 6:24.) The practical lady immediately perceived that her man had fallen into the trap and she had won her play. So, fondling her little dancer, she said to her crisply: Let the rest go, because it is unimportant; ask for one thing only; “die head of John the Baptist” (*ibid.*). To be safe in her adultery, the adulteress needed the services of a proxy and an executioner, and so she entrusted these unaccustomed duties to her unwitting daughter. This time, too, the little girl behaved beautifully. “And she came in at once with haste to the king, and asked, saying: I want thee right away to give me on a dish the head of John the Baptist. And grieved as he was, the king, because of his oath and his guests, was unwilling to displease [refuse] her. But sending an executioner, he commanded that his head be brought in a dish. Then he [the executioner] beheaded him in the prison, and brought his head on a dish and gave it to the girl; and the girl gave it to her mother” (*Mark* 6:25-28). The tetrarch’s sorrowful regret, since he considered himself bound by an oath made in the presence of his guests, did not keep the whole matter from being carried out to its bitter end with the greatest naturalness in the world, as if this were no more than the whim of a little girl who wanted a fruit hanging from the tree. The executioner was dispatched to cut off the head of John and bring it to the dancer just as a servant is dispatched to pick the fruit and give it to the child. Though she herself had no interest in it whatever, Salome carried the head, still warm and dripping with blood, to her mother, who was extremely interested in it. According to later information recorded by St. Jerome, the adulteress gave vent to her hatred by thrusting a bodkin through the tongue as Fulvia had done with the head of Cicero (*Adv. Rufinum*, III, 42). Later the disciples of the martyred John succeeded in recovering his body and burying it.<sup>139</sup> (Figure 49)

356. The Gospels do not tell us where John was killed, but according to Flavius Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 119) he was both imprisoned and executed in the Machaerus. Hence the infamous banquet took place there too. The gospel narrative clearly indicates that the prisoner was not very far away from the banquet chamber since the dancer’s request could be satisfied immediately. This is not a surprising circumstance. The Machaerus was a fortress used for defense against the Nabateans —in fact Pliny (*Natur. hist.*, V, 16, 72) called it the fortress most used to war in all Judea except Jerusalem —but it was also one of those solid and comfortable places Herod the Great had built here and there throughout his territories. Josephus, who

describes it at length (*Wars of the Jews*, VII, 165 ff.) says, among other things, that in the midst of the fortified enclosure Herod had built a "palace that was sumptuous in the size and beauty of its apartments" and furnished with many cisterns and storehouses of every kind. It was a very comfortable place to stay, therefore, and at that particular time Antipas had to stay there to watch the Nabateans more closely because of their enmity as a result of his divorce of his lawful wife (§17).

Today the traveler who manages to get as far as the site of the Machaerus finds nothing but desolation and squalor. It is surrounded by a very broad expanse of utter solitude and all that is left of the ancient building is a deep-sunk, cone-shaped mound with a flat top. The foundations of ancient towers scatter the crest and at its base there are wide caverns, perhaps the ancient cisterns of the fortress, which today serve to shelter the flocks of nomad Beduins in winter.

In one of these caverns or somewhere nearby, John the Baptist waited through many months of imprisonment. One evening, the prolonged din of distant merrymaking reached the subterranean cell and then suddenly an executioner appeared with sword in hand. The prisoner understood and bared his neck. There was a flash and a thud, and the son of Zachary and Elizabeth was no more.

Today the solitary Beduin whom the traveler approaches for directions points out the lopped cone of Machaerus in the distance, and says its Arab name with a shudder of disgust: *al Mashnaqa* (hanging place, scaffold). It is as though some kind of poisonous exhalation rose from it as from a volcano, spreading destruction all around it. The cone is tilted toward the west, where in the background lie the Dead Sea and the region of Sodom.

## JESUS DRIVEN OUT OF NAZARETH

357. For some time now news had been coming to Antipas about Jesus, the extraordinary preacher who was exciting his subjects in Galilee. The memory of John the Baptist was still fresh, and the character and activity of the new prophet were extremely reminiscent of the prophet just dead. Hence the superstitious Antipas concluded that John had come to life again, assuming the form of Jesus, and was going about working miracles. Others too, for that matter, were mistaking the heralded for the herald, while some preferred to recognize Elias or one of the other ancient prophets in Jesus (*Luke* 9:7-8). From then on Antipas was very curious to see Jesus personally and discover

for himself precisely what features the resuscitated John had assumed (*ibid.*, 9).

But Jesus had no desire to make the acquaintance of John's adulterous assassin. This was about the time when he sent his Twelve on their journey, and while they worked in a wider area, Jesus reserved for himself a more restricted but also a much more difficult region. After raising the daughter of Jairus to life he left Capharnaum (cf. *Mark* 6:1) and chose to make a special visit to Nazareth because he knew that deep resentments against him were brooding in the little village where he had grown to manhood. This had not been so in the beginning. Upon his return from Judea, he had certainly received ovations in Nazareth too (§299), but since then his fellow townsmen's feelings toward him had changed, and the superciliousness of some of his relatives (§344) must have had something to do with it. But what offended the local pride of the Nazarenes most deeply was the preference Jesus showed for Capharnaum, now become his customary dwelling place (§285).

Town rivalry and local pride in even the meanest villages was no less common in ancient times than it is today. Nathanael's disparaging remark about Nazareth itself is one evidence of it (§279). The Nazarenes could not forgive Jesus for having, practically speaking, abandoned his own village, especially since in Capharnaum he had done those extraordinary things which all of Galilee was talking about. Did Nazareth by any chance lack sick people to heal, or lame to straighten, or blind to give light to? Why deprive his own town of so many benefits, which would at the same time redound to the glory of the village now scorned so much? This sour temper on the part of Jesus' fellow townsmen must have constituted a barrier against his preaching too. If he could get along without his home town, then his town could get along without his preaching.

So, Jesus returned to Nazareth. He must have stayed there several days, awaiting the opportunity to achieve his purpose, probably with his mother in the little house he had left more than a year before (§270, §282). But the townspeople's attitude was not such as to inspire confidence. While some accorded him a warm welcome and all without exception kept telling over the miracles, he had wrought but recently in the surrounding towns, recognizing that he preached in no ordinary fashion, many others wanted to know what reason there was for accepting his teaching as if it were pure gold.

Was he not the son of Joseph the carpenter? Was his mother not Mary, whom they all knew? Were not his Brothers James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas? And were not his sisters well known in the town (§264)? They were all ordinary people, not one whit better or more unusual than anyone else. Where did he get his learning then? Was not all the wonder of it due perhaps to the fact that people were easily impressed who did not know him and had not watched him grow from babyhood to manhood like everyone else, as the Nazarenes had?

There were, of course, the miracles; but there was some question about these too. Anyone who can work miracles works them everywhere, at home and abroad, among friends and among strangers. In fact, if he were to show any preferences it would be to his own town and friends. Instead, this strange Nazarene worked miracles everywhere but in Nazareth. He was very much like a doctor who can cure other people but is unable to cure his own family or himself.

358. The comparison caught on and was repeated by one to another with all the petulance characteristic of little towns. The most hotheaded among them took occasion to say to Jesus' face: "Physician, heal thyself! As great things as we have heard done in Capharnaum, do also here in thy own country!" (*Luke* 4:23.) Jesus answered by trying to enlighten and convince them, observing that no one is a prophet in his own country. He did perform some miracles, healing the sick, but only a few, not because this village was called Nazareth instead of Capharnaum but "because of their unbelief" (*Matt.* 13:58). What they lacked here indeed was precisely what had triumphed only recently, on the day of faith, with the daughter of Jairus, the woman with the hemorrhage, and the two blind men (§§349 ff.).

The final clash came when Jesus made a formal and almost official attempt to shake his townsmen out of their complacency at the Sabbath gathering in the synagogue, perhaps the only Sabbath during his stay. His enemies must have gone to the assembly with the intention of challenging him. The scent of battle was in the air; Jesus would not fail to appear at the services, and they would have an excellent opportunity to corner him and come to some understanding once and for all.

Jesus did indeed come, and the meeting proceeded according to rule (§§66 ff.). This time Jesus gave the instruction after the reading of the "Prophets," and it is not too hardy to suppose that the ruler of the synagogue presiding

over the meeting purposely invited his much-discussed townsman to give the instruction in order that he might have plenty of opportunity to explain himself. Jesus mounted the pulpit and “the volume of Isaiah the prophet was handed to him. And after he opened the volume, he found the place where it was written:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me;  
because he has anointed me;  
To bring *good tidings* to the poor he has sent me,  
to proclaim to the captive’s release,  
and sight to the blind;  
To set at liberty the oppressed,  
to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord<sup>140</sup> ....

And closing the volume, he gave it back to the attendant<sup>141</sup> and sat down. And the eyes of all in the synagogue were gazing on him. But he began to say to them: Today this scripture has been fulfilled [which has resounded] in your hearing” (*Luke 4:17-21*).

This was the beginning of Jesus’ discourse, and the rest of it unfortunately has not been preserved for us. Certainly, he applied to himself at length the passage he had just read, showing how, with his works, he completely fulfilled the ancient prophecy concerning the proclamation of the “good tidings.” His exposition was effective and this time too the speaker seemed as one “having authority” (§299), so that all wondered. But at the root of their very admiration was the fuel of scandal. Was not this the lowly son of the carpenter? If he had worked so many miracles elsewhere, which he himself cited in his discourse, why did he not perform some there among his own townsmen? These questions, not uttered in the synagogue, were loudly muttered outside when the gathering was over. His listeners argued pro and con; then they confronted the speaker directly. They invited him once more to answer these crucial questions and remember above all that he was a Nazarene. Did he really wish to win his countrymen over to his teachings? Well, then, let him work a few definite and convincing miracles right there in the public square and they would give themselves to him body and soul: “Physician, heal thyself!”

Jesus answered as he had before. Let them beware of verifying for Nazareth the principle that no prophet is accepted in his own country. For him, Jesus, Nazareth and Capernaum and every other Israelite town were the same, and

whenever he was rejected by one of them it was easy enough to go to another. There were many widows in Israel at the time of the prophet Elias, yet God sent him to a widow who was not an Israelite. And in the time of the prophet Eliseus there were many lepers in Israel, yet God sent the prophet to the leper Naaman who was a Syrian (*Luke 4:25-27*).

359. Jesus' answer was a warning, but his ill-disposed interlocutors interpreted it as an insult. So, he explicitly declared that he did not need Nazareth and that he was ready to choose any other town at all in its place, even outside of Israel! How did this carpenters' son get so high and mighty? Let him learn once and for all to be a little grateful to the village that had raised him! He must be driven out of the town immediately and in such a way that he would never want to come back.<sup>142</sup>

The outburst of violence was sudden as it always is among excited mobs. They were still muttering there near the synagogue when someone probably began to shout against the unworthy Nazarene: Drive the insolent fellow out! Death to the traitor! The few who were on Jesus' side probably shrank back in terror; the others "put him forth out of the town, and led him to the brow of the hill, on which their town was built, that they might throw him down headlong. But he, passing through their midst (*dielqwn dia mesou*) went his way" (*Luke 4:29-30*).

Why did not the Nazarenes carry out their intention? We do not know. Perhaps at the last minute those who favored Jesus recovered their courage and intervened in some way to prevent so hateful a crime. Or perhaps the hotheads themselves when the fatal moment came recovered their senses and contented themselves with the threat they had given him. Nor are we to exclude the possibility that the superior force of Jesus' own personality during the incident quelled the rioters so that at the critical moment he was able to escape them. We are not told, either, the precise place where this occurred. A small peak is pointed out today called Gebal el-Qafse, which rises about nine hundred feet above the valley of Esdraelon and which in the Middle Ages already bore the name of *Saltus Domini*, while today it is known as the "Hill of the Precipice." But this place presents a serious difficulty in that it is about two miles from ancient Nazareth, which is truly too far away for an excited mob that had resolved on summary execution. In the actual vicinity of the ancient village there must have been steep drops in the terrain which would be very well suited to their violent purpose. Hence some have thought, with a fair

degree of likelihood, of a drop about thirty feet high near the modern Greek Catholic Church, which is situated on the old site of the ancient synagogue. Pious Christian meditation later contemplated what Mary must have felt on that occasion and a chapel situated in the direction of the *Saltus Domini* received in the Middle Ages the name of Santa Maria del Tremore [Our Lady of the Spasm] in commemoration of the fear Mary experienced when she saw her son in danger.<sup>143</sup>



## CHAPTER XVII: The Day of Parables

### THE PARABLE

360. DURING this part of his ministry in Galilee and probably on the very day when he calmed the storm (§346), Jesus gave that abundant instruction which we may designate as the day of parables.

Unquestionably he had used certain elements of the parable even before this in his discourses (cf. *Mark* 2:17, 19, 21, 22, etc.), including the Sermon on the Mount (*Matt.* 5:13-16; 6:22ff.; etc.). But this day was dedicated in a particular way to the true parable, as we glean from the short introductions with which all three Synoptics preface it (*Matt.* 13:1-3; *Mark* 4:1-2; *Luke* 8:4; cf. *Mark* 4:35). It is almost certain as well that we have the same procedure here among the Evangelists as we had in the Sermon on the Mount; that is, in recounting the preaching of this day they recorded parables Jesus gave on other occasions (*Matthew*) or transferred the parables given on this day to other episodes (*Luke* — §317). Nevertheless, historically speaking, there must have been a nucleus of parables preached on that particular day but its content was distributed with certain freedom through the respective narratives of the individual Evangelists.<sup>144</sup><sub>1</sub>

The parable is a literary device which uses an imaginary but entirely plausible and likely fact to illustrate a given moral and religious truth. It is therefore very similar to the fable; but the actors in a fable are inanimate objects or animals and hence it is an impossible tale, while its purpose is not specifically the edification of the hearer. Wherever they have flourished both types have always had a popular character. The common people have always found a clear and easy method of teaching and receiving bits of homely wisdom in this comparison between hypothetical situations and the realities of everyday life, illustrating the impalpable and abstract with the tangible and concrete. And although it is the favorite method of the common people it is more philosophical than it at first seems. It is well known that Socrates, in arguing against the Sophists, frequently used the parable and the simile. From the very beginning, in fact, to define his position as teacher, he used a kind of parable, for he declared that he was continuing in the field of the spirit the profession which his mother Phenaretes, a midwife, had exercised in the field of nature; he was the obstetrician of the spirit.

Substantially, then, the parable is a comparison. Of course, the parable may be simple or complicated depending on the subtlety of concept and comprehension on the part of its authors or listeners, and it may also borrow some of the features of the allegory. For example, if the school teacher's task is compared simply with the gardeners, then we have a parable. If the comparison is carried out to fine details, the little plants in the garden symbolizing the pupils; the flowers and fruits, the various promotions and prizes; the spading, the various cares of teaching; the pruning shears, the punishments, and so on, then the comparison becomes symbolic as well, or rather it becomes an allegorical parable. If the school itself is never mentioned but only the plants, flowers, spade, shears, etc., are spoken of, then we have pure allegory, or a sustained metaphor. It is clear, however, that just as pure allegory sustained for any length is both difficult and rare (a famous example is Horace's ode *O navis*, which speaks of the Republic as a ship) it is easy for the simple parable to border on the allegory and use certain of its features.

The parables of Jesus follow these general rules.<sup>145</sup>

361. Ancient Hebrew literature had cultivated the parable and called it *mashal*, which term, however, included other forms besides. As was to be expected, the rabbis, prior to and contemporary with Jesus, in actual practice mixed the parable more or less with other similar devices; these forms were used with increasing frequency until after the middle of the second century A.D. when they were not used any more. At this time Rabbi Meir died, and with him, it was said, the parable. Three thousand fables were attributed to him, in which the hero was always the fox. For that matter, the parable by this time had among the rabbis lost its liveliness and efficacy and become more or less stereotyped and conventional.

As Jesus uses it, the parable is quite another thing. Simple and precise, it is based on the humblest realities, but it mirrors with crystal clearness the most sublime concepts. It is easily understood by the unlettered and it offers abundant meditation to the learned. It is absolutely free of any literary device or artifice, yet for sheer power it surpasses by far the most elaborate of them. It does not startle but it persuades; it is not only winning but convincing. From *parabola* was derived the Italian word *parola*, which means "word." And may we not say, in fact, that the "parable" of Jesus is the highest "word" that has risen from among men and at the same time the homeliest that has descended from God to man?

## THE PURPOSE OF THE PARABLES

362. The purpose of Jesus' parables is to introduce the kingdom of God, or heaven. In the Sermon on the Mount, he had spoken of the moral prerequisites for entrance into that kingdom but, now that a little more time had passed, it was necessary to take another step forward, to speak of the kingdom in itself, of its character and nature, of the members who should compose it, of the manner in which it was to be realized and established. In this regard, too, Jesus' method was essentially a gradual one.

The reason for this is to be found in the extremely important historical circumstance already mentioned (§300-§301), which is the real clue to Jesus' general attitude toward the social and political world around him, namely, the acute expectation by the Jews of a political-messianic kingdom. To speak to these crowds of a kingdom of God without explaining and clarifying, would be to flash before their excited fancies the vision of a celestial omnipotent king, surrounded by phalanxes of armed men, or better, legions of warring angels; a being who should carry Israel from victory to victory and finally to dominion over all the earth, establishing as "lord and master" of all pagan nations the people whom they had heretofore trampled underfoot but whose footstool they would now become instead (§83). Yet it was precisely to these inflammable multitudes that Jesus had to speak of the object of their delirious enthusiasm, and to speak in a manner that would at the same time attract and disenchant them. The kingdom of God was unquestionably to come; yes, and indeed it had already begun to be realized; but it was not their "kingdom." It was Jesus' kingdom and quite different. Hence his teaching was to show and not to show, to open their eyes to the truth and to shut them to their fantastic dreams. Extreme caution was necessary, because Jesus at this point was treading volcanic ground which might explode from one minute to the next; and it was his compassionate prudence which induced him to use the parable.

The parable, in fact, is obscure though clear, reticent though eloquent. Whoever scans it with a clouded eye or prejudiced mind finds nothing in it; or else the opposite of what it really means. It is light, not darkness, but a light mercifully accommodated to certain eyes. They must be sound eyes, however, not diseased, for — as St. Augustine was later to experience in his own case — "to ailing eyes the light is hateful which is loved by healthy ones."

But even if the parable were not understood immediately there was still another resource. Jesus' parables were spoken in public both to people who

were well disposed and to others who were not, that the gate to the kingdom might be open to all. Mercy and prudence absolutely required the veil of the parable, but it was always possible to tear aside that veil by speaking to the author of the parables in private. Since Jesus wished truly to spread his kingdom, he would not refuse to speak without parables when consulted in private, for then the reasons for caution which regulated his preaching in public no longer existed, and the veil could be dispensed with.

363. And that is exactly what happened. On a certain day the disciples approached him and asked: "Why dost thou speak to them in parables?" (*Matt.* 13:10.) This question and Jesus' answer are most important, but to evaluate them properly we must keep in mind that both question and answer do not belong to the day of the parables; they came much later, when Jesus had already spoken numerous parables and his disciples had noted that they had little effect on the crowds.<sup>146</sup> Besides, even before this, the disciples had requested Jesus to explain to them privately the parables he uttered in public (*Matt.* 13:36; 15:15) and in other cases Jesus himself had freely offered them the explanation (*Mark* 4:34). Jesus' answer to the question was: "To you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven: but to them it is not given. For to him who has shall be given, and he shall have abundance; but from him who does not have, even that which he has shall be taken away. This is why I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, neither do they understand. In them is being fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias, who says: 'Hearing you will hear, but not understand; and seeing you will see, but not perceive. For the heart of this people has been hardened, and with their ears they have been hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart [mind] and be converted, and I heal them.' But blessed are your eyes, for they see; and your ears, for they hear...." (*Matt.* 13:11-16). This answer is given not only to the Apostles but also to others of good will who were with them (*Mark* 4:10-Greek text). The difference between them and the rest of Jesus' listeners was just this: that they were permitted to know the kingdom (*its mysteries*) clearly but the others only through the veil of the parable. This difference, however, was nothing but the consequence of their good will, for by questioning Jesus personally they removed the veil of the parable, while the others remained behind it because they had no desire to lift it aside. Nevertheless, the gate of

the kingdom was open both to one and the other, and its threshold was represented by the parable.

Jesus could have been asked why only those of good will crossed that threshold; but that would have involved a quite different and much more profound question, namely, the principle asserted for Nicodemus that he who is not born of the Spirit, cannot enter into the kingdom of God (§288).

364. All this is clear enough in the text of the dialogue as reported by Matthew except for one point we shall discuss in a moment. But the briefer accounts of the other two Synoptics offer a particular difficulty, especially that of Mark which reads: "To you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God: but to those outside [the number of you of good will] all things are treated in parables, that seeing they may see, but not perceive; and hearing they may hear, but not understand; lest perhaps at any time they should be converted, and their sins be forgiven them" (*Mark* 4:11-12). There has been infinite discussion on that first "that" (ina) which introduces the quotation from Isaias, to determine whether or not it has a purposive value and conveys the speaker's will in the matter. The question must be solved by comparing the passage with the other two Synoptics and especially with *Matthew* which is the most complete of the three.

In his answer Jesus distinguishes between those of good will and the rest, and then he refers to what had happened in the case of the ministry of Isaias, whose words he quotes. But the quotation, in the modern text of *Matthew*, is from the Septuagint (used by the Greek translator of *Matthew*), while Jesus was undoubtedly quoting the original Hebrew which reads: "And [God] said [to me]: Go, and thou shalt say to this people: Hearing, hear but understand not, and seeing see but know it not. Blind the heart of this people and make their ears heavy and shut their eyes lest [it happens that] they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and [so] be converted and [their physician] heal them" (*Isa.* 6:9-10). There can be no reasonable doubt as to the true meaning of these words. God is speaking here as the traditional and affectionate physician of Israel, who is trying once again to cure his patient by sending Isaias to take care of him. But the physician is angry because the patient, as usual, is hardheaded and stubborn, and so to frighten him and make some impression on him, the physician here speaks with sarcasm, in the form of a threat. In substance he says: Never have you listened and been persuaded! Well then, refuse my medicine and keep your ailments lest I cure you for always! Now, who cannot see that the physician is

earnestly anxious to effect a real cure and that the “lest” is kindly sarcasm and a salutary threat, the responsibility for which falls exclusively on the patient? As a matter of fact, in this very instance God was sending Isaias to try to achieve the spiritual cure of Israel.

Hence the text of the dialogue according to *Matthew* must be interpreted in the light of the original Hebrew of *Isaias*, specifically quoted: and the other two Synoptics must be interpreted in conformity with *Matthew* and the Hebrew text of *Isaias*. This latter text in *Luke* and *Mark* is quoted not only without reference to its source but also in abbreviated form; but the manner of quoting should not lead to error as if we were compelled to confine ourselves to the words quoted alone. Quotations were made *per summa verba* so that the passage referred to would be accurately recognized, but the true meaning was to be taken from the entire original passage. This one, as we could easily guess, was a famous passage in anti-Jewish polemics and variously employed in early Christian catechesis (*John* 12:40; *Acts* 28:26-27; *Rom.* 11:8). Finally, the disputed “that” has in all three Synoptics the value to be attached to the “lest” in the original Hebrew of *Isaias*; it represents nothing more than a heartfelt admonition in the form of a salutary threat.<sup>147</sup>

## THE PARABLES OF THE KINGDOM

365. The day of the parables was spent near Capharnaum on the shore of the lake. Since a great crowd was gathered, Jesus had recourse to an expedient he had used before (§303); he climbed into a boat, and having pushed out a little into the lake, he spoke to the people lining the shore.

The first parable recorded on this day is that of the sower and his seed. In the hilly and broken Galilean terrain, small plots of more likely ground here and there on the slopes and in the hollows were chosen for cultivation. After preparing his ground, the sower went out at the first rains, about November, proceeding from one plot to another with his seeds of wheat or barley. Now the progress of the kingdom of heaven resembles that of the sower of Galilee.

The sower goes out carrying against his hip the sack brimming with seeds, and when he reaches the ground he has prepared, he begins to sow. But in Palestine everyone cuts across the fields to get from one place to another, and small paths soon traverse even those patches which have been freshly plowed. Hence some of the seed falls on one or another of these little pathways, where the birds soon pick it up or the passersby trample it under foot. Another some falls on rocky ground, where there is only a light sprinkling

of good soil, and there in the heat it quickly begins to sprout; but since there is not enough earth for it to root properly, a few days of bright sunlight are enough to wither it completely. Another some falls on soil which is deeper but not properly prepared, and so weeds and thorns grow up with the seedlings and eventually choke them. Finally, the rest of the sack is emptied on good ground, and there the sowing yields thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold depending on the quality of the soil. This everyday occurrence Jesus narrates as the adventure of one particular sower and thus composes a parable. He concludes by saying: "He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"

Later, however, he himself furnished the explanation of the parable to the disciples who asked him for it privately (§363). The seed was the word of God, that is, the announcement of the kingdom of heaven. The seed that fell along the pathways and was eaten up by the birds represented the message as it was received by ill-disposed hearers, who barely listened with their ears and not with their hearts, and immediately Satan came and took it away from them. The seed fallen on rocky ground represented the superficial listeners, who accepted the message with joy at the moment but forgot it entirely at the first difficulty they encountered. The seed fallen among thorns and thistles represented the hearers enveloped in the passions and cares of this world, who kept the good tidings in their hearts for a little while but then let their materialistic desires and anxieties stifle it. Finally, the seed fallen on good ground represented those who received the good tidings in hearts that were well disposed and cherished it so that they yielded fruit in varying abundance according to their dispositions.

The average Jew who was expecting a political-messianic kingdom would have understood nothing of the true meaning of this parable unless he asked Jesus to explain it as the disciples did. For the average Jew was expecting a resplendent conqueror-king, and here the founder of the kingdom is not even mentioned. He was expecting the kingdom, fully established and ready for him, to descend from the clouds of heaven midst the rumble and crash of awesome portents, and here instead the kingdom was presented as rising humbly and silently from the earth midst obstacles of every kind. He was awaiting the vindication of his nation and victory over the pagans and here instead mention is made only of the hidden formation of the spirit, of victory over the passions and mundane interests. The average Jew, therefore, could see and could not see through the parable. The more tenaciously attached he was to his old concepts and beliefs, the denser would be his heart and the

deafened his ears, and he would reject the complete "change of mind" (§335) to which the parable cautiously invited him.

366. But the kingdom of heaven finds obstacles to its realization even where it has been well received, and this fact is illustrated in the second parable.

A man sowed good seed in his field. Since he had prepared his ground well and done his sowing in good season and proper measure, he could confidently and serenely await his harvest. But a neighbor of his, who had an old spite against him, came by night while his farmhands were asleep and scattered in his field an abundance of dandel weed (*Lolium temulentum* Linn.). Among farmers this was a typical way to pay off a grudge and is specifically considered in Roman law (*Digest.*, IX, tit. 2 *ad legem Aquiliam*, 27, n. 14). Even when it has begun to sprout the dandel weed cannot be distinguished from the wheat seedlings, and the difference between them is clear only when they begin to ear; by that time, it is too late to pull up the dandel and the wheat has already suffered. In the parable, too, the trick was not discovered until the crop had begun to ear. And then the laborers went to the master and said to him: "Sir, didst thou not sow good seed in thy field? How then does it have weeds?" And the master immediately surmised where the weed had come from and exclaimed: "It is my enemy that has done this." The workers then suggested: "Shall we go and gather it up and give the crop more room?" But the master replied: "No, because in gathering up the dandel you may also root up the wheat; rather let them both grow until the harvesting, and then I shall tell my harvesters first to gather up the weeds in bundles and throw them into the fire, and then to gather the wheat into my barn."

We also have the explanation of this parable which Jesus gave his disciples (*Matt.* 13:36-43). He who sows the good seed is the Son of man, and the field in which he sows it is the world. The good seeds are the sons of the kingdom and the weeds are the sons of the Evil One. The enemy who sows the spite crop is the devil, and the harvesting is the end of the present "age" or world (§84). The harvesters are the angels. At the end of the world, the Son of man will send his angels who, like the harvesters with the weeds, will cast out of his kingdom all those who have done evil and given scandal, throwing them into the furnace of fire, and the just will shine resplendent as the sun in the kingdom of the Father.

The second parable, then, showed that the kingdom preached by Jesus would contain both the good and the bad, the good deriving from the Son of



man and the bad from the devil. In addition, this coexistence of good and evil would be tolerated in view of the full triumph of the good which was to take place only when the present world passed into the world to come. Hence the kingdom was a kind of bridge, joining the two “ages” or worlds. It was a kind of Jacob’s ladder which rose from the earth high into the heavens.

367. The parable which only Mark gives us (4:26-29) resembles in part the one given above. The kingdom of God is like a man who has sowed his field. Whether he sleeps or wakes, by day or by night, whether he thinks of his crop or not, it sprouts and grows, and finally it puts forth ears and ripens, because it has an inner life and energy of its own; this, however, must unfold gradually and run its complete regular cycle.

Hence the good tidings preached by Jesus would also run its regular course, developing in extent and depth within the spirits of men, without the sudden and apocalyptic cataclysms anxiously awaited by the multitudes, in virtue of that inner force with which it was imbued from on high.

368. The parable of the mustard-seed also demonstrates that the kingdom of God is to begin without any exterior display.

The mustard is very common in Palestine, and although it is an annual plant it may become, under favorable conditions, a bush some ten or twelve feet high. Yet its seeds are the very tiniest little kernels so that in Palestine even today they are proverbial for things that are barely visible: “Small as a mustard seed.” Now this curious disproportion between the tiny seed and the size of the plant, which is the largest of all leafy shrubs, furnishes Jesus with a picture of the actual disproportion between the beginnings of the kingdom of God, humble and silent, and its subsequent expansion, which will be greater than that of any other.

Here, too, we have a complete rejection, in fact, a specific reversal (§318) of the prevailing Jewish concepts of the time. A few years before, Horace had written that the true poet “thinks how to draw out, not smoke from the lightning flash, but light from the smoke” (*Ars poetica*, 144-145). Apply Horace’s antithesis to the religious field and the first process becomes the one chosen by the multitudes of Palestine and the second the one chosen by Jesus. The populace was exalting the brilliant splendor of an imminent political-messianic kingdom, but after forty-odd years there remained to them only the smoke rising from the burning ruins of Jerusalem and all the sorry consequences of that destruction, which still endure after twenty centuries.

Jesus began with the Sermon on the Mount, a tiny cloud that looked as if it might melt away at the first light puff of wind, but from that cloud flashed a brilliance which is brighter than ever after the same twenty centuries. This comparison is no subtle critical theory based on a particular philosophy and calculated to prove that Jesus was suffering from hallucinations (§210) or the like. It is an elementary observation inspired by the clear parable spoken by Jesus, and, unlike such theories, it is based on historical fact universally known and solid as rock.

369. Similar to this is the parable of the leaven. In the evening the housewife fills her kneading trough with three full measures of flour and works into it a handful of leaven. The next morning, when she uncovers her trough, she finds that the small handful of leaven, in its hidden night-long growth, has pervaded and transformed the whole mass of dough which is now a hundred times larger.

Here, too, we have demonstrated the actual disproportion between the beginnings of the kingdom, represented by the leaven, and its full development, represented by the abundant mass of raised dough. But even clearer here is the allusion to the inner silent spiritual nature of the kingdom, which will spread not by force of arms, money, or political ideologies, but by the hidden conquest of minds and hearts, like a mysterious leaven.

370. Other parables, which Jesus probably gave his disciples privately at home (*Matt.* 13:36), are recorded very briefly.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in a field. It was the custom, during the various political upheavals of the time, to hide precious objects in convenient places in the country to keep them from becoming soldiers' booty. Forty years later, during the siege of Jerusalem, when the gates of the city were closed, treasures were hidden even in the gutters and subterranean tunnels (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, VI, 431- 432; VII, 114-115). But sometimes the owner of the treasure died before he had recovered it, and later some wayfarer or peasant working the field accidentally came upon it. Naturally, the first thing the lucky man tried to do was buy the field, saying nothing about what he had found there, in order that he might become the legal owner of the treasure.<sup>148</sup> In Jesus' parable the lucky finder, as soon as he is certain that he has come upon a treasure, covers it up, hiding it again so that no one else may discover it. Then, full of secret rejoicing, he sells all that he has to scrape together enough to buy the field and thus become the full

owner of the treasure. In short, he stakes everything for everything, because he is certain that the everything he leaves behind is worth much less than the all he is acquiring. *Dimitte omnia et invenies omnia*.

This is what happens when one has come to know and value the kingdom of heaven. He will leave every good he has to acquire this supreme good (*Matt.* 13:44).

371. The same teaching is expressed in the brief parable of the pearl. A merchant searches at great length for a fine pearl, one of those celebrated in antiquity for their value such as the two huge pearls of Cleopatra mentioned by Pliny (*Nat. Hist.*, IX, 35, 38). When he has found one of great rarity then he sells all that he has to buy it (*Matt.* 13:45-46).

Similar to the parable of the darnel weed is the short one of the fish net, based on an everyday occurrence along the shores of Lake Tiberias. The kingdom of heaven is like a great net cast into the water and then drawn forth full of fish of all kinds. The fishermen sort their catch, putting the good fish in baskets and throwing away the bad. Similarly, at the end of the world, the angels will separate the wicked from the just and put them into the furnace of fire (*Matt.* 13:47-50).

This separate conversation with his disciples, which closed the day of the parables, was sealed with another short parable. When he had finished speaking Jesus asked his disciples: Have you understood all this? And they answered yes. — Well then, he added, every scribe who becomes a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the householder who brings out of his storeroom things that are new and things that are old. These disciples who are destined to continue the master's work therefore, were to act according to the principle he himself had laid down in the Sermon on the Mount (§323), namely, that he had come not to abolish the old Law but to complete and perfect it. The things that were old were to be completed and perfected by the things that were new.

## CHAPTER XVIII: From the Second Pasch to the Last Feast of Tabernacles

### THE FIRST MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES

372. MEANWHILE some time had passed and it must have been now about the middle of March. Hence, “the Pasch, the festival day of the Jews, was near at hand” (*John* 6:4), the Pasch of the year 29 and the second Pasch of Jesus’ public ministry (§177).

At this point the Apostles return to Jesus from their missionary journey (§354) and almost simultaneously comes the news of John the Baptist’s death (§355). The Apostles, besides being worn out from the labors they had just undergone, were so besieged by the crowds swarming about them that “they had not so much as time to eat” (*Mark* 6:31). On the other hand, John’s tragic death had profoundly saddened Jesus, and so he took his returned missionaries and went away from Capharnaum in search of rest for them and solitude for himself; and “they got into the boat, and went off into a desert place apart” (*Mark* 6:32) which was near “a town called Bethsaida” (*Luke* 9:10—Greek text). It was the town which the tetrarch Philip had completely rebuilt and named Julia (Bethsaida-Julia) in honor of the notorious daughter of Augustus (§19), and it was the native city of the two pairs of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John (§279).

It seemed a very suitable place. It was not under the jurisdiction of Antipas but of Philip, and hence Antipas could not take any steps against Jesus, whom he suspected to be a reincarnation of John (§357); in addition, the town was situated on the other side of the Jordan a little above its entrance into the lake, and to the east lay a wide stretch of almost uninhabited country where it might be possible to rest and be alone. Finally, from the vicinity of Capharnaum it could be reached easily by sailing a short distance obliquely across the lake.

But Jesus’ departure with his little group of Apostles was noticed by the crowds around Capharnaum, and from the direction in which the boat made off they were able to figure out its destination. Then many of them took to the roads along the northern curve of the lake, crossed the Jordan where it flows into the lake and thus succeeded in reaching the other shore before Jesus’ boat did. When he landed in the desert place beyond Bethsaida-Julia the

crowds were already there and waiting for him. In all probability the eager throng that left Capharnaum had been joined by others along the way. Since the Pasch was near, the whole region was overrun with caravans of eastern Galileans heading for Jerusalem. These naturally seized the opportunity to hear Jesus again, as they had not seen him for some time.

The multitudes immediately dispelled all hope of rest and solitude, especially since Jesus, as soon as he saw all those eager people crowded there to wait for him, ‘had compassion on them’ and began to cure miraculously the infirm among them and to speak to all of them of the kingdom of God. Meanwhile the hours passed by. Jesus and his Apostles must have left Capharnaum early in the morning and landed on the opposite shore before noon. But the encounter with the crowds, the supplications of the sick and the unfortunate, the cures, the lessons on the kingdom, had consumed the entire day and it “was now far spent” (*Mark 6:35*).

The crowds, forgetful of everything else, neither tired nor showed any signs of leaving Jesus. Hence the practical-minded Apostles approached him and pointed out that they were in a desert place, the hour was late and hence it would be well to dismiss the people so that they might scatter through the nearest towns and villages and find food and lodging. Jesus answered: You yourselves give them to eat!

The answer seemed very strange indeed. First of all, they had no bread and perhaps not even sufficient money to provide it. Philip did some quick figuring and observed a little ironically that even if they could find two hundred silver denarii (some forty dollars) worth of bread, it would barely furnish a good mouthful apiece. Jesus did not answer Philip’s mathematics, but changing his tone he asked: “How many loaves have you?” Andrew, the brother of Peter, answered: “There is a young boy here who has five barley loaves and two fishes”; but he, too, feels obliged to point out, “What are these among so many?” And Jesus did not answer Andrew’s reckoning either.

373. All around as far as the eye could see, stretched the meadow, its verdure in the bright vigor of the Paschal tide. It seemed a sea of waving green from which the dark masses of the multitude rose like islands. All of a sudden, Jesus ordered the Apostles to have the crowds recline on the grass, and they did so in groups of fifty or a hundred persons. Peter, our witness, who must have lingered over the description of it in his oral teaching, likens it to a vast garden in which the companies of people looked like one flower bed after

another (prasiai prasiai), and Peter's interpreter repeats his comparison to the letter (*Mark* 6:40 —Greek text). But no one could yet fathom the reason for the commandment. To recline on divans was customary at gala banquets (§341), but what food could possibly be served there to guests lying on the grass? Jesus, however, "took the five loaves, and the two fishes and, looking up to heaven, blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and the two fishes he divided among them all. And all ate and were satisfied." The traditional Jewish procedure at banquets had been observed in the reclining and also in the prayer at the beginning and the breaking of the bread, both of which were the duty of the father of the family; and it was also observed at the end when the leftovers were gathered up, as they were at the end of every Jewish meal: "and they gathered up what was left over, twelve baskets full of fragments, besides what was left over of the fishes." Since the crowd had been divided into groups it was easy to calculate their number: "now those who had eaten were five thousand men" (*Mark* 6:41-44). Matthew confirms the number five thousand, but as a former tax gatherer he is a little more accurate and adds "without counting the women and children" [*Matt.* 14:21].

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had admonished his listeners: "Do not be anxious saying: What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What are we to put on?'" ... For your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides" (§331); and the truth of the admonition was proved on the meadow outside Bethsaida. All those people throughout the whole long day had been seeking the "kingdom and his justice," or the bread of the spirit, and without thinking about it at all they had at the same time found bread for their bodies. But this material bread was a very secondary adjunct, a merely accessory episode in the scene we are witnessing; the unusual thing about that particular day was the whole-souled search for the kingdom and its triumphant expansion. Quite rightly it was pointed out — and by none other than the rationalist Loisy — that the account of this episode in the fourth Gospel is dominated by the concept of Christ as the Bread of spiritual life.<sup>149</sup> And this was only to be expected in the "spiritual Gospel" (§160), which pays much more attention to the profound and subtle teachings in its incidents than to their more spectacular features and places particular emphasis on the analogies between material realities and spiritual principles.

374. We should also expect the crowds, however, to be much more impressed by the material reality than by anything else. Throughout the entire day they had heard about the “kingdom,” and were moved by what they heard, and now they watched the food for their bodies multiply in the hands of this “kingdom’s” preacher. Their conclusion was simple and immediate and in perfect keeping with their messianic expectations (§362). Whoever worked miracles like this could, like Isaias, easily exterminate the armies of the enemy, cover a whole region with darkness like Moses, cross rivers dry shod like Joshua, and move triumphantly all over the earth like the pagan Cyrus whom the God of Israel himself had called “messiah” (*Isa.* 45:1); in short, he could in very brief time effect the longed-for “kingdom of the Messiah” for the greater glory of Israel. Hence, he was the awaited Messiah; his power unquestionably revealed him as such. From a conclusion so clear and compelling the impetuous Galileans proceeded immediately to action: “When the people, therefore, had seen the sign [miracle] which Jesus had worked they said: This is indeed the Prophet who is to come (§339) into the world! So, when Jesus perceived that they would come to take him by force and make him king, he fled again to the mountain, himself alone” (*John* 6:14-15).

This information, precious as it is for its fine historical flavor, is even more precious because it is given us only by the Evangelist today pictured as a tireless inventor of abstract allegories. Here instead we have sheer historical reality, the reality Jesus had long foreseen and chosen to avoid by the prudence of his conduct (§301).

375. On that evening, too, Jesus had forearmed himself against the danger. As soon as the meal was over, even before his zealous electors had decided to proclaim him king, he immediately obliged “his disciples to get into the boat and cross the sea ahead of him to Bethsaida while he himself dismissed the crowd” (*Mark* 6:45). In other words, having noticed the crowd’s excitement and realizing their intentions, Jesus first protected his disciples by sending them ahead to Capharnaum and then stayed there alone in order the more expeditiously to handle his excited political messianists. As the other Evangelist tells us, he did exactly what he had done on other occasions (§301), namely, he passed secretly from their midst. A good part of the night he spent on the mountain in prayer (*Matt.* 14:23), and in the meantime the disciples were sailing toward Capharnaum.<sup>150</sup>

(Figure 50, Figure 51, Figure 52)

## JESUS WALKS ON THE WATERS; THE DISCOURSE ON THE BREAD OF LIFE

376. It was already night when the boat put out from the shore. Before embarking the disciples probably lingered a while hoping that Jesus would free himself of the multitude and join them, but when he did not come and it was already late, they set sail.

That is what the Master had bidden them to do and they obeyed, but they were not too happy about it both because the Master was not with them and because that journey by night was neither safe nor pleasant. Quite frequently in late spring toward the sunset of a hot calm day a cold and violent wind comes beating down from the mountains over Lake Tiberias, blowing toward the south and growing in volume and violence until morning, so that sailing becomes extremely difficult. And that is what happened on this particular night. Surprised by the wind which caught them broadside and pushed them south instead of west, the disciples furled the sail, now become a danger, and took to their oars. But the waters were so rough that the boat made little progress, and by the fourth watch of the night, or shortly after three in the morning, they had gone only twenty-five or thirty stadia, that is, about three miles. A good third of the crossing perhaps lay still ahead of them, and their weariness must have affected their dispositions.

All of a sudden, through the morning mist and the tossing spray they saw a man walking on the waters a short distance from the boat. A shout from one of the rowers and all looked where he was pointing. Unquestionably it was a human figure. The man seemed to be walking in the same direction as the boat and trying to pass it. But no; he turned and came toward them. Then all of them "were greatly alarmed, and exclaimed: It is a ghost! And they cried out for fear. Then Jesus immediately spoke to them saying: Take courage! It is I! Do not be afraid!" (*Matt.* 14:26-27.) If it was truly, he there was nothing to wonder at; he who a few hours before had multiplied the loaves and fishes could very well walk on the water. But was it truly he? Peter wanted to be sure: Lord, if it is thou, bid me come to thee over the water!" And Jesus answered: "Come!" Peter climbed out of the boat and strode across the water until he came to Jesus. The experienced fisherman of Capharnaum had never traveled the lake in that fashion before and it was his experience which betrayed him at the last moment; for when he found himself alone in the midst of those tumbling waves the enthusiastic faith which helped him out of



the boat suddenly deserted him and he was only the expert fisherman once more and therefore afraid. His fear began to pull him under water and in terror he shouted: "Lord, save me!" — and Jesus at once stretched forth his hand and took hold of him, saying to him: "O thou of little faith, why didst thou doubt?" And both then climbed into the boat, the wind subsided and they soon reached their landing place.

377. During the brief and now tranquil sail that remained, a stunned, unconscious bewilderment fell upon the little boat. The travelers threw themselves at the feet of the new passenger exclaiming: "Truly thou art Son of God!" (εου υιοz ε) They did not say he was the "Son of God" par excellence, the Messiah, but they certainly were proclaiming him an extraordinary man to whom God had been most generous with his favors. But somehow there was still a blind spot. When they tried to piece this new miracle together with all the others into some sort of picture that would sum up and explain them all, our travelers, their stomachs filled with the miraculous bread and their eyes feasting on the supposed ghost, could not come to any clear judgment. They repeated to themselves exactly the same reasoning the crowds who had eaten the multiplied bread had arrived at a few hours before. If this man knows how to work such potent miracles, why does he not make up his mind to show he is the powerful "messianic king" of Israel (§347)? What holds him back? "And they were far more astonished within themselves; for they understood not concerning the [matter of the] loaves, for their heart was blinded" (*Mark* 6:51-52).

They landed at Gennesaret, the place today called El-Ghuweir and described by Josephus as extremely fertile (*Wars of the Jews*, III, 516 ff.). Like Tabgha (note 150), it was about two miles south of Capharnaum. They probably avoided the latter city in order to avoid the customary noisy and dangerous demonstrations. Jesus' arrival was noticed immediately, however, and as usual the sick and the suppliant throughout the vicinity began to gather around him, "and as many as touched him were saved" (*Mark* 6:56).

Meanwhile, many from the region of Capharnaum had stayed at Bethsaida where the loaves were multiplied. When night came Jesus disappeared and the disciples sailed off without him in the only boat available. Hence there was nothing else to do but pass the night as best they could, and when morning came some of them took advantage of the boats that had come there from Tiberias to fish (*John* 6:23) and got passage back to Capharnaum, while others went off in other directions.

Those who came to Capharnaum began to search for Jesus, perhaps hoping still to carry out their frustrated plan to proclaim him king and force him either to accept the title without question or refuse it openly. They did find him as they hoped, but probably only after two or three days during which Jesus had been staying in the region of Gennesaret. Then, to engage him in discourse, they said: “Rabbi, when didst thou come here?” (*John* 6:25.)

378. This question begins the famous discourse on the Bread of Life which only John records (6:25-71), who, as we have observed, consistently supplies what is not contained in the Synoptics (§164). Certain characteristic elements of his Gospel which we noted in Jesus’ conversations with Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman reappear in the present discourse; it bears several resemblances to that with the Samaritan woman particularly, even to the way in which the thought is developed. But if we examine minutely the basic structure of the discourse itself, the transitions testify that John’s contribution is editorial only. If the Sermon on the Mount left the two Synoptics which report it, and Matthew especially, room for editing it as they thought best (§317), then John merely took and used the same latitude in recording the discourse on the Bread of Life. In fact, we find in it three distinct divisions: in the first (6:25-40) Jesus’ interlocutors are the inhabitants of the district of Capharnaum who had witnessed the multiplication of the loaves; in the second part (6:41-59) the “Jews” appear to challenge Jesus and John notes that his words were spoken in the synagogue in Capharnaum; and finally the third part (6:60-71) reports, together with some few » words of Jesus, various incidents which were consequences of his preceding discussions, consequences that did not follow immediately but undoubtedly took a little time to come to a head. Hence the discourse, as we have it today, is a composite which has collected about a chronologically compact nucleus other sayings of Jesus that do not belong to the same occasion but are related to the same subject. This method of composition, part chronological and part logical, was usual in John’s catechesis no less than in that of the other Apostles, and the early Fathers or teachers recognized the fact and acknowledged it far in advance of our modern scholars (notes 107, 144 and 170).

379. The first part of the discourse took place at Capharnaum but not in the synagogue. Those looking for Jesus met him, perhaps along the way, and asked him the question recorded above: “When didst thou come here?” As we know, the question veiled an ulterior motive and it is to that that Jesus replies, saying: “Amen, amen I say to you, you seek me, not because you have seen

signs, but because you have eaten of the loaves and have been filled.” The “signs” were the miracles wrought by Jesus in proof of his mission, and as such they would be effective “signs” in so far as they induced the spectators to accept that mission. Yet though these citizens of Capharnaum speaking with Jesus had witnessed many miracles they had not accepted them as signs; they had enjoyed the material benefit to be derived from them but they had remained impervious to the spiritual benefit. Just now they had eaten the miraculous bread but had immediately been kindled with zeal for the political reign of the Messiah. Hence Jesus continued: “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for that which endures unto life everlasting, which the Son of man will give you. For upon him the Father, God himself, has set his seal.” The seal was the most important instrument in a king’s chancellery. Only a little while before, Jesus’ listeners had tried to elect him ‘Icing’; but what kind of king would he have been after that election? Whence would he have derived his royal authority? Rather had he received his authority not from men but from the “Father, God.” His interlocutors replied: “What are we to do, in order that we may perform the works of God?” And the question clearly referred to Jesus’ exhortation to “labor for the food that endures unto life everlasting.” Jesus answered: “This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent”; that is, that you believe in him even when his word disappoints your hopes and dispels your dreams, that you believe in his kingdom even if it is a complete denial of your kingdom.

But they persisted: “What sign, then, dost thou, that we may see and believe thee? What work dost thou perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the desert, even as it is written: Bread from heaven he gave them to eat” (*Exod.* 16:4; *Ps.* 77 [78] 24). Two things were implicitly compared in this reference: the work of Moses, on the one hand, with its “sign” or seal, the manna from heaven; and the work of Jesus, on the other, with its most recent “sign,” the multiplication of the loaves at Bethsaida. Jesus’ questioners seem to prefer the former to the latter. The other signs Jesus has wrought are not even considered, almost as if they had no value as proof and almost as if to illustrate the truth of Jesus’ first words: “You seek me, not because you have seen signs, but because you have eaten of the loaves and have been filled.” In any case, the question is a reproach to Jesus and sets him second to Moses. If he wished to create faith in his invisible and intangible “kingdom,” then let him work “signs” equal, at least, to those of Moses.

380. The discussion has brought them to a crossroad and a choice must be made between the two terms of the comparison: Moses and his work on the one hand, Jesus and his “kingdom” on the other. Which of these two is the greater? This is the crux of the question and Jesus faces it squarely: “Amen, amen I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” The judgment of Jesus’ challengers has been reversed. Jesus is greater than Moses as heaven is greater than earth. Jesus, not Moses, “comes down from heaven and gives life to the world”; it is he who is truly the “bread from heaven.” The exposition is interrupted for a moment by the exclamation: “Lord, give us always this bread!” —the twin of the Samaritan woman’s request for living water, which shows that in both cases Jesus’ listeners still had their minds on material things. And Jesus answered: “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I have told you that you have seen me and you do not believe.” And with further assertions by Jesus in this vein (*John* 6:37-40), the first part of the discourse comes to a close.

381. There must have been a great deal of discussion in the city concerning the encounter and Jesus’ statements; and people must have felt, too, the desire to hear him explain them further. Probably matters developed in much the same way here as they had in Nazareth (§358), and the opportunity was offered Jesus to clarify his words at the next meeting in the synagogue, because the statements which follow were made while he was “teaching in the synagogue at Capharnaum” (6:60). But while we are told at the beginning of this second part of the discourse that the “Jews” were murmuring against him, it is not at all necessary to suppose that a group of rabid Pharisees had arrived from Judea to give him battle. The term “Jews” as John uses it means in general the countrymen of Jesus who rejected his teaching.

These Jews were now murmuring against Jesus “because he had said: I am the bread that has come down from heaven. And they kept saying: Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How, then, does he say: I have come down from heaven?” After a few more general observations Jesus came back to the question of the bread: “I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the desert, and have died. [Rather] this is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that if anyone eat of it, he will not die. I am the living bread that has come down from heaven. If anyone eat of this bread he shall live forever; and the bread that I will give is my flesh for

the life of the world” At these words, the Jews, unfriendly to begin with, had much more reason than Nicodemus and the Samaritan woman to be dumbfounded. Jesus had spoken to the latter of being "born again of the Spirit" and of water "springing up unto life everlasting," but these expressions could be taken figuratively, just as the phrase, "bread of life," could be taken in a figurative sense, too, the first time Jesus used it and applied it to himself. But Jesus did not confine himself to that first time. He came back to the very same expression and, as if to preclude any possible symbolic interpretation, he declared that this bread was "his flesh" given for the life of the world. So specific a definition was not permissible in a metaphorical discourse; when he spoke of his flesh as bread, Jesus was not using a symbol. That is the way his audience in the synagogue at Capharnaum reasoned, with perfect logic; and they began to argue with one another: "How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" It was indeed a solemn and decisive moment. It was now up to Jesus to define his meaning better and to make it crystal clear whether his words were to be taken as metaphor or as a plain and genuine statement of fact.

382. And Jesus' answer was crystal clear. Having heard his listeners objections, he continued: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has life everlasting and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him. As the living Father has sent me, and as I live because of the Father, so he who eats me, he also shall live because of me. This is the bread that has come down from heaven; [it shall] not [be] as [it was with] your fathers [who] ate the manna, and died. He who eats this bread shall live forever."

When they heard this explanation, Jesus' audience no longer had the least doubt, nor, in reality, could they have had any. The words they had just heard may have been as "hard" as you please, but they could not have been more clear or more precise. Jesus had plainly repeated that his flesh was true food and his blood true drink, and that to have eternal life it was necessary to eat of that flesh and drink of that blood. It was impossible to find any ambiguity in his words, and in fact the hostile "Jews" did not find any; their first interpretation was confirmed. Nor did "many" of his own disciples find them ambiguous; they were scandalized by them. "Many of his disciples, therefore, when they heard this, said: This is a hard saying. Who can listen to it?" The adjective "hard" here means "repugnant," "sickening," indicating one could

not "listen to it" without a certain feeling of revulsion. Evidently their thoughts were literal and suggested something of a cannibal nature.

Actually, Jesus did not specify the manner in which his flesh was to be eaten and his blood drunk; but even before the possibility of that very literal interpretation and the ensuing scandal, he did not retreat one inch nor withdraw a single word. Knowing "that his disciples were murmuring at this, [he] said to them: Does this scandalize you? What then if you should see the Son of man ascending where he was before? It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." Jesus considered this last sentence sufficient to dispel the literal fear of some form of cannibalism: his words were spirit and life. But these same words retained their full literal significance with no metaphorical implications whatever. The indispensable thing was to have faith in him, and the last confirmation of this faith would be to see the Son of man ascending into heaven, whence he had descended as the living bread — heavenly bread, heavenly flesh. Those who had this faith would come to see how this flesh might truly be eaten and his blood might truly be drunk without the least shadow of cannibalism.<sup>151</sup>

383. Notwithstanding this added explanation, the disciples' reaction was not merely vocal: "From this time [on] many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him." So "many" were alienated from him and fell away, but the twelve Apostles remained faithful. One day, when a number had already gone. "Jesus therefore said to the Twelve: Do you also wish to go away? Simon Peter answered him: Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast words of everlasting life, and we have come to believe and to know that thou art [the Holy One] of God" (*John* 6:67-69).

It is not mere chance when a writer like John so arranges his words that the Twelve "believed" and *then* "knew."

John does not return to this subject again, and the promise of the Bread of Life is not fulfilled throughout the rest of his Gospel because he is the only Evangelist who does not recount the institution of the Eucharist on the eve of Jesus' death. But this very omission indicates all the more clearly that the promise was fulfilled in the spiritual way Jesus foretold. John omits the institution of the Eucharist because it had already been narrated by all three Synoptists and his listeners were well acquainted with it (§165); he records the promise instead because the Synoptists had omitted it (§164).

## THE PARALYTIC OF BEZATHA

384. These things had occurred in Galilee just before the Pasch. It is also very possible that the Pasch had come and gone while they were happening. John records these events in chapter 6, but chapter 5 contains others which had taken place in Jerusalem. I have already mentioned several reasons for believing that the events in chapter 5 chronologically followed those in chapter 6 (§177); this eliminates certain textual difficulties without introducing any new ones.<sup>152</sup>

Going back now to chapter 5, we find that Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem for an unnamed “festival day of the Jews.” This may have been the Pasch (§177), but more probably it was the Pentecost of the same year, 29; in that case, the visit would have fallen toward the end of May.

At the northern end of Jerusalem, just outside the city walls, a new quarter was developing which — as often happens in such cases — had a double name, the general epithet “New City” and a specific name, in this case Bezatha (cf. Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, V, 151; II, 530).<sup>153</sup> In this quarter and near the old city gate which was called Probatika, or Sheepgate, there was a kind of pool likewise named Bezatha. In it were gathered the waters of a subterranean spring which, like that of Gihon (Siloe) situated on the same side of the city, flowed only intermittently. Special curative powers were attributed to these waters, especially if a sick person managed to bathe in them as soon as the new flow of water began to bubble. Hence porticoes had been constructed around the four sides of the pool with a fifth portico across the center; these have been clearly traced out in modern excavations (§162). In these porticoes “were lying a great multitude of the sick, blind, lame, and those with shriveled limbs, waiting for the moving of the water.”<sup>154</sup>

385. One day as Jesus was walking through this pitiful convention of miseries, he stopped in front of a man lying on a pallet. The man had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years and he continually had himself brought to the pool in the hope of obtaining a cure. Unexpectedly, Jesus said to him: Do you wish to be cured?” Naturally the poor man thought of the water; his hope was in that water, yes, but unfortunately, he explained, he was never the first to enter it because he could not move and he had no one there to push him in ahead of the others as soon as it began to bubble. Jesus made no answer to this legitimate complaint, but instead suddenly commanded the man: “Rise, take up thy pallet and walk! And at once the man was cured; and he took up



his pallet and began to walk (*John* 5:8-9). Now, it was the Sabbath day, and so when certain zealous Jews saw this scandalous performance, they went up to the cured man and indignantly pointed out to him that he could not carry a pallet on the Sabbath. It certainly weighed much more than a dried fig, and the best teachers considered it a sacrosanct precept not to carry even a dried fig from one place to another on the Sabbath (§70). The man's answer was extremely natural: "He who made me well told me to take up my pallet and walk." —And they retorted: "Who is this fellow? —The man did not know because he did not know Jesus, and at that moment Jesus had slipped away to avoid the crowd gathering at the news of the miracle.

A little later, however, Jesus met the cured man in the Temple and spoke a few words of exhortation to him. Then the man, fearing perhaps that the Pharisees would judge him Jesus' accomplice, went and told them the identity of his healer. "And this is why the Jews kept persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath" — hence not only because he commanded the man to carry his pallet, but also because he worked the cure. The Pharisees of Jerusalem shared completely the views of their Galilean colleagues, expressed on the occasion of the cure of the man with the withered hand (§309). But Jesus, entering into discussion with them, answered: "My Father works even until now, and I work. This, then, is why the Jews were seeking the more to put him to death; because he was not only breaking the Sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, making himself equal to God." There was no lack of intelligence or sharp-wittedness among those Jews. They had followed Jesus' reasoning with no difficulty whatever, and in substance it was this: as God the Creator works always, governing and sustaining all creation with no Sabbath rest from this his work, so do I, Jesus, work and for the same reason. Hence — argued these Jews — Jesus makes "himself equal to God."<sup>155</sup> They had caught his meaning perfectly, but since his conclusion, confirmed by the miracle, knocked down one of the pillars of Pharisaic casuistry, both the reasoning and its conclusion had to be rejected without further ado.

386. Jesus then talked at some length in defense of his mission. In the first part of his discussion (*John* 5:19-30) he illustrates his equality with the Father and his consequent office as dispenser of life and universal judge. In the second part (*ibid.*, 31-47) he lists the testimonies which prove his mission though the Jews continue to misread them. The discourse contains those sublime thoughts and expressions dear to the fourth Gospel which are to be



found only rarely and incidentally in the Synoptics. From the historical point of view, as we have seen (§169), the difference in tone is easily explained by the different audience Jesus is addressing. Though they too were Pharisees, the mountaineers of Galilee certainly did not match the doctors of Jerusalem, with whom Jesus is speaking here, for intellectual subtlety. These discussions in Jerusalem, omitted by the Synoptics, are the ones supplied by the careful John.

Jesus' long discourse (which should be read directly in the text) did not at all convince the Jews, and they had recourse to arguments of quite another kind. They decided that this bothersome worker of miracles must be done away with. Thus, "after these things Jesus went about in Galilee, for he did not wish to go about Judea because the Jews were seeking to put him to death" (*John* 7:1, referring to 5:47).

### THE "TRADITION OF THE ANCIENTS"

387. By moving to Galilee, Jesus put himself beyond reach of the treacheries of the Pharisees of Jerusalem, but they did not abandon their part of the game on that account. Up there in Galilee they could not lord it certainly as they did in Jerusalem, but they could always do something; for example, they could dog Jesus and pick up new charges to bring against him. In fact, when he returned to Galilee, "the Pharisees and some of the Scribes who had come from Jerusalem gathered about him (*Mark* 7:1). The tactics these delegates chose were to pester the unmanageable Rabbi with criticisms and remarks concerning his conduct, both to humiliate him personally and to discredit him among the people. They immediately noticed that his disciples did not wash their hands before eating; this was a very serious violation of the "tradition of the ancients, a terrible misdemeanor equivalent — according to rabbinic opinion (§72) to frequenting a harlot" and the penalty it cried out for was being uprooted from the world." As soon as the official critics discovered this crime, they denounced it to the Rabbi as the one morally responsible for his disciples.

Jesus accepts the challenge, but he rises from the particular to much more general considerations. All this washing of hands and dishes has been prescribed by the tradition of the ancients"; very well. But the ancients are not God and their tradition is not the law of God, which is infinitely greater. Hence it is necessary first to obey the law of God and never place before it the tradition of men. There was this case, for instance. The law of God, or the Ten

Commandments, prescribed that men honor their fathers and mothers and hence aid them materially when necessary. The rabbis, on the other hand, established the rule that if an Israelite decided to offer a certain object to the Temple, that offering was inviolable and the object could go nowhere but into the Temple treasury. In such instances it was sufficient to pronounce the word *Corban* (sacred “offering”), and the object so designated became holy Temple property by virtue of an irrevocable vow. It often happened, therefore, that a son ill-disposed toward his parents, declared all his possessions *Corban* and so, though they might be dying of hunger, his father and mother could touch nothing belonging to him. He meanwhile could continue in all serenity to enjoy the goods he had so consecrated (this also was permitted by the rabbis) until he actually consigned them to the Temple, or else he managed to find some means of avoiding their actual donation to the treasury (and there was no dearth of rabbinic loopholes on this point either).

388. This being the case, Jesus answered his hecklers: “How nicely you set aside the commandment of God in order to observe your tradition! For Moses said: Honor thy father and thy mother, and. He who curses father or mother let him surely die. But you say: If a man says to his father or mother: Whatever support thou mightest have had from me now is *Corban*<sup>156</sup> [he must maintain it]; and so, you no longer allow him to do anything for his father or mother, thus annulling the word of God by means of your tradition which you have handed down” (*Mark* 7:9-13). And he refers to other cases which do not enter into the discussion: “and many similar things you do” (§37). The conclusion is based on a passage in *Isaias* (29:13): “Hypocrites! Well did *Isaias* prophesy of you, saying: This people honors me with their lips, but their heart is far from me; but in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the precepts of men” (*Matt.* 15:7-9).

The criticism of the Pharisees had been answered and they do not seem to have made any further reply. But Jesus was solicitous for the crowds who had been listening and whose heads were crammed with Pharisaic prescriptions regarding the purity or impurity of foods (§72), so turning to them, he continued: “Hear me, all of you, and understand! There is nothing outside a man that, entering into him, can defile him; but the things that come out of a man, these are what defile a man” (*Mark* 7:14-15). As on other occasions, Jesus here turned the prevailing concept upside down (§318, §368) and the Pharisees were scandalized. The disciples themselves did not understand the full force of this anti- Pharisaic reversal of values any too clearly, and when

they were alone with Jesus, they asked him to explain it. The explanation was elementary; all that enters into a man does not reach his heart, which is man's true sanctuary, but his belly, where foods are digested and soon evacuated. But from the heart of man come all evil thoughts, adulteries, blasphemies, and the whole long procession of evil actions; and these alone have power to defile a man.

For Jesus, therefore, man is essentially spirit and a rational creature; all the rest in him is accessory and subordinate to that superior essence.

## JESUS IN PHOENICIA AND THE DECAPOLIS; SECOND MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES

389. The gospel narrative here becomes sketchy again and unexpectedly tells us that Jesus is in the district of Sidon and Tyre, or Phoenicia. This is the first time he has left Palestine since the beginning of his public life, perhaps since his birth, except for the flight into Egypt during his infancy. Why has he left it now? Certainly, it was not to carry the "good tidings" to the pagans, because that was not part of his own direct and personal mission, as he himself states soon afterward (*Matt.* 15:24). Nor was it to escape the threats of Antipas, because on his return from Jerusalem he had gone right into the latter's territory. Probably it was to avoid the persecutions of the Pharisees who had come from Jerusalem to trail him (§387), and at the same time to take refuge for a while in a place where he would be unknown and undisturbed (cf. *Mark* 7:24) and could take thought for his disciples, who still had so much need of spiritual formation.

But in Phoenicia, as in Bethsaida (§372), the hope of peace and quiet soon vanished. Even those pagan regions bordering on Palestine had heard of Jesus as a great wonder-worker. So many self-styled miracle-workers were wandering about the pagan world of that time that it was not difficult to include among them the Galilean prophet as well. If prodigies were attributed to Aesculapius and other gods, there was no reason for not attributing them to the God of the Jews, too, working through one of his prophets. The prowess of each could be judged by what he actually did.

These must have been more or less the sentiments of a woman of Tyre who came to Jesus at this point. She was a pagan, and while Mark, who is writing for Romans, calls her "Syro-Phoenician" because Phoenicia was part of the Roman province of Syria, Matthew, writing for Jews, called her "Canaanite," alluding to the descendants of the ancient pagan population which had

inhabited Syria-Palestine before the Hebrews. It was maternal solicitude which impelled the woman to approach Jesus. Her “little daughter” — as Mark calls her — was evilly oppressed by an unclean spirit, and the mother now put her hope in Jesus. She makes her request, but Jesus does not answer her a word. The unhappy mother is persistent and she follows Jesus and his disciples down the street beseeching in a loud voice: “Have pity on me, O Lord, Son of David!” This was the noisy and insistent way of beggars in the Orient (§351), and the woman, though not a beggar from poverty, imitates their manner in her anxiety for her little daughter. Jesus continues not to pay any heed to her; but after a little, the disciples, annoyed by the unwanted publicity they are getting, tell Jesus to send her away, thus implicitly inviting him to grant her request. Jesus answers dryly that he has been sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. The pagans, like that particular woman, would be the object of the special mission of others. But the woman interrupts and repeats her plea. Jesus then answers her sternly: “Let the children first have their fill, for it is not fair to take the children’s bread and to cast it to the dogs.” The privileged “children” are the Jews, and the dogs are the pagans. The severity of his words is almost like a bitter medicine which provokes the reaction that leads to cure. The woman reacts by answering again as an imploring and suppliant mother: “Yes, Lord; for even the dogs under the table eat of the children’s crumbs!” Hers was the reaction of faith, and for Jesus faith meant salvation (§§349-351); hence he said: “O woman, great is thy faith! (*Matt.* 15:28) — Because of this answer, go thy way; the devil has gone out of thy daughter” (*Mark* 7:29).

The mother believed directly, and returning home found her little girl lying quietly on her bed, entirely freed of the obsession.

390. From Tyre, Jesus proceeded further north, as far as Sidon, and then he turned toward the east and traveled through the Decapolis (§4), just how we do not know, returning finally to the neighborhood of the Lake of Tiberias (*Mark* 7:31). Of this rambling journey, which probably afforded Jesus the privacy with his disciples he had not found at Tyre, only one episode, which occurred in the Decapolis, has been handed down to us and that by Mark (7:31-37) alone.

A deaf-mute was brought to Jesus with the very earnest request that he lay his hands upon him. Jesus took the man apart from the crowd, put his fingers in the deaf ears, and with a bit of his own saliva touched the tip of the man’s tongue. Then he looked up to heaven sighing, and at last said: ‘Ethpetah, that is, “Be thou opened!” The Evangelist transcribes into Greek the precise

Aramaic word, faithfully repeated by Peter in his catechesis, and follows it with the Greek translation (§133). The deaf-mute was cured instantly, and Jesus then enjoined him not to speak of what had happened; but this time, too, his command was hardly obeyed.

Why, instead of working an immediate cure as he had in other instances, did Jesus preface this one with these various preliminary actions? Our old friend Paulus said that Jesus was using some natural remedy (§198) but however discerning an exegete, he forgot to tell us for the benefit of all mankind just what the remedy was. Seriously, we may suppose that since Jesus was in the pagan country of the Decapolis, it was somehow expedient to use this kind of symbolic preparation for reasons which now escape us. At the same time, it is very probable that since the deaf-mute could not hear Jesus' words, Christ used these material acts just to excite in him the lively faith he always required of those asking a miracle of him.

391. At this point the Synoptists, with the exception of Luke, record a second multiplication of loaves which closely resembles the first and which also took place on the eastern shore of Lake Tiberias (§372).

Great crowds throng to Jesus and stay with him for three days, during which time the food they have brought with them is all consumed. Jesus has compassion on all these people and is unwilling to send them away hungry for fear they may faint from weakness along the way. The disciples point out that there is no way to get food in this desert place. Jesus asks how many loaves of bread there are available, and they answer: "Seven, and a few little fishes" (*Matt.* 15:34). As in the first instance Jesus takes the food at hand, breaks it, and has it distributed. All eat until they are filled and seven baskets of fragments are gathered up afterward. Those who had eaten were "four thousand men apart from women and children" (*ibid.*, 38).

Both Synoptists who relate this incident also record the first multiplication of the loaves and thus explicitly treat them as two distinct episodes (*Matt.* 16:9-10; *Mark* 8:19-20). That is more than sufficient to prove that the early catechesis of the Apostles, who witnessed these things, treated of two separate events, but it has not been sufficient to convince modern radical scholars of the distinction, and they instead consider them two variations of the same incident. On the contrary, the two episodes, similar as they are, also differ both as to the time of occurrence and the numbers fed. Their similarities are easily explained by the similar circumstances in which they took place.

And if Jesus chose not once but twice to provide miraculously for the material needs of the multitudes seeking the kingdom of God, it was to confirm ever more strongly the admonition of the Sermon on the Mount: “Seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides” (§331). Since the urgent human need for food was concerned here, it was not amiss to have two practical examples instead of one.

After the performance of this miracle, Jesus went back into the boat and came to land on the western shore of the lake at a place which Matthew (15:39) calls *Magedan* and Mark (8:10) *Dalmanutha*. The names are entirely unknown, and notwithstanding the many conjectures advanced we still do not know to what places they refer.<sup>157</sup>

## THE SIGN FROM HEAVEN; THE LEAVEN OF THE PHARISEES; THE BLIND MAN OF BETHSAIDA

392. As soon as Jesus returned to Galilee, up popped the vigilant worthies on his trail again. The Pharisees, accompanied this time by Sadducees (*Matt.* 16:1), entered into discussion with him, and since they failed to be convinced, they asked him for a definite proof of his mission, that is, for some portent from heaven. This indeed would be the incontrovertible proof, which would persuade even them absolutely — not this business of curing the lame, raising the dead, and multiplying loaves of bread! What they wanted was some beautiful iridescent globe to come floating down from heaven, or the sudden blacking out of the sun, or even some sort of meteor. Then, yes, Jesus would win his case without question.

The request was not a new one. Some kind of magic of this sort was what those Jews were thinking of who spoke of the manna from heaven in their discussion with Jesus after the first multiplication of the loaves (§379). The messianic “sign” par excellence was, in the common opinion, some astronomical and meteoric portent. No other could have the value of certain proof precisely because it would not be what everyone was expecting to see.

But because this expectation was distorted and unworthy, Jesus did not satisfy it. When he heard the request, he sighed deeply, and this was his real answer, compounded of pity and regret. And then he added: “‘Why does this generation demand a sign? Amen I say to you, a sign shall not be given to this generation.’ And he left them, and getting back into the boat crossed the sea” (*Mark* 8:12-13).



393. Their departure was so sudden the disciples forgot to get the necessary provisions, and during the crossing they were bemoaning the fact that they had only one loaf of bread with them. Jesus, hearing them, said: "Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and of the leaven of Herod!" — The mention of Herod Antipas is certainly due to the preceding discourses or events. Granted that he still cherished his old curiosity regarding Jesus (§357), it is probable that there were some of his agents among those who had just been in discussion with Jesus, or that the Pharisees themselves acted on behalf of Herod. The very suddenness of Jesus' departure might lead us to suppose that he wished to take himself abruptly beyond reach of the insidious and malicious inquiries of both parties. The disciples, however, whose stomachs were articulately empty, could not see what "leaven" had to do with the Pharisees or Herod. Jesus, reminding them of the two multiplications of the loaves, exhorted them not to worry about material bread but to keep far away from the afore-mentioned "leaven." Then they understood that he was referring to the doctrines of the Pharisees and the wiles of Herod, which permeate the spirit as leaven permeates the dough.

394. The hostility encountered on the western lake shore (which must have been much more serious than its scant mention by the Evangelists would imply) had induced Jesus to go back to Bethsaida, perhaps because he was seeking souls better disposed. But nothing of what took place there is handed down to us either, except for a cure recorded only by Mark (8:22-26), who certainly learned it from Peter's catechesis. "They brought him a blind man and implored him to touch him. So, taking the blind man by the hand, he led him outside the village; and having spat upon his eyes, he laid his hands upon him, and asked him: 'Dost thou see anything?' And looking up, he said: 'I behold men, for I see them as trees, walking.' Then he again laid his hands upon his eyes, and he looked steadily (diebleyen), and was restored, and saw everything clearly [from a distance]. And he [Jesus] sent him away to his home, saying: 'Do not even enter the village!'" In this vivid description, due as much to Peter as to Mark, we watch a true gradual cure. Perhaps the man had not been blind from birth because he immediately recognizes the forms of men and trees; but his vision is clouded and confused at first, and then perfect. Why is the cure gradual? We may repeat here the observations regarding the deaf-mute (§390), whose cure is somewhat similar to this one. But we can offer no more than conjectures. As for the use of the spittle, it is found also in the rabbinic prescriptions for diseases of the eye, so this time

too the rationalist followers of Paulus have no difficulty in explaining the cure as entirely natural.<sup>158</sup>

#### AT CAESAREA OF PHILIP

395. From Bethsaida, Jesus went up toward the north drawing still further away from Jewish districts, until he came to the region of Caesarea Philippi (§18). In that predominantly pagan country, he and his disciples were not beset by supplicating crowds nor disturbed by the intrigues of Pharisees and politicians. It was, therefore, a kind of retreat for Jesus with his chosen followers.

These disciples, after all, represented the best fruit of his work. Some of them may have been rough or rustic or hardheaded. All of them probably showed the influence more or less of the narrow ideas prevailing among their race, but they were men of great heart, sincerely fond of their master and full of faith in him. The crowds usually pressing about Jesus did not have these merits. Ordinarily they sought in him the wonder-worker who cured the sick, revived the dead, and multiplied loaves of bread; and while they also listened with pleasure when he spoke of the kingdom of God and even kindled at his word, theirs was in part merely that fire of nationalism which Jesus so thoroughly deprecated and in part no more than a paper blaze which died out soon afterward. Hence Jesus preferred his disciples, and he took special care of their spiritual formation with a view to the future.

And now after a year and a half of activity, he could discuss with them in confidence the matter most delicate for him and most obscure perhaps for them, namely, his messianic identity. This teacher so beloved, this wonder-worker so powerful, this preacher so forceful — was he truly the Messiah foretold to Israel through the centuries, or was he instead only a later prophet endowed with extraordinary divine powers? Was he a son of God, or was he *the* Son of God? Certainly, within themselves the chosen disciples had already pondered this question. But if they felt personally inclined to answer that he was truly the Messiah, the Son of God, they were also kept from doing so by the extreme care Jesus himself had taken up to that time that no such statement be pronounced aloud. What was the reason for his inexplicable reluctance? This was a very difficult point for the disciples, but they were no doubt confident that the teacher knew more than they about it, and having so great a faith in him, they trusted and waited until this point too should be clarified in time.



Jesus now considered that the time was come. Their long and constant intimacy with him had opened the disciples' eyes with regard to many things. Besides, here in pagan territory there was not the same danger of riotous demonstrations and outbursts of nationalism when the disciples should become certain that Jesus was the Messiah and speak of it freely among themselves. It is also probable that during these days of quiet retreat Jesus prepared his disciples spiritually to receive the delicate confidence, pruning from the figure of the Messiah of Israel any of the political accessories he might still be wearing in their imaginations. Finally, he went apart to pray alone as he usually did in the most decisive moments of his mission (*Luke* 9:18).

396. Now they had set out together again and were walking toward Caesarea Philippi. They were already in sight of the city (*Mark* 8:27), and before them rose the majestic rock crowned by the temple of Augustus (§19).

Undoubtedly in reference to previous conversations, Jesus suddenly asked his disciples: "Who do men say that I am?" They answered, all talking more or less at once: I have heard them say that you are John the Baptist. — There are those who say you are Elias! — Some say you are Jeremias! — Still others quoted the vague notion that Jesus was one of the ancient prophets come to life again. The opinions were numerous, but Jesus attached no importance to them nor did he stop to discuss them. He asked what others thought simply to introduce the truly important question, namely, the personal opinion of the disciples concerning him. When they had finished, Jesus "said to them: But who do you say that I am?"

No doubt the disciples gasped when they heard the question, which touched them to the quick, and realized with amazement that Jesus was introducing a subject he had jealously avoided until then. There must have followed a silence which was more the speechless reluctance of joy than actual hesitancy — not unlike the silence of a girl who has just been proposed to by the man she has long loved secretly in her heart. Perhaps at that moment the disciples remembered Jesus' words when he compared himself among them to the groom among the "groomsman" (§307). And they stopped dead in the middle of the road mute with an eloquent silence, their eyes fixed on the temple of Augustus towering over the city and the countryside from the peak of the rock.

After a few moments their silence was translated into words by Simon Peter, nor could anyone have done it but him, the most impetuous of all that loved Jesus dearly: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." The translation of their shy and reverent silence had been a perfect one; this was plain to see in the happiness of assent on their bearded faces, telling all the joy they had so long repressed.

397. Jesus glanced swiftly from one face to another; then he turned to the disciple who had answered him and said: "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona,<sup>159</sup> for flesh and blood has not revealed this to thee, but my Father in heaven!" Simon's declaration was completely confirmed by him it most concerned, and all present felt their own secret faith confirmed as well. There must have followed another brief silence, in which they looked again perhaps toward the temple up there on the rock. Then Jesus continued: "And I say to thee, thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell (adon) shall not prevail against it. And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (*Matt.* 16:16-19).

Jesus had called Simon "Peter" or "Rock," in Aramaic *Kepha* before this (§278), but the reason and explanation were not given that first time. Now the epithet is explained and it is all so much clearer as they stand there before that actual rock which supports the temple dedicated to the lord of the Palatine. The foundation rock of the spiritual temple which Jesus will build to the Lord of heaven, namely, his Church, is to be the disciple who first declared him the Messiah and truly the Son of God. Jesus' other words are just as clear in the light of the circumstances in which they were spoken. Hell, the *inferi* (Greek, "Hades") corresponds to the Hebrew *Sheol* (§79), not in the general sense of abode of the dead but as the dwelling of the wicked dead, the enemies of good and of the kingdom of God; the "gates" of this satanic abyss, that is, its utmost strength<sup>160</sup> will not prevail against the edifice erected by Jesus and the rock which supports it.

The symbols of the keys and of binding and loosing are typically Semitic. Even today in Arab towns men go about the streets with a set of huge keys tied together with a small cord and dangling conspicuously on either side of the shoulder.<sup>161</sup> They are landlords parading their authority in that particular fashion. The figure of binding and loosing (cf. *Matt.* 18:18) retains here the

meaning it had in contemporary rabbinic terminology, where it occurs frequently. The rabbis “bound” when they prohibited something and “loosed” when they permitted it. Rabbi Nechonya, who flourished around A.D. 70, used to preface his lessons with the following prayer: “May it please thee, O Yahweh, my God and God of my fathers that . . . we may not declare impure what is pure and pure what is impure; that we may *not bind what is loosed nor loose what is bound*.”<sup>162</sup>

Peter’s office, then, is clearly defined. He will be the foundation of the Church, a foundation so solid and unshakable that the hostile powers of hell will not prevail against it. He will also be the chief steward of this house, and its keys will be entrusted to him. Finally, he will dictate the laws of the house, prohibiting and permitting, and the judgments he pronounces on earth will be ratified without change in heaven.

398. Jesus’ reply to Simon Peter is so clear as to be dazzling. The text of this passage is no less incontrovertible, for all the ancient manuscripts of the text we possess today agree to the letter. Yet, as we well know, this same text has caused streams of ink to flow in absolute denial that Jesus ever conferred on Simon the office of foundation stone of the Church, trustee of its keys, and arbiter of its laws. Why has this been denied?

The early orthodox Protestants asserted that Jesus was not speaking of Simon Peter at all but of himself, and that the rest of his statement refers to all the Apostles collectively and to their faith.<sup>163</sup> When he said “upon this rock I will build my church,” etc., Jesus pointed to himself even though he was speaking with Simon and of Simon. This gesture supposedly solves the whole question: it is clearly evident from the context and is in complete agreement with the words which follow, “and I will give thee the keys to the kingdom of heaven, and whatever thou shalt bind.... etc. The reasoning here is perfect provided we start with the premise that white means black and black means white: *lucus a non lucendo*.

The modern scholars who deny Simon’s office have taken the opposite tack. They find the explanation of the early Protestants so awkward that it directly betrays the contentious sectarianism which inspired it. No — they answer — Jesus’ words have precisely the significance which tradition and good sense have discovered in them; on that point it is useless to theorize. One of them thus expresses himself: “Simon Peter ... is still living, in Matthew’s eyes, in a power which binds and loosens, which keeps the keys of the kingdom of God

and which is the authority of the Church itself.... Simon Peter is the first apostolic authority in what concerns the faith, because the Father has revealed to him by preference the mystery of the Son; in what concerns the government of the community, because Christ has entrusted to him the keys of the kingdom; in what concerns ecclesiastical discipline because he has the power of binding and loosing. It is not without reason that Catholic tradition has founded on this the dogma of the Roman primacy" (Loisy).

Did Jesus then truly confer on Simon the office in question according to the new negative criticism? Not at all! Jesus never spoke any such words; the passage is wholly, or almost wholly false or sheer invention. It was interpolated in the text between the end of the first and the beginning of the second century either at Rome, to serve the purpose of the Roman church, or else in Palestine.

And the proof of this? Not a single ancient codex, not a single version or quotation is brought forward which gives even the vaguest indication of interpolation. The only arguments produced are those *a silentio* (and everyone knows their value), namely, that the Christian writers of the second and third centuries either do not quote the passage or quote only a part of it. We may well think that the early Protestants, whom the modern critics ridicule because they discovered in the text the pointing finger of Jesus, could return the compliment and triumphantly apply to their deriders the words of Horace: *Quodcumque ostendis mihi sic, incredulus odi!*

399. These are the arguments from two separate standpoints against the office of Simon. But in both cases the real reason for denying it, a reason never explicitly or frankly stated, is the premise that it was "impossible" that Jesus should confer that office. This "impossibility" is absolute, indisputable, transcendent, and much more valid indeed than the clarity and the authenticity of the text.

From this "rock" alone have streamed whole torrents of critical ink, and on this rock alone deniers old and new meet in agreement. When they come down from the rock to exegetic and documentary ground, they are busy disagreeing with and refuting one another by turns.

Behind those who appeal to the clarity and authenticity of the text they discern the looming shadow of papism; but papism or no, they would shout and dance in triumph if they had at their disposal one half the strictly "historical" arguments which those accused of papism have at theirs. But did

these critics ever think to glance over their own shoulders to see if perchance the shadows of Luther and Hegel were not looming behind them and prompting their “historical” arguments?

## THE MESSIANIC IDEA CORRECTED

400. Jesus had now definitely proclaimed his Messiahship, but he immediately added the correctives (§301) which were to keep his disciples’ concept of his meaning within the proper limits. In the first place, the announcement was still confidential; only the disciples received it. And as soon as Jesus had conferred Simon Peter’s office upon him, he charged them “to tell no one that he was Jesus the Christ” (*Matt.* 16:20). Jesus did not consider the time ripe to spread the announcement, both because the populace had not yet been prepared for it and because the disciples themselves still had an imperfect notion of the nature of his messianism.

Hence, he began to correct and perfect their concept. “From that time Jesus began to show his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things from the elders and Scribes and chief priests, and be put to death, and on the third day rise again” (*ibid.*, 21). How different from the far-famed and splendid Messiah awaited by the people is this Messiah, who shuns recognition as such and predicts the suffering and violent death awaiting him. The sharp warning is a hard blow for his disciples. The generous Peter, both by his own nature and from the new office just conferred on him, felt he must say something: “And Peter taking him aside, began to chide him, saying: ‘Far be it from thee, O Lord! This will never happen to thee!’ —He turned and said to Peter: Get behind me, satan! Thou art a scandal to me; for thou dost not mind the things of God, but those of men.’” Satan was the tempter *par excellence* (§78, §273), and his name is here bestowed on the Rock of the Church and the chief steward of the kingdom of heaven. The reason for the humiliating rebuke, namely, the lingering desire for a conquering Messiah and a reluctance to accept the suffering one instead, was chargeable to his times more than to Peter personally, but it does show how necessary it was to correct the messianic concept even in the minds of the disciples closest to Jesus.

And the correction continued through a series of abrupt disillusionments. What did these disciples expect who were following the Messiah Jesus? To share a triumph, perhaps, and enjoy a life of magnificence with a conqueror? Jesus takes care to scatter these fine dreams, anticipating and belying their

thoughts with statements rough as the slaps with which one tries to awaken a patient from drugged delirium. Those who would follow him must deny themselves and take up their cross (*Matt.* 16:24). The allusion to the cross is naturally clearer after Jesus' death, but even now the disciples could understand it very well. Ever since the Romans had taken over Palestine, crucifixion had been common there (§597) especially as the penalty for those who promoted popular uprisings, very often inspired by messianic notions. Anyone who wants to follow Jesus is to consider himself already dead and then only will he live. By losing his life in the cause of Jesus and the "good tidings" he will be saved, but if he remains desperately attached to his life, he will lose it (*Mark* 8:35). In fact, what does it profit a man to gain the whole world if he loses his soul by failing to gain life eternal? What ransom can a man give for his soul (*ibid.*, 36-37)? Will there be some ashamed of Jesus and his "good tidings"? Well, they may think they have saved their lives in this sinful and adulterous generation; but when the Son of man comes in the glory of his Father, surrounded by the angels, he will be ashamed of those who were ashamed of him, and he will render to each one according to his conduct (*Mark* 8:38; *Matt.* 16:27).

For Jesus, the present life is essentially transitory and it has value only in so far as it is directed to the enduring life of the future. He, the Messiah, guides men toward eternal life through the harsh vicissitudes of our impermanent existence. Whoever does not want to follow him, choosing instead this transient life, also chooses death.

401. All three Synoptics record here another statement which seems, to all appearances, to have been pronounced on another occasion: "And he said to them: 'Amen I say to you, there are some of those standing here who will not taste death, till they have seen the kingdom of God coming in power'" (*Mark* 8:39). With fine insight the Synoptists set this statement after the others which correct the messianic concept, for in substance it does the same thing.<sup>164</sup> No political Messiah is to appear in a blaze of glory and conquest, but the kingdom of the suffering and murdered Messiah is to display in its coming such inner and exterior power that it will dispel forever all dreams of a political messiah. And some of those present will not die before they have witnessed the unfurling of that power. In fact, some forty years later, that is, within the second "generation" according to Jewish reckoning, the Jerusalem of the messianic dreams has been destroyed and political Judaism cut down

forever, while the “good tidings” of Jesus “is proclaimed all over the world” (*Rom.* 1:8; cf. *Col.* 1:23).

## THE TRANSFIGURATION

402. As we might expect, the vigorous correctives Jesus applied to his disciples’ hopes also depressed their spirits. These fiery Galileans of pure Jewish blood were abashed and disheartened. Jesus remedied this with the Transfiguration, which took place “six days (“about eight days” according to Luke) after” he manifested that he was the Messiah.

The Evangelists place this episode on “a high mountain,” but neglect to give us its name. Many modern scholars think it was Hermon, whose peak is over eight thousand feet above sea level and which is besides just above Caesarea Philippi where Jesus declared his Messiahship. But the ascent of the mountain is very difficult and it would have taken a good day to climb it and come down again. In addition, this supposition is entirely recent; ancient times did not associate the Transfiguration with Hermon even though minds with a mystic bent might have been induced to do so by the passage in *Psalms* 88 [89] 13 which says: “Thabor and Hermon shall rejoice in thy name.”

On the other hand, a tradition dating back to the fourth century has settled on the first of these two. For us today Thabor is not a “high mountain,” being only about 1700 feet above sea level and rising somewhat more than 1800 feet above the surrounding valleys (which are below sea level). But for men in ancient times, it could well represent a high enough mountain since it was completely isolated and most of Judea could be seen from its peak. Another difficulty is that the summit was perhaps inhabited and hence did not present the solitude the episode of the Transfiguration seems to require. But this difficulty is not insurmountable. The top of the mountain was probably inhabited in times of political upheaval and war, since it was easily convertible into a fortress. This in fact happened in 218 B.C. under Antiochus III the Great (cf. *Polybius*, V, 70) and at the time of Vespasian’s war when it was fortified by Josephus, who speaks of it at length (*Wars of the Jews*, IV, 54-61). Except for such occasions the peak must have been abandoned, especially since the mountain, besides being steep and rocky, is absolutely devoid of water.<sup>165</sup> As for the distance between Thabor and Caesarea Philippi, it could have been traversed without difficulty in the six (or eight) days mentioned. Whatever the setting the event took place as follows.



403. From among his dispirited disciples Jesus took with him three favorites, Peter and the brothers James and John, and led them up the mountain. The long road, the difficult climb, and the heat of the season must have greatly wearied the travelers by the time they reached the top. They probably arrived at evening, because the three disciples lay down as comfortably as they could and started to go to sleep (*Luke* 9:32). Jesus, as was his custom at night, began to pray (*ibid.*, 29) a short distance away from them. All of a sudden, a brilliant light flooded the faces of the sleepy disciples; they opened their eyes and there beheld Jesus "transfigured before diem, and his face shone as the sun and his garments became as white as the light" (*Matt.* 17:2). When the disciples, "heavy with sleep" (*Luke* 9:32), were fully awake and their eyes and minds adjusted somewhat to the dazzling splendor of the vision, they recognized Moses and Elias standing with the transfigured Jesus and speaking with him of "his death (exodon; §131) which he was about to fulfill in Jerusalem" (*Luke* 9:31). The conversation lasted for a little and then Moses and Elias made as though to move away. But Peter, as usual, feels obliged to say something and he bursts out: "Master, it is good for us to be here! And let us set up three tents, one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias!" We might be tempted to think the good Peter is perhaps remorseful that he has provided only a place for himself to sleep after the hard journey and neglected to do anything for Jesus, who is now so transfigured and in the company of such illustrious visitors. But the Evangelist who is Peter's interpreter immediately adds the true explanation, which he had certainly heard more than once from the lips of Peter himself, that he did not know what he was saying, they were so struck with fear (cf. *Mark* 9:6). Peter received no answer, for a radiant cloud enveloped them all, and "a voice out of the cloud said: 'This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear him!'" (*Matt.* 17:5.) More terrified than ever, the three disciples threw themselves to the ground; but shortly afterward Jesus went up to them and touched them, saying: "Arise and do not be afraid." They looked about them and saw no one but Jesus, and he was as they always knew him. The next day, as they descended the mountain, he commanded them: "Tell the vision to no one until the son of Man has risen from the dead!"

404. It is hardly necessary to mention that the rationalists completely deny the historicity of the Transfiguration. To them the whole episode represents a hallucination, or part of the "myth," or a symbol or something similar. Yet a representative rationalist has accurately recognized its precise conceptual



significance, stating that "the transfiguration of the Christ is strictly associated in the Synoptic picture with the prediction of his Passion and glorious Resurrection. It remedies the prospect of suffering and is a prelude to the triumph" (Loisy). This is correct but not quite complete. The presence of Moses and Elias, representing respectively the Law and the Prophets, also has its special significance, for it demonstrates that the Law and the Prophets of the Old Testament contemplate the Messiah Jesus as their ultimate goal. This parallels what Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, namely, that he had not come to "destroy the Law or the Prophets.... but to fulfill" (§323).

In a certain sense Jesus' transfiguration balances his temptation (§§271 ff.). More directly, it remedies the depressing effect produced on the disciples by his reversal of their messianic notions and at the same time it confirms that reversal. The Messiah Jesus, also splendid with radiance, speaks with Moses and Elias of his "departure" or death, which is about to occur in Jerusalem, as if it were for him the necessary bridge to the manifestation of his glory. When he has crossed that bridge and entered into his glory, he reproaches some of his slow-witted disciples: "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his glory?" (§630; *Luke* 24:25-26.)

The remedy was undoubtedly successful in its effects on the disciples' spirits, but it created at the same time certain worries and uncertainties. Why were they forbidden to tell others of the vision? And to what future event did the permission to speak of it only after the Son of man "has risen from the dead" refer? Was it then truly the eve of the cosmic palingenesis and the resurrection of the dead mentioned in the ancient prophecies (*Isa.* 26:19; *Ezech.* 37; *Dan.* 12:1-3)? But then why had Elias not come to stay — instead of appearing only fleetingly in a vision — in order to prepare the way for the great rebirth? With this last question in mind the disciples began to interrogate Jesus: "Why then do the Scribes say that Elias must come first?" (*Matt.* 17:10.) And Jesus answered: Yes, Elias must come to prepare all things; but he has already come, and people have done to him all the evil they have wished. Thus, also the Son of man must suffer and receive evil at their hands. "Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them of John the Baptist" (*ibid.*, 13).

A POSSESSED BOY

405. They descended the slopes of the mountain and soon rejoined the other Apostles waiting on the plain; these they found surrounded by a great crowd of people and some Scribes with whom they were disputing.

As soon as Jesus came into view, one of the crowd approached him, saying: — I have brought you my son, the only son I have, who is possessed of a dumb evil spirit. And whenever it seizes him, it flings him down, bruising him sorely and he foams and grinds his teeth and his body becomes rigid. I have begged your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not. — This failure had perhaps elicited the dispute with the Scribes, who would not let the chance escape them to say something malicious about the disciples and their absent master as well. But now he is there, and hearing the difficulty he exclaims: “O you unbelieving generation! How long shall I be with you? How long shall I bear with you?” Then glancing about for the boy, he added: “Bring him to me!” (*Mark* 9:19.) For Jesus, faith was the essential requisite for the performance of a miracle, and he deplored the lack of it in the Scribes and the father of the boy as well as in the Apostles, whose failure betrayed that their faith was weak and faltering. How long shall Jesus have to endure this lack or weakness of faith?

The boy is brought to Jesus, but in the presence of the wonder-worker he is immediately seized with a fit of convulsions and falls violently to the ground, rolling and grunting and foaming at the mouth. Jesus questions the father, not to make a physician’s diagnosis but rather to underline for the benefit of all present the significance of the “sign” he is preparing to work and to induce them to reflect on their own lack of faith: How long has this befallen him? And the father answers: — From his childhood; and often the unclean spirit throws him into the fire or water. If you can do something, help us; have pity on us. — The poor fathers’ words still betray a slightly uncertain faith despite Jesus’ lament in that regard. Hence, “If thou canst! said Jesus to him. Why, all things are possible to him who believes!” (*Mark* 9:23, Greek text.) The little scene that follows these words, in Mark’s simple style faithful to Peter’s account of it, is a vibrant and a lively one. “Immediately the father of the boy cried aloud, and said [with tears]: I do believe! Help my unbelief!’—So when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the foul spirit, saying to it: Thou dumb and deaf spirit, I command thee, come out of him and never enter him again.’ Then shrieking and convulsing him violently it came out; and he became as if dead, so that many said: ‘He is dead.’ But Jesus, taking him by the

hand, raised him, and he stood up.” The physician-Evangelist adds the delicate touch, he “restored him to his father.”

The Apostles who had been disappointed in their attempt could not help seeking the reason for their failure; so, they ask Jesus in private: “Why could we not cast it out?” And Jesus replied: “Because of your little faith; for amen I say to you, if you have faith like a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain: Remove from here —and it will remove. And nothing will be impossible to you.”<sup>166</sup> Jesus had already spoken of the mustard seed in his parable (§368); “this mountain” is perhaps Thabor, which loomed in front of them. As for the necessity of faith for miracles, Jesus had insisted on it many times in the past (§§349 ff.) but his lesson had borne little fruit.

## LAST DAYS IN GALILEE

406. After these things had taken place, Jesus was “passing through Galilee, and he did not wish anyone to know it” (*Mark* 9:30). Hence it was a journey used exclusively for the spiritual formation of the disciples accompanying him and not to spread the “good tidings” to the multitudes.

This formation soon required a new warning regarding the earthly lot of the Messiah to dispel more thoroughly the dreams of political messianism inbred in those Jewish souls: “The Son of man shall be delivered into the hands of men, and they will put him to death; but on the third day he will rise again.” The effect of the warning showed how necessary it was, for the disciples “were deeply grieved” (*Matt.* 17:22-23), and Luke adds that “they did not understand this saying, and it was hidden from them, that they might not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask him about this saying” (9:45).

Later the group turned toward Capharnaum, and they arrived there while the disciples, walking perhaps a little apart from Jesus, were busy and excited in a serious discussion among themselves (§408). Their arrival in town was immediately noted by the tax collectors who hurried to make certain that Jesus had paid the tribute for the Temple in Jerusalem. All Israelites were obliged to pay annually a half shekel of silver (or a didrachma) for the upkeep of the Temple (§534). This tax was usually collected before the Pasch, but in more distant localities like Galilee the collection might continue until, or be taken up instead, just before the Feasts of Pentecost and of the Tabernacles. Since Jesus had been away from Capharnaum for a long time and the Feast of Tabernacles was drawing near, the tax gatherers came to collect. They addressed Peter first, asking him: “Does your master not pay the didrachma?”

And Peter with his usual impetuosity answered: "Certainly he does"— and he entered the house where Jesus was, to speak to him about it. But Jesus spoke first: "What dost thou think, Simon? From whom do the kings of the earth receive tribute or customs; from their own sons or from others?" And Peter answered: "From others." Jesus replied: "The sons then are exempt."

The application of this statement to Jesus' case was clear enough. He was the Son of God and hence was not liable to tax for the earthly house of his heavenly Father. But Jesus continued: "However, that we may not give offense to them, go to the sea and cast a hook, and take the first fish that comes up. And opening its mouth thou wilt find a stater; take that and give it to them for me and thee" (*Matt.* 17:24-27). The stater was equivalent to a whole shekel or two didrachmas; hence it covered the tax for Jesus and Peter both.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus had exhorted his listeners to imitate the birds of the air and the lilies of the field and not to be concerned over material things but only for the kingdom of God and his justice. This episode, like the two multiplications of the loaves, is a commentary which verifies his words. Perhaps at that moment the Apostles' common purse held only a few coins. Jesus, without borrowing anything, sends Simon to that Providence which supplies food to the birds and raiment to the lilies, and Providence redeems the pledge made for it in the Sermon on the Mount.

407. Fish of the genus *Chronides* are still very abundant in Lake Tiberias, and they have a curious cycle of development or incubation which is to be found particularly in the species called *Chronis Simonis*, or popularly, "St. Peters fish." The female lays her eggs, about two hundred of them, among the plants underwater. Later the male gathers these eggs up in his gills, and in his mouth especially, where he keeps them for a long time until the cycle of development is complete and the offspring, then about ten millimeters long, can live by themselves. This function has also won the male the name of *Chronis paterfamilias*. By the end of the incubation period the throat of the male fish is distended out of all proportion to the rest of his body and is, in fact, so enlarged that he cannot bring his jaws together. When the time has come to expel the young, he swallows some object which gradually pushes them out and for a while takes their place. This object is usually a pebble, but a coin of some sort, like an ancient stater or shekel, may well have performed the same service. Was this what had happened in the case of the fish Simon caught with a stater in its mouth? We cannot say for certain; we know only that he who had multiplied the loaves drew on Providence once more, though in a

different manner, and Providence promptly paid the note issued in its name in the Sermon on the Mount.

Of Jesus' subsequent followers, perhaps, no one drew on the bank of Providence with more confidence than Francis of Assisi, and his experience permitted him to state that it was most punctual in its payments. Was the son of Bernadone perhaps a keener exegete than the modern critics of the Gospel?

408. The errand given Peter here suggested in some way the discussion which the disciples were having among themselves when they arrived in Capernaum. This was perhaps revealed in their attitude or in some half-finished sentence, so Jesus questioned them directly: "What were you arguing about on the way?" (*Mark* 9:32 ff.) The question embarrassed them; they were ashamed to answer because they had been arguing about which one of them was the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. There was indeed room for discussion, not so much where Peter was concerned, for he had already been especially singled out at Caesarea Philippi and now again in the incident of the stater, but certainly with regard to the rest of them. Each perhaps gave his own reasons for claiming that when the Master should be seated on his messianic throne, gleaming with gold and studded with gems, he and not the companion he was arguing with would have the seat of honor closest to it. After a short and embarrassed silence, one of them took courage and told Jesus they had been discussing who should be first among them.

As in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus' answer is a complete reversal of ideas. The first, he said, was to be the least, the servant and slave of all. At that very moment a little child chanced to pass through the room, and Jesus called him to him, fondled him, and set him in the midst of those grown men; then looking at them one by one he declared: "Amen I say to you, unless you turn and become like little children, you will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whoever, therefore, humbles himself as this little child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven" (*Matt.* 18:3-4). Then Jesus went on to state that whoever should receive in his name a child like the little fellow he had given them as a model, received him himself, just as whoever received him received the heavenly Father who had sent him (cf. §483).

This broad criterion did not seem very clear to John. Shortly before, he and the other Apostles had not received, in fact had deliberately hindered, a certain man who was driving out devils in the Masters name. It was indeed

permissible for him to use that Name in exorcism, but then he should have joined them, becoming a disciple as they had done. Since he had not chosen to join them, the Apostles hindered him. Jesus disapproved their action; they should not have forbidden the man because whoever was not against them was for them (*Mark 9:38-40*).

409. There were other norms too which Jesus imparted to his disciples as the occasion presented itself in these days spent in their spiritual formation (*Mark 9:41 ff.* and parallel passages).

Whoever gives a glass of water to Jesus' disciples because they are such will not be without his reward.

If anyone scandalizes one of these who, believing in Jesus, have become again as little children, it will be better for that man that a millstone be tied around his neck and he be cast into the sea. (This would be the lower of the two stones forming the mill turned by a donkey, because it had a hole in it through which the flour fell and through which the rope could be tied.)

Care must be taken not to scorn those who are children in spirit, for their guardian angels constantly behold the face of the heavenly Father.

If a brother has sinned, he is to be reproved in secret. If he listens to the rebuke, then a brother has been won. If he refuses to listen, then one or two witnesses are to be sought in conformity with the precept in the Mosaic Law (*Deut. 19:15-17*). If he remains obdurate, then he is to be referred to the Church. If he will not listen to the Church either, then he is to be treated as a pagan or publican was treated by the Jews, namely, as an alien to the spiritual life of the community. And whatever the Apostles, constituting the Church, shall bind or loose on earth shall be bound or loosed also in heaven (§397).

When two come together on earth to ask something of the heavenly Father it will be granted to them. For wherever two or three are gathered in the name of Jesus, there, too, is Jesus in their midst.

In passing these sayings on to us the early catechesis shows it saw in them the norms which were to regulate the social life of Jesus' followers, the mold in which the Church of the first Christian generations was to be cast.

But the rule to denounce the guilty and obdurate brother raised a difficulty in Peter's mind. "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?" (*Matt. 18:21 ff.*) The number seven was a sacred and conventional one in Judaism, and Peter here is very magnanimous, for in the next century Rabbi b. Yehuda declares that God will forgive until the third

time, but not the fourth (Yoma, 86 b, Bar., with reference to Amos 2:4). For all that, Peter's generosity seems skimpy indeed to Jesus, who replies: "I do not say to thee seven times, but seventy times seven!" — proverbial for an unlimited number. According to Peter, one was to offer the other cheek, as the Sermon on the Mount commanded, only seven times. An eighth blow would nullify the precept. But according to the Preacher of the Sermon, the eighth blow was still the first and so the precept remained in force. And why?

410. Jesus explained why in a parable. There was a certain king, who one fine day decided to settle his accounts and called in his servants to give their reports. First there came one who was to give him 10,000 talents, an altogether overwhelming sum, especially for those days, for it amounted to more than twelve million dollars. The debtor naturally had no such sum at his disposal, and so the king, to recover at least a part of the amount, ordered his possessions to be sold and the debtor himself with his wife and children to be sold into slavery. Substantially, the sentence was mild enough for ancient times, because the debtor and his family at least had their lives spared while the king lost the greater part of his money. But when he heard the sentence, the debtor threw himself at the king's feet and implored him not so much with the usual melodramatic vigor of the Orient as with the heartbroken sincerity of a man ruined forever: "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all!" The king, who was a very goodhearted man, took pity on him and immediately released him, forgiving him all his debt. The man might well breathe freely once more; he had escaped slavery and he had acquired 10,000 talents besides.

But this made him proud and his pride blinded him. When he left that terrible yet lucky audience, he met a colleague who owed him one hundred denarii, or a little more than twenty dollars. He no sooner saw him than he jumped on him and, grabbing him by the throat almost as if to choke him, he began to shout: "Pay what thou owest!" His poor fellow servant threw himself at his feet exclaiming: "Have patience with me and I will pay thee all!" But the man would not listen, and he had him cast into prison until he should pay the debt. This grieved the other employees of the court and they reported it to the king. Then the king summoned the debtor he had pardoned and said to him: —Wicked servant! I forgave you that whole enormous debt because you begged me to. Therefore, should you not have had pity on your fellow servant? — And in great anger the king had him thrown not into prison, but to the "torturers" (basanistaiz), until he should pay all his debt. And Jesus

concluded: “So also my heavenly Father will do to you, if you do not each forgive your brothers from your hearts.”

It seems this time the parable was so clear that the Apostles did not ask Jesus for an explanation. The king is God; the alarming sum of money which the king forgave his servant are the many failings which God forgives man. The negligible sum the pardoned servant so brutally demanded of his colleague represents the little wrongs one man commits against another. Hence — and this is the lesson of the parable — God’s pardon of man inexorably requires that he pardon his fellow man. It is the same thing Jesus taught earlier in the Lord’s Prayer: “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.”

(Figure 53, Figure 54, Figure 55)

411. By this time, several months had passed since the Pasch just prior to the first multiplication of the loaves (§372), and it was now drawing toward autumn of the year 29. A year and a half or about twenty months had gone by since the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry. Judging from the explicit information given in the Gospels, all the activity of these months had taken place in Galilee with the exception of the trip to Jerusalem (§384) and the other journey into Phoenicia and the regions north of Palestine (§389).

Unfortunately, the results of that activity showed a heavy deficit, if the accounts were to be balanced from the human point of view. The preacher of the “good tidings” had been driven out by his fellow townsmen of Nazareth (§359). The villages along the lake shore, which he seemed to prefer, had gathered about the wonder-worker, it is true, but only in order that their blind might see and their deaf hear, that their dead might be brought to life and that they might have bread to eat. When it came to accepting the “change of mind” and the spiritual revolution required by the wonder-worker, most of those who had come thronging about him refused, and the seed that he had sown had fallen on the pathways and been trampled underfoot, or on the rock, or among thorns (§365). What had sprouted from his sowing? Except for the slender sheaf of disciples — and even these were a long way from the full ripening of the harvest — we may reasonably suppose that those in all Galilee who sincerely accepted and adhered to the “good tidings” were very few indeed. Humanly speaking, Jesus’ work seemed to add up to failure.

Jesus felt this, and his heart grieved, especially since there was no time to insist further with the Galileans. He had now to go and try elsewhere. What more could he have done among those Galileans and especially through the



towns along the lake that his harvest might have been more abundant? Nothing. And if the harvest was extremely small, did not the blame belong to these very towns he had loved so well? One day his sorrow and regret burst from his heart in poignant lamentation: "Woe to thee, Corozain! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! For if in Tyre and Sidon had been worked the miracles that have been worked in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. And thou, Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted to heaven? Thou shalt be thrust down to hell! For if the miracles had been worked in Sodom that have been worked in thee, it would have remained to this day. But I tell you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom on the day of judgment than for thee."<sup>167</sup>19

412. We are well acquainted with Bethsaida and Capharnaum at this point, but there has been no other mention of Corozain, which occurs only here in all the Gospels. This unexpected mention is highly instructive, for it shows what gaps there are in the information concerning Jesus' activity which the Evangelists have preserved for us. If Jesus names Corozain here particularly, singling it out for woe, then the town must have been the object of his care and affection no less than Bethsaida and Capharnaum. Yet we know absolutely nothing about what he did there.

The Onomasticon of Eusebius says that Corozain was two miles from Capharnaum. In fact, about two miles north of the latter city, there is a place today called Keraze (or Kerazie), where the ancient synagogue, built of basalt and decorated in a style similar to the synagogue of Capharnaum (§285, §336), has recently been discovered. An Aramaic inscription on the chair of the ruler of the synagogue gratefully commemorates a certain Judan, son of Ishmael, who built the edifice. Today, as in the time of Eusebius, the whole place is deserted. In later times, this village, named in the Gospels only to be cursed, attracted the popular Christian fancy, which, having reflected over it for several centuries, decided it would be the country of the Anti-Christ.<sup>168</sup>

## CHAPTER XIX: From the Last Feast of Tabernacles to the Last Feast of Dedication

### CHRONOLOGY AND GEOGRAPHY

413. UP TO this point the three Synoptists have for the most part traveled parallel roads. Only John, according to his custom, has gone off in a direction all his own which neither ignores nor parallels that of his three predecessors (§165). But here the three Synoptics part company as well: Matthew and Mark proceed parallel wise in general, but Luke turns off in another direction while John continues on his own way as usual. Only at the last Pasch in the life of Jesus does Luke again walk beside Matthew and Mark; John follows along with them too, but specifies and completes as was his aim.

We know that John is concerned particularly with Jesus' activity in Jerusalem and clearly establishes its dates. Hence in this new period he offers the historian extremely important material for rounding out the story of Jesus' life and determining its chronology. Where Luke's narrative does not parallel the other two Synoptics, it records many new facts and discourses, although he does not bother at all to define the time or place of their occurrence. Consequently, we have the problem of fixing in their proper setting the events narrated by Luke independently of the other three Evangelists.

Many scholars conventionally refer to this part of the narrative found only in the third Gospel as the "journey" of Jesus according to Luke, because the entire section begins with the announcement of a journey toward Jerusalem (*Luke* 9:51) and ends with Jesus' actual entrance into the city (19:28 ff.); but this last is exactly the point where Luke rejoins the other Evangelists because it is the entrance on the occasion of the last Pasch. The question is: was this truly a "journey"?

414. To answer this properly we must keep several facts in mind. In the first place, this "journey" would have had to be an exceptionally slow one, for it would have begun in early autumn and the destination would not have been reached until the following spring. Rather than a true journey, therefore, this period was probably one of chance traveling about through various regions with no urgency to reach a specific destination. In Luke's account of this "journey," besides, we are told a second and a third time that Jesus is on his way to Jerusalem (*Luke* 13:22; 17:11) without any mention of his reaching it in

either instance. Only when this detail is mentioned the fourth time (18:31) is the Holy City established as his destination and does he actually enter it (19:28 ff.). Why, then, these repeated announcements which are not at all necessary for clarity and add nothing new? Do they not have specific meaning, on the other hand, if we consider that they refer to different journeys to Jerusalem rather than one single “journey”? This is, in fact, one theory, and it has been noted that in precisely this same period the independent narrative of John sets the journeys for the Feast of Tabernacles, the Dedication, and the last Pasch.<sup>169</sup>

Nevertheless, this supposed correspondence between the lesser journeys discovered in *Luke* and those described explicitly and separately in *John* runs into certain geographical and chronological difficulties and in addition seems to be contradicted by the very words with which *Luke* announces the beginning of the major “journey”: “Now it came to pass, when the days had come for him [Jesus] to be taken up, that he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem” (*Luke* 9:51). These words clearly indicate that the journey thus introduced is to end with Jesus’ death and his subsequent “assumption” (anahyiz) into glory. Even here, however, we are not obliged to insist that the reference to the ultimate end of the journey is strictly chronological or to suppose that in this last period of Jesus’ life Luke’s attention is fixed more on the sequence of events than on the final, impending trial of Jesus and his subsequent triumph. On the other hand, within this major “journey,” Luke sets events and discourses which we find in other context in *Matthew* and *Mark*, namely, in the period of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee; and while Luke’s chronological sequence is for the most part the one to follow, it is also possible that in some few instances it is better to take that in *Matthew* and *Mark*.

415. All things considered, it would not seem that, from the chronological and geographical point of view, we should consider this part of Luke’s Gospel one major “journey.” It merely represents a certain literary arrangement of the narrative material. Details from different journeys Jesus made in this period are gathered together here, along with several episodes introduced out of their original time and place setting for the sake of some logical connection between them and this part of the narrative of Luke.<sup>170</sup> The different journeys, which furnish the principal material for this summary, may very well be the journeys separately recorded by John. Luke has not at all pretended to give his particular material in specific and detailed chronological order; he has aimed

only at presenting the facts in such manner as to form an appropriate conclusion and worthy culmination of Jesus' preceding activity. With full and serene awareness, Christ is now approaching his final test in Jerusalem, and when it has been passed, he is taken up into glory. This purely logical arrangement, or arrangement according to thought rather than time sequence, was characteristic of the early catechesis and especially St. Paul's, which Luke follows faithfully (§135).

(Figure 56)

## THE FEAST OF TABERNACLES

416. The summer of the year 29 was drawing to a close, and with the autumn was approaching the gay and popular Feast of Tabernacles (§76). If Jesus last visited Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost (§384), then he had been away from the Holy City about four months. During this period, his activity in Galilee had produced the most disappointing results, and he decided to leave it. But where was he to go next? Those "brethren" who did not believe in him enthusiastically recommended one destination (§264). They had indeed noticed the scanty results achieved by their relative after all his work in Galilee, and besides they would have been more than gratified to see him at the head of a stream of people, well organized and headed confidently for Jerusalem. That was the place to go to astonish the illustrious doctors with his works if he wanted any definite results, instead of wasting time and miracles on the boorish mountaineers of Galilee! "His brethren therefore said to him: Leave here and go into Judea that thy disciples [there] also may see the works that thou dost; for no one does a thing in secret if he wants to be publicly known. If thou dost these things, manifest thyself to the world. — For not even his brethren believed in him" (*John* 7:3-5).

Jesus, too, had thought of Jerusalem, but that very suggestion from his "brethren," dictated by considerations far different from his, was a momentary obstacle to his plans. They were thinking that the Feast of Tabernacles, to which great crowds thronged even from outside of Palestine, would be a highly opportune time for some spectacular manifestation on Jesus' part; but he was thinking that precisely the danger of any such publicity was reason enough to reject their advice. So, the "brethren" together with other Galilean pilgrims left for Jerusalem, and Jesus stayed yet a while in Galilee. Later, when the caravans of his relatives (§261) had already gone on ahead, he, too, set out for the Holy City "not publicly but as it were privately" (*John* 7:10).

417. Jesus chose the shortest route, that which crossed the center of Palestine through Samaria. The Samaritans, with their inveterate hatred of the Israelites, were quick to make the most of the opportunity offered by this great concourse of pilgrims to molest them in every way, not hesitating even to wound and kill. It is true that Jesus in the past had found a good welcome among the Samaritans, but only those of Sychar (§294), and besides that had happened a year and a half before, so this former friendliness was not to be counted on very much. Hence, for precaution's sake, he sent some of the disciples on ahead to find lodging in an unnamed village in the dangerous region. But his fears were realized, for the Samaritans of the village, knowing that these were Galileans bound for Jerusalem, refused to give them any hospitality. Whereupon, the two brothers James and John, afire with impetuous zeal, remembered that they had received from Jesus the power to work miracles for the diffusion of the kingdom of God; so, they asked him if he would permit them to call fire down from heaven to burn those Samaritan blackguards to ashes. But he "turned and rebuked them.... And they went to another village" (*Luke 9:55-56*, Greek).<sup>171</sup> Who knows but that the "other village" was Sichar?

418. Meanwhile the first groups of pilgrims from Galilee had arrived in Jerusalem, and its citizens, remembering what had happened a few months before at Bezatha (§384), immediately inquired if Jesus too had arrived: "Where is he? — And there was much whispered comment among the crowd concerning him. For some were saying: He is a good man. — But others were saying: No, rather he seduces the crowd. — Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him" (*John 7:11-13*). This scene, presented with a genuine and lively realism though it is from the pen of the Evangelist now supposed to be an abstruse allegorist, shows that Jesus' previous visit to Jerusalem had left a deep enough impression on its citizens and aroused some comment both for and against him. Suddenly, when the eight days of the Tabernacles were half over, it became known that Jesus had arrived and had begun to teach in the Temple court (§48). Both admirers and detractors ran to hear him, all recognizing without exception the power of his preaching.

But his detractors immediately posed a damaging question. No one could be truly learned and wise if he had not attended the schools of the great Rabbis and Scribes and been trained in their methods: "How does this man come by learning, since he has not studied?" There was good reason to suspect the self-made teacher who in matters religious dared to deviate from

“tradition.” Jesus answered: “‘My teaching is not my own, but his who sent me. If anyone desires to do his will, he will know of the teaching whether it is from God, or whether I speak on my own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory. But he who seeks the glory of the one who sent him is truthful, and there is no injustice in him. Did not Moses give you the Law and [yet] none of you observes the Law? Why do you seek to put me to death?’ — The crowd answered: ‘Thou hast a devil! (§340.) Who seeks to put thee to death?’ — Jesus answered and said to them: ‘One work I did and you all wonder. For this reason, Moses gave you the circumcision — not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers — and on a Sabbath you circumcise a man. If a man receives circumcision on a Sabbath, that the Law of Moses may not be broken, are you indignant with me because I made a whole man well on a Sabbath? Judge not by appearances but give just judgment!’” (*John* 7:15-24.)

419. The discussion referred to the cure at Bezatha and the objections then raised by the Pharisees. Jesus did not go back over the rabbinic diatribes nor answer the insult that he had a devil, but tried to make his opponents understand more deeply the true significance of the Mosaic Law, and the dispute continued, so that some of those in Jerusalem, who knew very well which way the wind was blowing, asked: — Is not this the man they seek to kill? And look, he speaks in public and they say nothing to him! Can it be that our elders have recognized he is truly the Messiah? But we know whence this man has come, but when the Messiah comes no one will know where he is from!

It was indeed the common opinion that the Messiah was to be a descendant of David and be born in Bethlehem (§254), but also that he would appear unexpectedly after he had remained in absolute retirement for a long time in a place no one knew.<sup>172</sup> But it was well known where Jesus usually lived and so he could not be the Messiah.

Jesus, therefore, made answer by appealing to his own heavenly origin and the authority of him who had sent him: “You both know me, and know where I am from. Yet I have not come of myself, but he is true (*alhqinoz*) who has sent me, whom you do not know. But I know him because I am from him, and he has sent me” (*John* 7:28-29). Jesus spoke these words in a loud voice (*ekraxen*), as though he were making a solemn declaration, and that is the way his adversaries took it. They interpreted it — and rightly — as a declaration of heavenly and divine existence. But for them such a declaration

was blasphemy and they therefore burst out in scandalized indignation and tried to carry out their old design and seize Jesus. “But his hour was not yet come” — observes the spiritual Evangelist — and so no one succeeded in laying hands on him. His enemies were, in fact, well counterbalanced by enthusiastic admirers; and these took courage, notwithstanding the stormy atmosphere, and entering into the discussion, they observed: — When the Messiah comes will he perhaps work more miracles than this man works?

This answer was a recall to actual reality. The argument of the miracles, which was peremptory and therefore as much of a target twenty centuries ago as it is today, produced a good effect and “many believed in him.” Nevertheless, Jesus’ adversaries, who were anxious to seize him, did not give in, but ran to the Temple magistrates to see if they could arrange a regular arrest. But the resolute attitude of Jesus’ admirers must have dissuaded them from carrying out a procedure so dangerous since it might result in one of those riots which were all too frequent in the Temple courts. And while the guards were buzzing about Jesus, he was repeating to his enemies: “Yet a little while I am with you, and then I go to him who sent me. You will seek me and will not find me; and where I am you cannot come.” Jesus is still alluding to his previous declaration of divine origin; his adversaries, who rejected that declaration, found themselves trying to understand an indefinite reference instead, and they wondered among themselves: — Will he perhaps go into the Diaspora to teach the pagans there?

420. During the Octave of Tabernacles, meanwhile, there was the daily procession to the fountain of Siloe (§76). On the last day, which was the most solemn, Jesus applied the ceremony to himself and his teaching: “If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink!” Earlier Jesus had spoken of a certain water to the Samaritan woman, and even six centuries before, a prophet spoke of the same water, attributing to God this lamentation:

“Two evils have my people committed:  
they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water,  
and have dug for themselves cisterns,  
broken cisterns that can hold no water!”<sup>173</sup>

This time, too, Jesus had spoken with a loud voice (*ekraxen*), in the tone of solemn proclamation, and his words rekindled among the crowd the disputes of a few days before. Some of his admirers declared: — This man is truly the prophet! — And others: — He is the Messiah! — And his adversaries



answered: — What Messiah can he be? Is Galilee going to give us a Messiah now? Is he not to come from Bethlehem, the descendant of David?

The Temple guards tried again to seize Jesus, but they were stopped by his great spiritual magnetism. When they were rebuked by the magistrates and the Pharisees for not having arrested him, they answered with beautiful simplicity: “Never has man spoken as this man!” (*John* 7:46.) The Pharisees retorted sarcastically: — Has he led you astray too? Has any one of the rulers or any of us Pharisees ever believed in him? But this crowd, which does not know the Law is everyone accursed! The “accursed” of the “crowd” who admired Jesus were the abominated “people of the land” (§40).

The cautious Nicodemus (§290) also took part in the discussion. He had the courage to appeal to the Law, observing: “Does our Law judge a man unless it first gives him a hearing, and know what he does?” But Nicodemus, too, received a sarcastic rebuke: “Art thou also a Galilean? Search the Scriptures and see that out of Galilee arises no prophet.”

The provincial spirit of the Jews was a vanguard for the nationalist spirit of the Gentiles. Both will later agree in judging that “out of Galilee arises no prophet,” and pass sentence on the accused without first listening to him or investigating what he has done.

421. Jesus used still another circumstance of the feast to present himself and his teaching. From evening of the first day of Tabernacles the outer court of the Temple was crowded with people bearing branches of palm, myrtle, and willow. As soon as darkness fell, the priests lit great lamps hanging from very high lamp holders and immediately the crowd lit innumerable other lights of every kind. In the midst of this riotous illumination, the joyful festivities unfolded, and chief among them were the dances performed in the center of the court, while the Levites, gathered on the steps of the inner court, chanted hymns. The dances were executed principally by the dignitaries of the nation and the most famous doctors, who vied with one another to see who could dance the longest with a lighted torch in hand (*Sukkah*, V, 1-4; *Sukkah* babli, 50 a-b, 53 a-b). The splendors of that gay night lingered in the eyes of the celebrating throng throughout the eight succeeding days, and on one of those days Jesus applied the ceremony to himself. We are not told which day it was, but if John (8:12-59) sets this episode after the others of the same feast, he probably does so to prepare the way for the incident which follows of the man born blind, who received the light from Jesus.



One day, then, Jesus was in the Court of the Treasury, next to the Women's Court (§47), and he said to the Jews: "I am the light of the world. He who follows me does not walk in the darkness, but will have the light of life." Here he refers the light of a particular ceremony of the feast to himself just as he had done earlier with regard to the water. The Pharisees answered that no one was obliged to believe in him, because he gave testimony of himself and his testimony was not true. There followed a dispute in several installments (cf. *John* 8:20-21 with 8:30-31), which should be studied in its entirety in the text. Jesus' fundamental assertions are the following.

422. The testimony of Jesus is guaranteed by his heavenly Father, but the Jews do not know the Father because they do not know Jesus. Meanwhile time presses; Jesus will depart from the Jews forever and they will die obstinate in their sin of not recognizing his mission. They are "from below" (ek twn katw) and of the world; Jesus is "from above" (ek twn anw) and not of the world. At this point, the Jews ironically ask Jesus the same question their special delegation had asked John the Baptist (§277): "Who art thou?" Jesus answers: "In the first place, [I am] precisely that which I tell you."<sup>174</sup> The expression avoids the clear and definite assertion the Jews were waiting for in order to be able to use violence against Jesus, as indeed they do at the end of the discussion. Yet, continues Jesus, when the Jews "have lifted up the Son of Man" then they will know that he is "the Son of Man," the one who faithfully performed the mission he received from the Father.

This total dedication to the will of the Father impresses many of his listeners, who believe in him. To these new believers Jesus next addresses himself, but others still hostile to him break in to challenge him again. Jesus has said that by accepting his teachings they will achieve true liberty, and this consists not in being the descendants of Abraham but in freedom from sin. Let him who is the true descendant of Abraham do the just works of Abraham and not seek to kill Jesus who has been sent by the heavenly Father. It is not enough to proclaim themselves the sons of God, as his adversaries do; they must also love Jesus and accept his teachings, because he "has come forth from God," being sent by him. Whoever does not listen to the words of Jesus shows that he has for father the devil, who was a murderer from the beginning and the father of lies. If Jesus speaks the truth, why do they not believe in him? Who can convict him of sin? Whoever is of God listens to the words of God; that is why Jesus' adversaries do not listen to him, because they are not of God.

423. At this point the conflict becomes more intense. The Jews resent the blows they have had to take and they hit back, not with reasoned arguments but with insults: “Are we not right in saying that thou art a Samaritan (§4, §417) and hast a devil? —Jesus answered: I have not a devil, but I honor my Father, and you dishonor me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is one who seeks [it] and who judges [of it]. Amen, amen, I say to you, if anyone keep my word, he will never see death.’

“The Jews therefore said: ‘Now we know that thou hast a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets, and thou sayest: If anyone keep my word, he will never taste death. — Art thou greater than our father Abraham, who is dead? And the prophets are dead. Whom dost thou make thyself?’

“Jesus answered: ‘If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing. It is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is your God. And you do not know him, but I know him. And if I say that I do not know him I shall be like you, a liar. But I know him, and I keep his word. Abraham your father rejoiced that he was to see my day. He saw it and was glad.’ — The Jews therefore said to him: ‘Thou art not yet fifty years old, and hast thou seen Abraham?’ (§176, §182)—Jesus said to them: ‘Amen, amen, I say to you, before Abraham came to be, I am.’”

The discussion is ended. Jesus has proclaimed that he is before Abraham and consequently before all Hebraism, of which Abraham is the founder. Either they must accept his assertion and believe in him, or else they must declare him later and inferior to Hebraism and therefore subject to its laws. Now, according to the Hebrew Law (*Lev. 24:16*), the blasphemer must be stoned; so, the Jews, in whose opinion Jesus has blasphemed declaring that he existed before Abraham, immediately start to apply the Law: “They therefore took up stones to cast at him; but Jesus hid himself, and went out from the Temple.”

## THE ADULTERESS

424. Also on the occasion of the Feast of Tabernacles we have the episode of the woman taken in adultery, which is recorded right after the discourse on the living water and before the discourse on the light of the world (*John 7:53-8:11*). But the episode is burdened by the famous question of how it came down to us, which derives from the following facts.

This episode is not to be found in the oldest Greek uncial codices (except the disputed Codex D of the sixth century) or in many of the minuscule ones; neither is it contained in the ancient Syriac, Coptic, and Armenian versions,

nor in the most reliable codices of the Old Latin version previous to St. Jerome. Among ancient Christian writers, all the Greeks up to the ninth century fail to mention it and so do the oldest Latin authors like Tertullian, Cyprian, and Hilarion, but toward the end of the fourth century and in the fifth it is known to Pacian of Barcelona, Ambrose, Augustine, and to writers in increasing number after that. Other Greek codices, both uncial and especially minuscule, either leave a space where the account of the episode would normally go, or carry the account but mark it with an asterisk (denoting passages which were either added later or were controversial). The codices which do have the account display an exceptional number of variants in the text, which is usual in the case of disputed passages. It has also been noted that the narrative of this incident contains expressions foreign to John's usual style and resembling rather that of the Synoptics, and that it interrupts besides the logical sequence between the two discourses on the symbolic water and the light. This unexpected interruption seems to have been noticed in ancient times, too, because one early Greek codex sets it after *John* 7:36 instead of in its present place, and another relegates it to the end of the fourth Gospel (after 21:24), and four related codices (the Ferrar group) transfer it to another Gospel altogether, setting it after *Luke* 21:38.

On the other hand, six later uncial Greek codices (besides the above-mentioned Codex D) do include the account and so do many minuscule ones. Several codices of the pre-Jerome Latin version also carry it, as do those of the Vulgate, of the Ethiopic version, and some later codices of other versions. From a statement in Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.*, III, 39, 17) it would seem very probable that Papias (§114) knew the incident, that is, it was familiar in the first two decades of the second century.

425. How are we to solve the problem? Does the absence of the account of this episode in some codices represent an omission, or does its presence indicate an addition?

St. Augustine chooses the first alternative (*De coniug. adult.*, II, 7, 6). He thinks that the account was suppressed in the codices by men of little faith who feared "their wives would be afforded an occasion for sinning with impunity." But this reason, psychological rather than historical, is not very convincing, because in the first place, as St. Augustine himself observes, there was no permission to sin granted by the Jesus "who said: 'From now on sin no more,'" and in addition it is not likely that the ordinary faithful, lay and married, would have so much authority in the Church in the first centuries as

to have a passage of such length and importance in the Holy Scriptures suppressed. The Church was too jealous in her zeal to preserve the Scriptures intact, to protect them from interpolations and suppressions both. After all, when and how could the passage have been suppressed so completely and affectively that every trace of it disappeared from all the original codices until the middle of the fourth century?

On the other hand, the arguments in favor of the account have their own undeniable value, which is recognized even by radical critics, who consider the episode "a most ancient part of the Evangelical tradition" (Loisy), "a lost pearl of ancient tradition" found again by chance (Heitmueller). The most authoritative Catholic scholars say the same thing; for them, naturally, the account is inspired and forms part of the canonical Scriptures. Among them there is one New Testament editor who concludes his research by saying that the story of the adulteress is evidently an addition to the text of the fourth Gospel . . . "although its great antiquity is indisputable"; hence it "must be numbered among the most precious pearls of tradition; but how the passage first came into being and how it managed to enter into the Gospel of John is a question which remains completely unsolved" (Vogels).

Does the account derive from the Aramaic text of Matthew (§114)? Could it be perhaps an isolated little note penned by Luke? The character of the episode, so full of infinite compassion and so like the *scriba mansuetudinis Christi* (§138) would favor this conjecture. But from the documentary point of view, unfortunately, we must confess our complete ignorance.

426. One day, then, perhaps during the Octave of the Tabernacles, Jesus, having spent the night on his beloved Mount of Olives, came down early in the morning, crossed the Cedron, climbed back up the western path to Jerusalem and entered the Temple. There the people gathered about him in the outer court, and he sat down and began to teach. All of a sudden, a group of Scribes and Pharisees followed by a crowd of people bursts into the court. They glance all around and no sooner spy the circle of people listening to Jesus than they go directly toward them and proceed to push their way through, interrupting Jesus' teaching. From the crowd trailing the Scribes and Pharisees two or three men step forward dragging a woman after them, and they push her out into the empty space in front of the Teacher, where, disheveled and covering her face with her hands in shame, she sinks to the ground like a bundle of rags. The Scribes and Pharisees then explain the meaning of all this to Jesus. The woman has been caught in adultery; her

partner in sin, as usually happens (*Dan.* 13:39), has apparently managed to escape, but the woman has been arrested. She cannot deny the flagrancy of her crime and so she must be punished according to the Law. Now Moses commanded in the Law that such women be stoned (*Deut.* 22:23 ff.; cf. *Lev.* 20:10). What does the Master think of it? How should the culprit be treated?

The Evangelist here points out "Now they were saying this to test him, in order that they might be able to accuse him." We might easily have imagined this even without the Evangelist's remark. This was unquestionably an excellent opportunity for the Pharisees. In the first place, by going about the city dragging the trembling and weeping woman after them they cut a magnificent figure as most diligent custodians of the Law and zealous guardians of morality. The Sanhedrin had to pass judgment on the sin (§59); but what would have been the advantage of taking the woman directly to the Sanhedrin without all that noise and publicity? If they had accomplished the arrest with modest reticence, no one could have appreciated their merits. Besides, this show of force gave them another fine opportunity. There was that Galilean Rabbi who, with his vaunted independence of the great teachers of the Law and his increasing authority over the people, deserved a good formal and public lesson, and precisely on a question of Law. This particular woman's case seemed made on purpose to give him that lesson. Before delivering the culprit to the Sanhedrin, they must propose it to him, as though asking his opinion as to whether she should be stoned or not. If he should answer no, he would stand self-confessed a revolutionary, an enemy of the public welfare, and a destroyer of the Mosaic Law. If he answered that they should relentlessly execute the stoning, he would lose his authority over the people whom he had won particularly with his precepts of mercy and kindness. This was indeed a fine chance; and the Pharisees made the most of it and proceeded to the attack.

427. Jesus accepted their challenge. His preaching now interrupted, he listened to their explanation of the case, but remained serenely seated. When the woman's accusers had finished, he did not answer a word, but, like one with nothing in particular to do except try to pass the time, he stooped over and began to trace signs or letters with his finger on the pavement. His manner said in substance that he had no answer to give them and that he was idling the time until the matter should be ended. The accusers waited a little, and Jesus kept on tracing flourishes on the ground. They repeated the charge, stated their question again, and waited. Only after another little while did

Jesus slowly sit up and glance from the accusers to the crowd and the woman; and then he said simply: "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to cast a stone at her." When he had said this, he bent over again, as if it were the most natural thing in the world for him to do, and began to trace more flourishes. It was all over; in fact, it should never have begun. The one challenged did not have to take any part in the question proposed to him by the accusers in those circumstances. He preferred to sketch curlicues in the dust, and if he had answered them at all it was only to stop their insistence. Let them look to it, but let them also conform to the principle he had given them.

Alas and alack! That principle touched them to the quick. It was not a question of passing judgment on some elegant law case to determine how many blows of the rod were to be administered to someone else's back, or how high the gibbet must be on which someone else's body was to hang. It was a question of judging their inner selves before the invisible tribunal of the conscience where accuser and judge are one and the same. It would actually have been a very simple matter to answer that Rabbi with, "I have not sinned so I will throw the first stone!" But it was much wiser not to fool with him. He had shown himself the master of nature and the reader of souls, and he was quite capable of repeating and explaining the apostrophe of the ancient Daniel to the old men who accused Susanna (*Dan. 13:57*) and of answering there in front of the whole crowd: Are you without sin when you have behaved thus and so with this particular married woman; and when another day you did thus and so with this other? ... — No, no; it was too dangerous to prod such a hornet's nest. And so it happened that "hearing this, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest. And Jesus remained alone, with the woman standing in the midst. And Jesus, raising himself, said to her: Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned thee? — She said: 'No one, Lord.'— Then Jesus said: 'Neither will I condemn thee! Go thy way, and from now on sin no more.'"

He who had come not to destroy the Law of Moses but to complete it (§323) had not violated that Law and he had besides penetrated to its essential spirit. The essential of every honest law can only be to divert from evil and direct toward good. Justice had been sublimated by mercy.

THE MAN BORN BLIND

428. After the discourse on the spiritual light, which produced no visible effect and ended in the attempt of some of Jesus' adversaries to stone him, John narrates the cure of the man born blind, a diffusion of physical light which did have its effect. The event must have occurred a little later when the Feast of Tabernacles had been over for some time and excited spirits had had a chance to calm down.

One Sabbath, Jesus passed by a blind man who was begging alms, perhaps in the vicinity of the Temple. Reflecting on the man's misfortune, the disciples accompanying Jesus asked him: "Rabbi, who has sinned, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" We see in this question the old Hebrew notion that every physical ill was a consequence of and punishment for wrong-doing, a notion which the high-minded author of the book of Job proved false but which persisted for a long time both among the educated and the illiterate. Jesus rejected the idea, saying that neither the poor man nor his parents had sinned, and that this particular case had been permitted in order that the works of God might be made manifest: "As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (*John* 9:5). When he said this, Jesus spat on the ground and with his spittle made a little clay, which he spread over the blind man's eyes. Then he said to him: Go wash yourself in the pool of Siloe. And the man went and washed, and when he returned, he could see.

Right after the word Siloam, the spiritual Evangelist adds a comment of mystic flavor, pointing out that the name "is interpreted 'Sent.'" In reality, the Greek Siloam stands for the Hebrew Shilo<sup>ah</sup>, the original name of the subterranean canal which gathered the waters of the fountain of Gihon (§384) and carried them into the city. This function had won the canal its name, signifying "sending" (the water), or (water) "sent," and it had naturally come to designate also the pool in which the channel ended.<sup>175</sup> The Evangelist who records for us the symbol of the spiritual water which comes to the world through Jesus would naturally think of him also as a supernatural water which has been sent. In that water the whole human race, devoid as it is of light, must be bathed, as the blind man bathed in the pool of Siloe, and in both cases the result will be the same.

429. When the cure is effected, the inevitable discussions follow, because the man is a professional beggar and very well known throughout the entire city as one blind from birth, though now he can see. Therefore, some said: — It is the same man! Others said: — Not at all! It is someone who looks like the

blind man. But when the man himself was questioned he replied: — No, I am truly he, the beggar who was born blind. — Then they asked him: — Well then, how have your eyes been opened? — And he answered simply: — The man who is called Jesus made a bit of clay, put it on my eyes and said to me: Go wash yourself in Siloe. I went, and washed, and I see. That is all! — To carry the inquiry further it was necessary to question Jesus. — Where has he gone? they asked the cured man. He answered that he did not know. The matter was serious both of itself and because it had taken place on the Sabbath. So, the man was brought before the Pharisees, who repeated the same questions and received the same answers. There was no doubt about it: the man standing there before them was the beggar born blind, and now he could see very well.

But there was still that matter of the Sabbath. Hence some of the Pharisees declared: This man is not of God because he does not observe the Sabbath! — He had violated it by making the thimbleful of mud he placed on the blind man's eyes. Yet there were others too, a little less Pharisee, who observed: But if he were a sinner how could he perform miracles like that? — And the two sides began to discuss and argue. Of course, it was certain the blind man had been cured; but it was even more certain that whoever made a fingerful of clay on the Sabbath day was a sinner, impious and execrable, and therefore he could not work miracles. There was no escape from the dilemma. In this impasse they turned to the cured man himself again for help and asked his opinion: — What do you think of the man who opened your eyes? — And he answered promptly: For me, he is a prophet!

430. This was bad, very bad indeed. They were obliged to go back a step and revive the doubts they had already dismissed concerning the man's identity. So, they sent for his parents. — Is this man really your son? Was he actually born blind? Then how is it that he can see now? The two old people, frightened by that gathering of illustrious doctors, took refuge behind the facts themselves and declined to accept any responsibility for what had happened. — That this is our son is certain, and it is also certain that he was born blind. But how it happens that he can now see or who has opened his eyes — we do not know anything at all about that. Ask him! He is of age. Let him speak for himself. — After recording this answer, the Evangelist observes: "These things his parents said because they feared the Jews. For already the Jews had agreed that if anyone were to confess him to be the Christ, he should be put out of the synagogue." Thus, the old couple cunningly avoided



the danger and nothing more definite could be dragged out of them. The inquisitors then returned to the son.

They assumed a coaxing, confidential tone with him. Perhaps the man would be touched and “open up.” — Come! Give glory to God! We know very well that this man is a sinner. Tell us the truth of the matter. — And he answered: Whether he is a sinner I do not know; I know only that before I was blind and that now I see! — And they said: But what did he do to you? How did he open your eyes? — The man, using his eyes for the first time in his life to contemplate those inquisitors, preferred perhaps to be out admiring more pleasant sights, and he began to lose patience: But I have already told you all that! Why do you want to hear it again? Do you too perchance want to become disciples of Jesus?

Heaven forbid! A deluge of curses and insults fall on the impertinent beggar who had dared ask that sarcastic question, and the opprobrious insinuation is hurled right back at him. — You are that fellow’s disciple; we are the disciples of Moses. We know that God spoke to Moses; but as for this man, we do not know where he is from! (§419.) But the man stands his ground and replies undaunted: Well, this is exactly what is so strange, that you do not know where he is from when he has opened my eyes. It is very certain that God listens, not to sinners, but to just and pious men; since the beginning of the world no one has opened the eyes of a man born blind. Now, if this man were not from God, he could not have done it! — What irreverence! Was this insolent rogue, begotten in sin as his blindness proved, presuming to teach the most outstanding representatives of Hebrew “tradition” and learning! They answered indignantly: You were wholly born in sin, and you want to teach us? Out of here! — And they threw him out.

Shortly afterward the man met Jesus, who said to him: “Dost thou believe in the Son of Man [variant: “of God”]?” And he answered: “Who is he. Lord, that I may believe in him?” Jesus replied: “Thou hast both seen him [referring to the cure], and he it is who speaks with thee.” Then the man exclaimed: “I believe, Lord!” and falling down before Jesus, worshiped him. Jesus added: “For judgment have I come into this world, that they who do not see may see, and they who see may become blind.” Some Pharisees had approached meanwhile and overhearing these last words, they took them as an allusion to themselves. So, they asked Jesus: “Are we also blind?” Jesus answered: “If you were [only] blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say ‘We see,’ your sin remains.” In other words, blindness is a general condition, but it can be

cured only if one recognizes that he is afflicted with it; whoever deludes himself that he can see will never be cured. This illusion is more dangerous than the blindness itself, because it is its sevenfold seal.

431. The incorrigible stubbornness of the Jews in refusing to recognize the cure of the man born blind is sheer history and it is also a phenomenon which history regularly records. The throne of Pharisaism rose on certain pet columns which must never crumble though all the rest of the world should fall in ruins; the observance of the Sabbath, membership in the Pharisaic group and the like were towers of strength, from the top of which they looked down and judged the entire universe, approving whatever contributed to the strength of those towers and rejecting everything that weakened them. They summon the cured beggar and his parents before their tribunal; they examine the evidence; they invent loopholes; but they do not get the explanation they want. That makes no difference: let everything else collapse, their towers must remain.

The modern historian who calmly compares realities finds that after so many centuries a certain portion of mankind has changed very little in its attitude toward the evidence concerning Jesus' life. It has changed names but its method of procedure has remained substantially the same. Those inviolable towers once called the observance of the Sabbath and so forth, are today named the "absurdity" of the miracle, the "impossibility of the supernatural, and the like. But practically speaking, the towers themselves are the same. The various documents are summoned before the tribunal of rationalism; the testimony is examined; theory after theory is invented, but the desired explanation is still not forthcoming. Indeed, the result is instead a still more supernatural Jesus (§§221 ff.). It makes no difference. Let everything else crumble, the towers still must stand.

And so, the blindness remains, sealed with its sevenfold seal.

## THE GOOD SHEPHERD

432. The cure of the man born blind and the discussions concerning it had their aftermath. It was probably a few days later, but still at Jerusalem that Jesus had recourse to a parable, which is part allegory (§360) but based on everyday customs in Palestine. He compares his work to that of a good shepherd, and the society he has founded to a sheepfold. The sheepfold in modern Palestine (and it was more or less the same twenty centuries ago) is nothing more than an enclosure within a little low wall of stone where the

sheep of one or more flocks pasturing in the vicinity are gathered in the evening. The animals go in and out one by one through a low, narrow door in the wall which makes it easy to count them both times. At night one shepherd stands guard alone to protect the fold against thieves and wild beasts; and toward dawn, it is he who opens the little door to the shepherds coming to claim their flocks. Each shepherd gives his own particular call and his sheep come crowding to the door and trot out one by one to follow him all day long over the heath. The other sheep wait until they hear the special cry of their own shepherd; only his voice, which is to guide them throughout the day, brings them to the entrance. Thus, flock by flock, the sheep go out by the little gate in obedience to the cries of the shepherds, who sometimes even call their favorite sheep by name: "Hey! Whitie!" "Come on. Beautiful!" That little door, then, is the mainspring of the fold and it alone inspires confidence. Whoever does not pass through it but climbs over the wall proclaims himself an enemy — a thief or a wild beast.

That is why Jesus said: "Amen, amen, I say to you, he who enters not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbs up another way, is a thief and a robber. But he who enters by the door is shepherd of the sheep. To this man the gatekeeper opens, and the sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them forth. And when he has let out his own sheep, he goes before them; and the sheep follow him because they know his voice. But a stranger they will not follow, but will flee from him, because they do not know the voice of strangers."

433. But his listeners did not understand the allusion and so Jesus continued: "Amen, amen, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. All whoever have come [before me] are thieves and robbers; but the sheep have not heard them. I am the door. If anyone enter by me, he shall be safe, and shall go in and out, and shall find pastures. The thief comes only to steal, and slay, and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it more abundantly." Who the "thieves and robbers" were Jesus did not explain, but the historical circumstances of the times were sufficient to make them recognizable. As the ancient prophets had found the greatest obstacle to their mission in the hostile activity of pseudo prophets prophesying "lies . . . and the delusions of their own heart,"<sup>176</sup> so Jesus, who speaks here as the Messiah, is alluding to the hostile activity of the pseudo-messianic preachers who mushroomed in Palestine both before and after him. Josephus, who knew some of them personally, describes as follows those preaching under the procuratorship of

Antony Felix (A.D. 52-60): “Deceitful men and impostors, who under the appearance of divine inspiration bring about innovations and upheavals; they would excite the crowds to acts of religious fanaticism, and lead them out into the desert, as if there God had showed them the signs of [imminent] freedom” (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 259). Then speaking, as an eyewitness, of the siege of Jerusalem he says: “After all there were many prophets then who . . . went about commanding them to expect help from God.

..... Thus, the wretched populace was deluded by charlatans and those speaking falsely in the name of God” (*ibid.*, VI, 286-288). The malady was an old one, and if it burst out with full virulence at the time here mentioned by Josephus, we may gather from the same historian that it had been latent for a long time previously and that in Jesus’ day it had already infected a great part of the Jewish populace. These are the “thieves” and “robbers” to whom Jesus refers as his— the Messiah’ — direct and immediate adversaries. When, however, he declares that the “sheep have not heard them,” he is speaking of the good, sound portion of the people, who, after all, were still the majority in his time, though later they gradually diminished in number.

434. Still using the similitude of the sheepfold, Jesus continues: “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for his sheep. But the hireling, who is not a shepherd, whose own the sheep are not, sees the wolf coming and leaves the sheep and flees. And the wolf snatches and scatters the sheep; but the hireling flees because he is a hireling, and has no concern for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and I know mine and mine know me, even as the Father knows me and I know the Father; and I lay down my life for my sheep. And other sheep I have that are not of this fold. Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice, and there shall be one fold and one shepherd.”

Jesus, therefore, like the true shepherd and not the hireling, is ready to lose his life for the good of his followers. In addition, he is the shepherd not only “of this fold” of the chosen people of Israel, but also of other sheep who will one day hear his voice. Then there will be “one fold” of his followers, come from Israel and other nations without distinction, and the one shepherd of the whole new flock will be Jesus the Messiah. The ancient prophets too, when they spoke of the times of the future Messiah, had contemplated this expansion of the limited fold of Israel:

“And in the last days, the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be prepared on the top of mountains, and it shall be exalted above hills, and all nations shall flow unto it, and many shall go, and say:

Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, and to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the Law shall come forth from Sion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.

And he shall judge the Gentiles, and rebuke many people: and they shall turn their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into sickles: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they be exercised any more to war.” (*Isa. 2:2-4*; cf. *Mich. 4:1-3*.)

And Jesus concluded: “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have the power to lay it down, but I have the power to take it up again. Such is the command I have received from my Father.”

These words, too, caused dissension among the Jews. Many, and perhaps the majority, commented on them scornfully, concluding: “He has a devil and is mad. Why do you listen to him?” But there were others who replied: —Ah, no! “These are not the words of one who has a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?” (*John 10:19-21*.)

## EXPANSION OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD IN JUDEA

435. Now that the last discussions during the Feast of Tabernacles were at an end, Jesus departed from Jerusalem. Most of the events narrated in the so-called “voyage” of Luke (§§413 ff.) occurred in the good two months between this feast and that of the Dedication (§§76-77) and, therefore, in Judea for the most part. This was, in fact, the new field of activity Jesus chose when he abandoned Galilee (§411). As we have seen, Luke’s narrative at this point is vague and general so far as chronology and geography are concerned and so acquires a conspicuously episodic character. Of Jesus’ varied activity in this period to spread the kingdom of God in Judea, we have only isolated incidents and discourses, but not a complete or organized report. The diligent “researcher” Luke gives us only the information he has succeeded in recovering, both as to the incidents themselves and their relationship to each other. What he does not know, he honestly omits.

Incidentally to the narrative, three different men are presented to us as desiring to follow Jesus (*Luke 9:57-62*). Of these three Matthew mentions only

two (8:19-22), and it is very likely that the three came to Jesus at different times and in different places although they are all grouped together in the editing of the material.

436. One of these men, who was a “Scribe” according to Matthew, overtook Jesus along the road and said to him: “Master, I will follow thee wherever thou goest.” The good man was perhaps thinking that a prophet as powerful and authoritative as Jesus would have a permanent and suitable home as the headquarters for his activity. Jesus disenchants him with all frankness: “The foxes have dens, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head.” In other words, the first to follow the rule of complete faith in Providence (§331) laid down in the Sermon on the Mount was the Preacher of the Sermon himself.

To another, who, according to Matthew, was one “of the disciples,” Jesus said: “Follow me!” The man was well disposed, but he first asked permission to “go and bury” his father. Jesus answered him: “Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead,” to which Luke adds: “but do thou go and proclaim the kingdom of God!”

There has been a great deal of discussion about this brief dialogue. Some have thought that the disciple’s father was not actually dead, otherwise his son, according to Jewish custom, should have been with his body and not with Jesus. Hence, he was really asking permission to stay and help his aged father through his declining days, or as the modern affectionate phrase still expresses it, “to close his father’s eyes.” But though this explanation is not entirely impossible it is not very plausible. Even less likely is the hypothesis (Perles) that the Greek text is from a faulty translation of the Aramaic, which originally had ‘leave the dead to the burier of their dead’ (supposing *limqabber*, “to the burier,” instead of *lemiqbbar*, “to bury”). An answer like that would become only Monsieur de la Palisse. In all likelihood, however, the father of the disciple was actually dead. Jesus wants to emphasize the imperiousness of the summons to the kingdom of God, which could in certain cases brush aside even the most legitimate customs. If for religious reasons the Mosaic Law forbade the high priest and the “Nazirite” to bury their own parents personally (*Lev. 21:11; Num. 6:7*), the Messiah, Jesus, had much greater reason to demand of the heralds of God’s kingdom at least the same freedom from social ties and a complete dedication to their office. Those living outside the kingdom of God were spiritually dead, and to turn back even for a short time among those dead might be dangerous for this particular

disciple. He had been called to the kingdom of God, and he was to enter resolutely into that kingdom of life without turning back to contemplate again the cemetery of the world.

The exhortation addressed to the third postulant is substantially the same. He says to Jesus: "Lord, I want to follow thee; but first let me go and say farewell to those at home." —Jesus answers: "No one, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God!" Just as the ploughman cannot make a straight furrow if he keeps turning to look behind him, so whoever is bound for the kingdom of God must not turn back to look at the things of the world which he has left behind.

437. Now in Judea, Jesus again dispatched his collaborators on a special mission as he had done in Galilee (§352). They had grown in number, and so this time seventy-two or seventy (depending on the codices) were sent out. It is very probable that among the new messengers were included all or some of the Twelve who had gone out the first time. The norms and the goal of the new mission were substantially the same as those of the previous one. The zone of action must have been Judea and perhaps also the Transjordan, though we have no specific information in this regard. Nor can we say how long a time this new evangelizing journey lasted, but it seems to have been more than a fortnight.

On their return the messengers of the kingdom were jubilant. Gathering about Jesus, they told him proudly how even the devils had been subjected to them at the mention of his name. Jesus rejoiced with them, telling them that he had seen Satan fall as lightning from heaven; then he confirmed for them their dominion over the powers of the enemy in the future. But at the same time, he warned them that their true joy should spring not from their power over the spirits of evil but from the fact that their names had been written in heaven.

The fine success achieved by the disciples in the propagation of the kingdom of God occasions in Jesus a joy that is greater and more sublime. He lifts his thought to his heavenly Father, contemplates his designs for the salvation of humanity, and notes that the means used for their accomplishment are, humanly speaking, the least expedient, men who were least prized or conspicuous. And there bursts from his heart a joyous thanksgiving to the heavenly Father. "In that very hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit and said: I praise thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst

hide these things from the wise and prudent and didst reveal them to little ones. Yes, Father, for such was thy good pleasure. All things have been delivered to me by my Father; and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son, and him to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.” Then turning to the disciples, he proclaimed them blessed because they saw and heard things which the ancient prophets in vain desired to see and hear.

Jesus’ exultation is recorded by two Synoptics (*Luke* 10:21-22; *Matt.* 11:25-27); and yet if we heard this passage read without knowing its source, we should confidently conclude that it came from the Gospel of John, so similar are its thought and expressions to those of the fourth Gospel, which does not contain any part of this passage. These similarities have been sufficient for prejudiced scholars to conclude, despite the concordant testimony of the ancient documents, that the passage was added later or represents at least a generous interpolation. Unprejudiced scholars, who go back to the historical origins of the four Gospels, will see in this passage a genuine document of Jesus’ teaching, though not forgetting that from that abundant teaching the Synoptists ordinarily chose the plainer and easier parts while John purposely sought out the more elevated and difficult parts the former had omitted (§165, §169). Nevertheless, this rule has one exception right here, where the Synoptists record what John later omits, without altering at all the fact that both the Synoptists and John derive from the historical Jesus.<sup>1779</sup>

#### THE GOOD SAMARITAN

438. During this period of travel about Judea, probably shortly after the return of the seventy-two disciples, Jesus was approached by a doctor of the Law who wanted a clearer idea of Jesus’ views on certain fundamental points. There was so much being said about the Galilean Rabbi that the doctor was anxious to learn the truth and put him to the test (*ekpeiraxwn auton*). Hence, he asked him simply: “Master, what must I do to gain eternal life?” Jesus was glad of the question and he replied with other, pointed queries to lead the man gently to his own answer, as Socrates used to do. Therefore, he asked: “What is written in the Law? How dost thou read?” And the man answered that it is written we must love God with all our strength and our neighbor as ourselves. To love God was the first and most solemn precept which every faithful Israelite recalled daily when he recited the Shema’ (§66),



and Jesus, as a faithful Israelite, heartily approved the answer: "Thou hast answered rightly; do this and thou shalt live!"

But there was no passage in the Law which linked the two precepts of love of God and love of neighbor; and in any case, there was still the uncertain meaning of the term "neighbor," namely, the doubt as to whether it referred only to relatives and friends or also to all one's countrymen and coreligionists, or whether indeed by the wildest stretch of the imagination it was also to be extended to one's enemies, the foreigners, the uncircumcised and idolaters (note 119). Among all these people who was the Israelite's true *re<sup>a</sup>* (neighbor)? Was it possible that every one of them without distinction was a *re<sup>a</sup>*? The doctor here showed that his question had been well considered; what he was after was precisely the answer to this problem. Hence, "wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus: 'And who is my neighbor?'" Jesus answered him with a parable.

"A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell in with robbers, who after both stripping him and beating him went their way, leaving him half-dead."

The distance from Jerusalem to Jericho by the modern road is twenty-five miles, but in ancient times it was somewhat shorter because the last stretch of the highway now takes a longer turn to accommodate the traffic. The man "was going down" from Jerusalem to Jericho because the road is almost a continuous descent, the difference in altitude between the two cities being about 3000 feet. From about the fifth mile beyond Jerusalem almost to the gates of Jericho, the road travels through regions which are entirely uninhabited, mountainous, and often impassable. Hence in every age it has been infested by robbers since it is practically impossible to drive them out of the various hidden dens and shelters which line the roadside and it is so very easy for them to disappear completely after a holdup. Today the militia policing the road has been increased.<sup>178</sup> In the time of the Byzantines and Crusaders its headquarters was the *Khan Hathrur*, a massive structure about twelve miles from Jerusalem, which besides protecting the traveler from highwaymen, would also offer him shelter for the night.

Dangerous as it was, the road was well traveled for it was the only one connecting Jerusalem and the greater part of Judea with the fertile and populous plain of Jericho and with Transjordan beyond.

439. Our assaulted traveler, then, is lying in the middle of the road, bruised, beaten, and stunned, unable to help himself and forced to await the merciful assistance of some other wayfarer. Now, "as it happened, a certain priest was going down the same way; and when he saw him he passed by. And likewise, a Levite also, when he was near the place and saw him, passed by." Evidently both the priest and the Levite have just finished their turn of service in the Temple (§54) and are returning home to Jericho or its vicinity. Then a third traveler comes along. "But a certain Samaritan as he journeyed came upon him, and seeing him, was moved with compassion. And he went up to him and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine. And setting him on his own beast, he brought him to an inn and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper and said: Take care of him; and whatever more thou spendest, I, on my way back, will repay thee."

The Samaritan was perhaps a merchant on his way to buy stock in the district of Jericho and so would be returning in a short while. He was also well off because he was traveling on his own beast. The pity he immediately felt for the unfortunate man prompted him to give him the best care he could in that lonely place. He applied to his wounds the usual medicines of the time, oil to soothe and wine to disinfect, and he improvised bandages to bind them up. He then placed the unconscious victim on his own beast and, holding him on as best he could, he took him to the inn.

The latter was certainly the caravan stopover (§242) on that particular route. It was perhaps situated on the site of the modern Khan Hathrur, an old name for which was also *Qal 'at ed-Damm*, "Castle of Blood," from the red color of the ferriferous rock in that region but easily suggestive of the blood continually being shed along the highway; hence the other common name for it today is the "Inn of the Good Samaritan."<sup>179</sup> The two silver denarii, or about fifty cents, were sufficient to provide care for the wounded man for several days. In any case, if the sum fell short the Samaritan promised to reimburse the innkeeper.

440. The parable was finished. The doctor of the Law had asked who his neighbor was, and Jesus closes the parable by making him answer his own question: "Which of these three, in thy opinion, proved himself neighbor to him who fell among the robbers?" The doctor naturally answered: "He who took pity on him." And Jesus said to him: "Go and do thou also in like manner."

Note the apparent discrepancy between the doctor's question ("Who is my neighbor?") and Jesus' answer ("Do thou also in like manner!"). It is a discrepancy in form only. The doctor is still within the realm of pure ideas; Jesus comes down to the realm of fact, because the most beautiful ideas in the world are nothing but words if they are not realized in actual life. "Life is the touchstone of words," and the most beautiful words become effective "only when they are preceded and followed by a life of unselfishness and sacrifice."<sup>180</sup> That is why when the doctor wants to know who his neighbor is, Jesus pictures for him one who acts like a neighbor and admonishes him to follow that example.

In the parable, the official "neighbors" of the wounded man were above all others the priest and the Levite, but the fine ideal failed to materialize. The Samaritan was in no way the neighbor of the wounded man officially, yet here the ideal found complete and unexpected fulfillment. The two ministers of the national religion do not feel the least flutter of pity for their gasping countryman; the Samaritan, an execrated foreigner, does for the dying man what he would have done for his own mother and father. Of the three, only the Samaritan behaves as a neighbor (real); hence any man, of any race or creed whatever, can be a neighbor because he can act as a neighbor.

#### MARTHA AND MARY; THE PARABLE OF PRAYER

441. In the course of his journeyings, Jesus reached the immediate vicinity of Jerusalem and entered a village Luke does not name, where two sisters, Mary and Martha, received him into their home. Since they are the sisters of Lazarus, whom John also mentions (11:1 ff.), the unnamed village must be Bethany. This coincides with the setting of the whole account, because Bethany is on the treacherous highway from Jerusalem to Jericho and therefore, if the parable of the Good Samaritan was recited shortly before the arrival at Bethany, it was inspired by the very places through which Jesus was traveling.

Martha seems to be the manager of the hospitable home, which Jesus had undoubtedly visited before. Probably she was the older of the two sisters, who may have been orphans. She is not called Martha (in Aramaic *lady*) for nothing, for she sees to everything that can make a worthy welcome for their revered guest and friend. Their brother Lazarus does not figure in this episode at all nor is he even mentioned; was he perhaps already ill of the malady which a few months later led to his four-day sojourn in the tomb (§489)? It is

not impossible but we do not know. As for Mary, she takes advantage of her sister's assiduous busyness to sit quietly at the feet of Jesus. Since the good Martha is taking care of everything, the younger sister is free to listen to those words which entrance the multitudes and change men's hearts. Martha is bustling about the room, and she too is trying to hear Jesus' words, but she can catch only a few crumbs because she has so much to do. Hence, at a certain point, a touch of affectionate envy — or better emulation — toward her sister as well as their familiarity with Jesus, who is a friend of the family, embolden her to speak her mind. And she came up and said: "Lord, is it no concern of thine that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her therefore to help me!" Martha, the good housewife and the devoted admirer of Jesus, merely points out that the two of them together could dispatch these little domestic tasks much more quickly and then both could enjoy the Master's words in peace and quiet. Jesus, with the same frankness but with reference to a much loftier idea, replies: "Martha, Martha, thou art anxious and troubled about many things, while there is need of only a few, or of only one (*oligwn de estin creia h enoz*). Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her."

The material "things" about which the good Martha was concerned were indeed "many" but they could be reduced to only a "few," given the frugality of Jesus and the disciples with him; and even these few things were negligible compared with the "one," only, which was spiritual and the goal of all Jesus' works. Had he not admonished them in the Sermon on the Mount that the kingdom of God was to be sought first, with the certainty that everything else would be added? That was the "good part" which Mary had chosen.

442. Immediately after the episode of Bethany, Luke records the teaching of the Lord's Prayer, which Matthew included instead in the Sermon on the Mount. As we have observed (§371) Luke's arrangement seems the more probable historically because it is prefaced with the reason why Jesus gave the prayer. "And it came to pass as he was praying in a certain place, that when he ceased, one of his disciples said to him: Lord, teach us to pray, even as John [the Baptist] also taught his disciples. — And he said to them: When you pray, say: Father, etc." But was this really the first time Jesus taught his disciples how to pray? If it was, then we must explain why Jesus, who had given these beloved disciples so many principles- for the perfection of their spiritual lives, should have neglected so important a matter as this, postponing it to the last months of his life. Or was Jesus returning here to a subject he had already

treated, explaining and confirming what he had said before? That seems more likely, and then Luke and Matthew would both be right.

If Jesus taught the Lord's Prayer again shortly after the episode in Bethany, then it must also have been somewhere in the vicinity. In the fourth century the near-by Mount of Olives was pointed out as the place where Jesus used to teach his disciples, but only toward the ninth century is it definitely stated that he taught the Lord's Prayer there. In 1345, Nicolo da Poggibonsi wrote: . . . "Go to the Mount of Olives; and on the right side, above the road, there is a wall, and above it a church, which now is fallen into ruin so that there is nothing left but the pavement. Below the wall there is a cistern, and toward the west, on the wall, there is a great stone, on which could be seen written the Our Father entire. And there the noble Jesus Christ composed the Our Father and gave it to the Apostles" (*Libro d'Oltamare*, I, p. 165).

Today in the renovated church of Eleona near the peak of the Mount of Olives, the first Christian prayer is similarly to be found inscribed in the language of every people under the sun.

443. Having taught them the formula, Jesus proceeded to illustrate particularly the most important qualities of prayer, persistence and confidence. Prayer, according to Jesus, must be so insistent and tenacious as to seem almost petulant. And a little parable he gives in illustration is a lovely example of Palestinian petulance.

In a certain village there live two friends one of whom is unexpectedly visited late at night by an acquaintance on a journey who wants to stay with him. It is easy enough to prepare a place to sleep for him; but the traveler is hungry too, and how is he to be fed when all the bread in the house was eaten up at supper? There is nothing to do but go and borrow some; but where? It is late and everyone is asleep. There is nothing to do but go and bother a friend; it is already midnight but he will not mind and will do this little favor. In fact, the man goes to his friend's house and begins to knock loudly on the door: Wake up! Wake up! "Lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has just come to me from a journey, and I have nothing to set before him!" The other man, so rudely awakened, considers this a fine imposition: — Don't bother me! The door is already locked and my children and I are in bed! I can't get up! — But if the man outside refuses to be discouraged by that first rebuke and keeps up his knocking and shouting, then his friend will finally give in, if not out of friendship, then certainly to stop that nuisance. And Jesus concludes: "And I

say to you, ask, and it shall be given to you; seek, and you shall find; knock, and it shall be opened to you.”

So much for the persistence of prayer. But what moral principle is to nourish that persistence? What is the source of the confidence that we shall be heard? And Jesus illustrates this point too with a few practical examples: “But if one of you asks his father for a loaf, will he hand him a stone? or for a fish, will he for a fish hand him a serpent? or if he asks for an egg, will he hand him a scorpion?” (*Luke* 11:12.) (As a matter of fact, the huge scorpions of Palestine have a white and oval-shaped abdomen, so that if they are turned over on their backs they look like eggs.) This is the conduct of earthly fathers, then, and it becomes the *terminus a minori* for Jesus’ comparison: “Therefore if you, evil as you are, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your father in heaven give good things to those who ask him?” (*Matt.* 7:11.)

#### THE CURE OF THE DEMONIAK; BLASPHEMY OF THE PHARISEES; THE PRAISE OF MARY; THE SIGN OF JONAS -

444. In Luke’s narrative the instruction on prayer is followed by the cure of a dumb man possessed of a devil (*Luke* 11:14 ff.). Matthew records the same incident (12:22 ff.) but in his account the demoniac is blind as well as dumb (cf. St. Augustine, *De cons. evangelist.*, II, 37). The discussion with the Pharisees after the cure is also in Mark (3:22), where it occurs during the visit of Jesus’ relatives (§345). Luke’s order, which records both cure and discussion during this sojourn in Judea, seems preferable to that in the other two Synoptics, which set it earlier.<sup>181</sup>

Jesus, then, publicly cured a dumb (and blind) demoniac who had been brought to him. Among those present were several Scribes from Jerusalem and some Pharisees. They did not deny the cure but explained it by declaring that Jesus’ power over devils was due to the fact that he himself was on such good terms with the prince of devils, Beelzebub, and was acting on his authority. In ancient times this name had been *Ba’al zebub*, “Baal [god] of the flies,” and it had denoted a Philistine divinity of Accaron (cf. 2 [4] *Kings* 1:2 ff.); later it indicated an object of idolatrous worship in general and was altered slightly to *Ba’al zebul*, “Baal of dung,” the highly disparaging epithet for all idols and their worship. Jesus, now, is supposed to be on friendly terms with this prince Beelzebub.

Jesus answered the insult in a way the Scribes and Pharisees relished least, that is, he invited them to a little calm and objective reasoning. Appealing to contemporary Jewish angelology (§78), he observed that the kingdom of Satan was compact and hierarchically constituted, and that if it were divided within itself it would fall to ruin. — How then can you, Scribes and Pharisees, assert that I drive out Satan in the name of Satan? In that case, his kingdom would be divided against itself and would fall. After all, you Scribes and Pharisees also have your exorcists; well, ask them if it is possible to drive out Satan in the name of Satan, and they will judge the calumny you have spoken against me. If, then, I cast out devils in the name of God, and cast them out personally with so much ease, and if I also empower my disciples to cast them out, all this shows that something quite extraordinary is taking place among you, namely, that the “kingdom of God has come upon you.” But you do not see this because you do not want to see; and before the radiance of the light, you obstinately shut your eyes. This is a direct sin against the Holy Spirit, who is the source of light to you; it means that you are blocking the roads of salvation which God has laid out for you and you are vitiating his plans. Take heed, therefore, because “every kind of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven to men; but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him; but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit it will not be forgiven him, either in this world or in the world to come.” Whoever does not wish to open the eyes of his soul to the light of the Spirit remains in darkness for eternity. Nor is it enough to open them for a moment; it is necessary to keep them open always, because Satan, driven out once, returns to assault, and take renewed possession of, his former domain.

(Figure 57, Figure 58, Figure 59, Figure 60)

445. Among those present at this discussion there were also a number of people friendly to Jesus, and from among them rises a woman’s cry: “Blessed is the womb that bore thee, and the breasts that nursed thee!” This truly motherly exclamation is recorded only by Luke (§144). Jesus accepted her blessing but at the same time sublimated it: “Rather, blessed are they who hear the word of God and keep it.” This was substantially the same answer that he had given those who told him his mother and brethren were waiting to speak with him (§345).

446. And the discussion, after the woman’s cry, began anew. Some of the Scribes and Pharisees declared almost with a certain condescension, that they



were disposed to recognize Jesus' mission, but naturally they wanted proofs, "signs"; the miracles Jesus had thus far wrought would not quite do. Some "sign" with the rabbinic stamp of approval was necessary, some event to take place at an established time and place as if at the touch of a magic wand; and it would be all the better, of course, if some meteor could be arranged to come flashing down the heavens. Substantially the same request had been made of Jesus a short time before by other Pharisees (§392).

This time, too, Jesus refused to satisfy them, and he added a number of other statements besides: "An evil and adulterous generation demands a sign, and no sign shall be given it but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For even as Jonas was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (*Matt.* 12:38-41). The expression "day and night" in rabbinic usage meant the full cycle of twenty-four hours, or any part of such a cycle.<sup>182</sup> So Jesus here announces that the Son of Man will be in the heart of the earth during three complete or partial periods of twenty-four hours, and that then he will come forth again like Jonas from the fish. Since the Pharisees reject the other signs and demand one under special conditions, let them accept this "sign of Jonas," which largely fulfills their requisites. It will take place at a pre-established time, namely, at the time of the death of the Son of Man. Though he will not descend from the opened heavens where the angels of power have their dwelling, he will instead rise from the closed abyss where dwell the helpless dead (§79). Finally, the sign will not represent a prideful manifestation of personal power because the Son of Man will then have ended his present controversies and will be in the heart of the earth, but instead it will represent the triumph of an idea, as the adventure of Jonas represented the triumph of "repentance" among the inhabitants of Nineve. "The men of Nineve will rise up in [the day of] the judgment with this generation and will condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonas, and behold, a greater than Jonas is here." The Queen of Sheba will also condemn them on that day, for she came from the ends of the earth to wonder at the wisdom of Solomon (I [3] *Kings* 10:1 ff.); "and behold a greater than Solomon is here."

The Pharisees had no difficulty understanding the allusion to the triple "day and night" to be spent in the heart of the earth. As soon as Jesus dies, they run to Pilate and request him to take the proper measures in time, for they remember "how that deceiver [Jesus] said while he was yet alive: After three days I will rise again" (*Matt.* 27:63; §619). Hence, they reject the sign of Jonas



which fulfilled so well the conditions they required. They run with petitions to Pilate for fear that the new Jonas may rise from the heart of the earth, for fear that their blindness may be illumined, for fear that they will no longer be able to blaspheme the Holy Spirit.

## JESUS AT DINNER AT THE HOME OF A PHARISEE; DENUNCIATIONS AND WARNINGS

447. Evidently the conflict between the Pharisees and Jesus was growing deeper and more serious. The former could not forgive him for that independence from their legal formalism which he claimed on a thousand occasions and proved with his miracles. And Jesus, for his part, never ceased to address the sternest rebukes to the spiritual vacuousness clothed in Pharisaic formalism, to the stiff-necked obstinacy and overweening arrogance of those men of the Law. Besides, he showed he had deeply felt the insult they hurled at him when they called him the friend and minister of Beelzebub.

Nevertheless, shortly after the controversy just described, a Pharisee invited Jesus to dinner. We do not know whether he did this out of a kind of sympathy for the much-discussed Rabbi or from a desire to entangle him in treacherous questions; in any case, there was no one more skillful than a Pharisee in saving appearances and distinguishing theory from practice. Jesus accepted the invitation, and having entered the banquet chamber he went straight to his divan until the dinner should be served. Such conduct was extremely reprehensible to the Pharisees' way of thinking. Jesus had just come in from the street and from contact with the crowd of *am ha'ares* (§40); how could he presume to take food without having first performed the prescribed ablutions? The Pharisee who was his host was disgusted. In his heart he was thinking that his guest, far from being an authoritative Rabbi, was nothing but a bur — one of those 'rustics' to whom Judah the Holy would not give a crust of bread even if he saw him dying of hunger (§40); and yet he had been simple enough to invite him to dinner. The Pharisee's thoughts were clearly legible in his face, and Jesus read them. And a tense dispute followed:

"Now you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but within you are full of robbery and wickedness. Foolish ones! did not he who made the outside make the inside too? Nevertheless, give that which remains [the contents of those receptacles — *ta enonta*] as alms and behold, all things are clean to you! — But woe to you Pharisees! because you pay tithes on mint and rue and every herb, and disregard justice and the love of God. But these

things you ought to have done, while not leaving the others undone. — Woe to you, Pharisees! because you love the front seats in the synagogues (§63) and greetings in the market place! — Woe to you! because you are like hidden tombs, over which men walk unaware.” It is quite reasonable to suppose that at this everyone stopped eating. The host and his “colleagues” (§39) probably answered as best they could, but certain teachers of the Law (§41) were also present at the dinner and they felt that they too were being rebuked at least implicitly; and so one of them said with resentment: “Master, in saying these things, thou insultest us also!” But he and his fellows also came in for their share, because the indomitable Rabbi continued: Woe to you lawyers also! because you load men with oppressive burdens and you yourselves with one of your fingers do not touch the burdens. — Woe to you! for you build the tombs of the prophets, whereas your fathers killed them. So, then you are witnesses and approve the deeds of your fathers; for they indeed killed them and you build their tombs.<sup>183</sup>.... Woe to you lawyers because you have taken away the key of knowledge; you have not entered yourselves and those who were entering you have hindered!” (*Luke* 11:39-52.)

448. These invectives are aimed at the prevailing practice not at the theory, at the generality and not at individuals. The rabbis, at least after the Christian era, taught on more than one occasion that doctrine must be accompanied by personal example and that it was a blameworthy thing to be more severe with others than with oneself.<sup>184</sup> As for actual practice, the prudent historian has only to refer to the very judgment of those concerned, that is, to the already quoted passage from the Talmud which describes seven types of Pharisee (§38). Not all the Scribes and Pharisees, collectively or individually, merited those invectives; there is no question about that. But Jesus is aiming not at individuals but at the generality, and this did deserve them without any doubt. When Jesus rebukes them for building tombs for the prophets, it is not to censure a work in itself pious. His rebuke is aimed rather at the fact that their piety stops with the material act, while from the spiritual point of view the conduct of those building tombs for the prophets was a continuation of the work of their fathers, who had killed them. The sons showed by their works that they had not only the blood of their fathers in their veins —they had inherited their spirit as well (cf. *Matt.* 23:29 ff.). The lawyers and Scribes in particular had arrogated to themselves the monopoly of the Mosaic Law, and they claimed that they alone had the key to this ivory tower. But it was a broken and rusty key, and could barely admit them to the outer court, called

“the dead letter,” while it could not open at all, either for its possessors or others, the inner courts of the tower, which were called “living charity.”

The result of that embattled banquet was exactly what should have been expected. When Jesus had left there the “Pharisees and the lawyers began to press him hard (*deinw eneein*) and provoke (*apostomatiein*) him to speak on many things, setting traps for him and plotting to seize upon something out of his mouth, that they might accuse him.” The old conflict, therefore, was becoming more and more intense, and it was clear now that the end must be in sight.

449. Jesus took occasion from what had happened further to admonish his followers. The crowd at this particular time had grown so great that some were in danger of being trampled (12:1). Luke here has Jesus pronounce a discourse, almost all the elements of which are to be found in *Matthew* but not all in the same context. — Let his disciples beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy (§393). No disciple is greater than his teacher; if Jesus has been called Beelzebub (§444), his disciples cannot expect any better treatment (*Matt.* 10:25). Let them speak openly and frankly nevertheless; there is nothing secret which must not be revealed, and what they have heard in secret they must preach from the housetops. They are not to fear those who can kill the body only, but not the soul; let them fear instead whoever can kill both body and soul in Gehenna. They are not to worry for their own lives, but trust to the providence of the heavenly Father, who watches over all things. The field sparrows are worth practically nothing, for they may be purchased for two as (less than a cent), and yet not one of these little creatures is forgotten by God. The disciples are to be calm and serene, therefore, for their worth is far greater than that of a multitude of sparrows, and all the hairs of their heads are numbered. Whoever shall confess the Son of Man before men, him shall the Son of Man confess before the heavenly Father and his angels; but if anyone denies him, the Son of Man shall deny him in turn. The disciples are not to worry about defending themselves when they shall be summoned to trial in the synagogues and various courts, because the Holy Spirit will teach them in that moment what they must say in their own defense.

Even this last statement betrays the revolutionary character of Jesus’ teaching (§318). Socrates had made no provision for his legal defense, either, when he went before the tribunal and came out condemned to death: “This indeed is the way things are. I have come before the tribunal for the first time,

at the age of seventy years; I am therefore unskilled in the speech of this place, which is foreign to me" (*Apologia*, I). The Athenian philosopher said this with complete candor and perfect sincerity, but his discourse — at least in the form in which it has come down to us — is arranged according to the classical norms of forensic oratory, with an exordium, proposition, refutation of the charges, peroration, and counterproposal to the penalty. Nor did he speak by virtue of another's aid, but on his own authority only. It was Socrates who spoke and not his usual daimonion (§194). His mysterious genius of inspiration, though it had whispered within him on other occasions to prevent him from doing what he should not, did not intervene at all on the morning of the trial: "To me indeed, O judges — and in calling you judges I mean to call you rightly — there has happened something to be wondered at. In truth, the inspiration of the daimonion, which is usual with me, has always been very frequent in all the time that has passed, and it would object even in very little things if I was about to do something unjustly. But now instead . . . the sign of the god did not object either when I went out of the house this morning or when I mounted here in the tribunal, or at any part of the discourse at anything I was about to say; and yet in other discourses it has stopped me in the middle of many phrases while I was speaking: now, however, it has not objected at all to anything that I have done or said in this affair" (*Apologia*, 31). A phenomenon much more important than that noted by Socrates will take place in the disciples of Jesus. In them, the Spirit will not act in a negative manner only, like the Socratic daimonion, which kept him from wrong but did not prompt the right. Instead, the Spirit himself will suggest the words of defense and set an effective *apologia* on the lips of the calumniated. Hence, they can and must disregard forensic oratory.

#### A WARNING AGAINST AVARICE; THE ULTIMATE EXPECTATION

450. One day during this uncharted traveling, a certain man came to Jesus and besought him to use his authority in a question of money: "Master, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me" (*Luke* 12:13). This was a very imprudent request to make of the one who in the Sermon on the Mount had clearly distinguished between God and mammon (§331); the adequate answer could only be an invitation to abandon the mammon altogether to the one withholding it and give himself entirely to God. But Jesus did not give the adequate answer; he did not even enter into the question at all: "Man, who has appointed me a judge or arbitrator over you?" It might almost be said that

money in itself disgusted Jesus, that he shrank from soiling his hands with it even though handling it in the service of others. He will have nothing to do with the case.

The little incident is followed by various considerations on the fallacy of material goods, which Jesus illustrates with a parable. There was a certain rich man, whose harvest every year was very abundant and he concentrated all his mind on that harvest, seeking ways and means to store and preserve it. And he began to say: I shall throw down my granaries and build larger ones, and there I will conveniently store all this great harvest. Beaming with satisfaction over his plans, he gloated within himself: Be merry, for you have an abundance of good things assured to you for many years! Take your ease, eat, drink, and be merry! — But lo, God himself unexpectedly enters upon the scene, and says to the blissful rich man: Fool, this night you must die, and then whose shall be all these goods of yours? — Such is the lot, concludes Jesus, of the man “who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich as regards God.” And he continued, recalling the concept of the Sermon on the Mount: “Sell what you have and give alms. Make for yourselves purses that do not grow old, a treasure unfailing in heaven.... (§330 — *Luke 12:32-33*).

Now does all this mean communism? It is much more than communism, because it is the altruism of charity. It is precisely that complete and absolute altruism which, by virtue of a supernatural principle, provides for the material needs of others to the point of neglecting self: — Sell what you have and give alms. Modern communism, on the other hand, fails of its very essence to reflect even the least shadow of Jesus’ doctrine, because it does not recognize at all the “purses that do not grow old” and the “treasure unfailing in heaven.” That is, it lacks the supreme expectation.

451. Shortly afterward, in fact, Jesus returns to this expectation, as to the essential basis of all his teachings. Why are we to renounce riches? Why must we place our trust only in the treasure of heaven? Why is the present world no more than fleeting shadow? For answer we have Jesus’ admonitions:

Let your loins be girt about and your lamps burning [such was the garb of alert servants] at night, and you yourselves like men waiting for the master’s return from the wedding; so that when he comes and knocks, they may straightway open to him.” The master has told his servants that he was off to a wedding feast, and so he will be very late in returning home (§281). But they are extremely thoughtful and do not want him to be kept waiting even an

instant at the door; hence with loins girt and lamps lit, they keep their vigil through the nighttime, listening for the sound of his arrival. — “Blessed are those servants whom the master, on his return, shall find watching!” — Touched by their solicitude, good as he is, he will gird his own loins and make them recline at table and serve them himself. He indeed has dined at the wedding, but these matchless servants have not taken the time to prepare themselves any food, anxious as they were to be ready at any moment of their devoted waiting through the second and third watches of the night (§376).

Similarly, a prudent householder has his house watched because he does not know at what hour the thief may come and break into it. Anxious to be secure, he mistrusts every hour and watches through the entire night. Whence Jesus concludes: “You must also be ready, because at that hour that you do not expect, the Son of Man is coming.”

What is this “coming” of the Son of Man? It is the coming that will make manifest the eternal and unchanging consequence of Jesus’ teaching. He had spoken of renouncing riches, of choosing instead one’s treasure in heaven. Riches must be renounced, the present world be viewed as something fleeting as the shadows precisely because of the “coming” of the Son of Man, which shall dispel the shadow and reveal the abiding substance, melt away the accumulated riches of earth and distribute the invisible treasure of heaven, fill the expectations of those who have hoped in that “coming” and establish in eternity their lot of blessedness. “Blessed are those servants whom the master, on his return, shall find watching!”

452. Peter asked Jesus for an explanation: “Lord, art thou speaking this parable for us or for all alike?” He had been impressed with the statement that the master of the zealous servants would himself serve them as a reward, and he wanted to know if this was to be true of all or of only a few privileged souls. By way of answer Jesus presents for consideration the servants who prove negligent and unreliable and he establishes a hierarchy of duties and responsibilities for servants in general. A certain dutiful servant has been appointed to dispense food to his colleagues during his master’s absence. If he discharges this duty faithfully, the master, on his return, will reward him and make him steward of all his goods. But if instead that servant takes advantage of his master’s prolonged absence to lord it over his fellows and to spend his time eating and getting drunk and beating the manservants and the maids, the master will come home unexpectedly one day and punish him with extreme severity, while lesser penalties will fall upon the other servants in

proportion to their shortcomings. In short, there is the general principle that much will be required of him to whom much has been given; more will be demanded of him to whom more has been entrusted (*Luke 12:35-48*).

Hence at the "coming" of the Son of Man the lot of everyone will be fixed and unchanging, but that lot itself will be subject to differences and degrees. Above all, no one knows the exact time of Christ's "coming."

## THE SIGN OF CONTRADICTION; THE NECESSITY OF REPENTANCE

453. Teachings of this kind upset every human scale of values. These were not the lucubrations of Pharisaic casuists regarding eggs laid on the Sabbath (§251) or the business of washing hands and dishes before meals. This was a fire sweeping wreckage and confusion through the world of Jewish thought and it was on its way to flame through other worlds as well. Jesus recognized this, for he immediately continued: "I have come to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I but that it be kindled?" (ti qelw ei hdh anhfqh.) It is the trial of fire through which the disciples of Jesus must pass, and he himself will lead the way: "But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how distressed I am until it is accomplished!" With Jesus' figurative baptism the fire will be manifest; both are a trial, the first for Jesus personally, the second for all the earth.

Nor will the trial bring peace and harmony on earth, but war and discord. Jesus himself describes the consequences of his teaching: there will be strife and division in a family of five, and there will be three against two and two against three. The father will be divided against his son, the mother against her daughter, the mother-in-law against her daughter-in-law, and vice versa. All has been agreement and concord among them, but once the message of Jesus penetrates their hearts it brings discord in its wake, for some will bless and some will curse him (*Luke 12:49-53*). More than thirty years before, the aged Simeon in the Temple had contemplated the Infant Jesus as "the sign that will be contradicted" (§250): the person and the teaching of Jesus will be the sign of contradiction for all mankind. Here again the modern historian can easily ascertain whether these predictions of twenty centuries ago were verified in that time and in the centuries since to our own day.

Meanwhile Pharisees and Sadducees, mingling with the populace, continued to dog Jesus' steps, still trying to pick up charges against him, and he took occasion to address certain words of exhortation to them along with the people. — The days are passing and events are plunging to a climax, while



they, instead of giving thought to their supreme interests, are straining every nerve and fiber to hinder the kingdom of God. But do they not see what is happening around them? Do they not recognize the signs of the new times? The signs of the physical world they indeed recognize very easily: when in the evening they see a cloud rising in the west, they immediately remark that rain is coming; and when the south wind blows, they say it is going to be hot weather; and so, it is. But from the spiritual signs made manifest since the time of John the Baptist, can they not see, hypocrites that they are, that the time has come for spiritual regeneration and a “change of mind” (§266)? The old useless matter is to be inexorably cut away; and are there still some so blind that they do not see the change that is taking place but still must cling tenaciously to the debris? Let them open their eyes and see and judge for themselves what they must do while there yet is time (*Luke 12:54-57*).

454. Two events which occurred shortly afterward furnished the occasion for re-emphasizing these things. Since Jesus was a Galilean, people were quick to tell him of Pilate’s massacre of certain Galileans while they were offering sacrifices in the Temple (§26). Whereupon Jesus, alluding to the ancient Hebrew notion that physical calamity was invariably a punishment for moral evil (§428), answered: — Do you perhaps think that because these murdered Galileans have suffered these things, they were worse sinners than all the other men of Galilee? Quite the contrary; indeed, I say to you that “unless you repent, you will all perish in the same manner.” And he spoke also of another disaster which had occurred shortly before and also in Jerusalem. In the Siloe quarter (§428), that is, on the edge of the residential district, a tower which formed part of the city’s fortifications (recent excavations have unearthed traces of it) suddenly gave way and came crashing down, killing eighteen people. Well — proceeded Jesus — do you think that those eighteen people were more guilty than all the other dwellers in Jerusalem? Not at all; indeed, I say to you that “unless you repent, you will all perish in the same manner.”

What is the end that threatens the impenitent? We note that both examples refer to a violent death, for Pilate’s victims died by the sword and the others were crushed beneath the tower, two very common forms of death in the wars and sieges of the time. Together with death from starvation they strew the pages of Josephus’ account of the siege of Jerusalem in *Wars of the Jews*. Hence the threat is of death mid the violence common to wars, while in the previous parables of the servants awaiting their master’s coming, there has been no hint whatever of such things. The parables, in fact, spoke of an



event that was unavoidable though the time of its occurrence was not specified, namely, the time of the "coming" of the Son of Man, who will determine the eternal destiny of each individual. Here, on the other hand, the violent end can be avoided; it is enough to repent. Jesus' words clearly outline a dilemma: Either you will not repent and then you will all perish as those who have died in these two disasters, or you will repent and thereby save yourselves from violent death.

This is clearly confirmed in the brief parable with which Jesus continues. A man had in his vineyard a fig tree which never bore any fruit. So, he said to his vine dresser: For three years now, I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and I do not find any. Cut it down, therefore, because it bears no fruit and makes the ground around it sterile besides! —But the vine dresser interposed: Master, let it stay this year too. I will dig around the roots and manure it and then we shall see. If it gives fruit, well and good; otherwise, after this last test, you will cut it down and throw it away! (*Luke 13:6-8.*)

The figure is self-evident. As we have remarked before, the tree's three years of barrenness seem an allusion to the length of Jesus' public life (§178), for he was now in his third year of preaching. In any case, it is clear that the tree represents Judaism, the master of the vineyard God, and the vine dresser Jesus himself. And so here is the same threat again; in this last delay, the tree either will bear fruit, or it will be cut down with the blows of an ax.

## THE STOOPED WOMAN; THE MAN WITH DROPSY; THE PARABLE OF THE BANQUETS

455. Did these threats produce any effect? Did the fire which Jesus came to cast on the earth begin to burn? In other words, was there taking place that "change of mind" which rejected the debris of formalism and sought the new spirit?

Luke does not give us a direct answer to these questions but there seems to be one implicit in the anecdote he tells us next, wherein we see how rabbinic formalism weighed on the spirit like a leaden mantle and was not even scratched by Jesus' threatening words. It is the episode of the stooped woman, cured on the Sabbath (*Luke 13:10-17*), and the Evangelist, who takes delight in coupling incidents, records shortly afterward the other very similar scene of the man with dropsy, also cured on the Sabbath (*14:1-6*). One episode logically suggests the other, and together they seem a discouraged, yet repeated answer to the questions we have just asked, so it is convenient to

consider them together. It is evident, however, if we compare Luke with the other Evangelists on this point, that the two events do not belong together chronologically; the woman was cured in Judea a little before the Feast of the Dedication, and the man shortly after it, probably in Transjordan.

While Jesus was traveling through Judea, therefore, he went one Sabbath to a certain synagogue and began to preach. Among those present was a woman who had been ill for eighteen years — perhaps from arthritis or some form of paralysis — and she was so bent over that she could not even lift her head to look up. When he saw her, Jesus called her to him and said: “Woman, thou art delivered from thy infirmity.” And he laid his hands upon her. On the instant she straightened and began to thank and glorify God. The ruler of the synagogue presiding at the services (§64) was extremely angry at this performance on the Sabbath, but since he did not quite dare to tackle Jesus directly, he vented his feelings on the crowd, scolding them angrily: “There are six days in which one ought to work; on these therefore come and be cured, and not on the Sabbath!” The miraculous cure meant nothing at all to this zealous worthy, but the Sabbath — which, after all, had not actually been violated — meant everything. Jesus, therefore, answered him and all others of like mentality: “Hypocrites! does not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or ass from the manger, and lead it forth to water?” Truly, tying and untying a knot in a rope were included in the thirty- nine categories of prohibitions for the Sabbath (§70), but in actual practice, provision was made in one way or another for taking care of domestic animals.<sup>185</sup> This much having been granted, Jesus argues *a fortiori*: “And this woman, daughter of Abraham as she is, whom Satan has bound, lo, for eighteen years, ought not she to have been loosed from this bond on the Sabbath?” Satan was commonly held responsible for ills of every sort (§78). What day could possibly be more suitable than the Sabbath, the day consecrated to God, to demonstrate the triumph of God over Satan, of Good over Evil? Hence, Jesus more than any of them, understood the true spirit of the Sabbath, having wrought on precisely that day a victory of God over Satan.

456. The crowd wholeheartedly approved Jesus’ reasoning; as for his adversaries, Luke says they “were put to shame,” but that does not mean they agreed with the logic of it. The rabbinic observance of the Sabbath was, as we have seen, one of the pillars which must never fall (§431). The fact that miracles and prodigies belied that observance meant nothing whatever; let

the facts be ignored and the Holy Spirit blasphemed (§444, §446), provided the Pharisaic Sabbath remained inviolate.

The parallel incident takes place, not in a synagogue, but in the home of a prominent Pharisee who has invited Jesus to dine with him. It is again the Sabbath and the Pharisees are on the alert as usual. At this point a certain man suffering from dropsy presents himself to Jesus, attracted perhaps by his fame as a miracle-worker and hoping to be cured. Jesus turns to the lawyers and the Pharisees present and asks: "Is it lawful [or no] to cure on the Sabbath?" They gave him no answer though many aspects of the question had been considered and decided by the doctors of the Law (§71). As the silence continued, Jesus drew the man to him, cured him, and let him go. Then he said to his hushed audience: "Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fall into a pit, and will not immediately draw him up on the Sabbath?" — But, according to Luke, he did not receive any answer this time either.

At first reading, the two episodes seem very similar, except that in the latter incident Jesus' adversaries are not acrimonious and confine themselves to keeping silent. Hence, we are tempted to conclude that the lawyers and Pharisees of the Transjordan, further away from Jerusalem, were a little less fanatic and bigoted than those of Judea, who were under the direct influence of the capital.

457. This seems further evidenced by the fact that the banquet lasted a long time and that in the course of it many questions were treated without rancor or resentment, beginning with the matter of the first seats.

These good Pharisees would not have been Pharisees if there had not been some question among them as to who should have the places of honor next to the host: — That is my divan! — No, it is mine, for I am more worthy! — You more worthy! What do you think you are? — I am older and more learned than you! Yield me this place! — And so on. For people whose lives were fashioned of externals, such questions of etiquette were of prime importance. Jesus took occasion to comment on the arguing, and to confound all parties concerned he showed them how not even their vanity was shrewd enough to assure them a real social triumph: "When thou art invited to a wedding feast, do not recline in the first place, lest perhaps one more distinguished than thou have been invited by him, and he who invited thee and him come and say to thee: Make room for this man. — And then thou begin with shame to take the last place. But when thou art invited, go and recline in the last place; that

when he who invited thee comes in, he may say to thee: Friend, go up higher! — Then thou wilt be honored in the presence of all who are at table with thee. For everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted.”

The guests’ vanity having been thus put to shame by the spectacle of their very amateurishness, there remained the question of the host’s attitude and that of hosts in general, too often motivated by vainglory and considerations of material advantage. Besides, both would profit from the lesson in a much higher sphere by being made to think of the norms and advantages governing a spiritual banquet. And so, turning to the host, Jesus continued: “When thou givest a dinner or a supper, do not invite thy friends, or thy brethren, or thy relatives, or thy rich neighbors, lest perhaps they also invite thee in return, and a recompense be made to thee. But when thou givest a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind; and blessed shalt thou be, because they have nothing to repay thee with; for thou shalt be repaid at the resurrection of the just.” Intimately akin to this principle is the logion, not in the four Gospels, which St. Paul attributes to Jesus: “It is a more blessed thing to give than to receive” (§98). The common basis for all these norms is, as always, the fundamental principle of the Sermon on the Mount, the principle of a supernatural, not an earthy, sanction (§319). Here it is called the “resurrection of the just,” elsewhere the “kingdom of heaven” or the “coming” of the Son of Man, but it is substantially the same foundation stone, which supports the whole structure of Jesus’ teaching and without which the structure would crumble and the teaching would have no meaning. The pagans of whom St. Paul speaks were perfectly reasonable and logical men, for since they denied this supernatural foundation (cf. Acts. 17:32), they found the teaching itself “foolishness” (mwria, 1 Cor. 1:23).

There has been no change of position down to our day and Jesus’ doctrine is still labeled foolish or divine according to whether its cornerstone is rejected or accepted.

458. The mention of the supernatural reward had lifted the guests — as Jesus intended — to the thought of a spiritual banquet. And one of them exclaimed: “Blessed is he who shall feast in the kingdom of God!” Jesus took the opportunity to describe the kingdom of God as a banquet, in a parable which is recorded for us both by Luke (14:16-24) and by Matthew (22:2-14). There are several incidental differences between the two versions but the chief discrepancy is the addition of a fairly long circumstance in *Matthew*

(22:11-14) which has no parallel in *Luke*. Did Jesus speak this parable only once and in the longer form recorded by Matthew, which was then shortened by Luke? Or did he speak it as Luke gives it and did Matthew add to it part of another, similar parable? Or did he recite the same parable more than once and in various ways? There has been a great deal of discussion on these questions, and the most plausible answer is that Jesus used the figure of the banquet several different times — as the rabbis did, too, for that matter — to illustrate somewhat different points according to the circumstances in which he was speaking. Matthew's version probably represents the fusion of two such banquet parables: one (22:2-10) is substantially the same as that reported by Luke; the other (22:11-14) is only the end of another parable, the first part of which is now lacking because in the current redaction the similar parable reported also by Luke seemed adequately to take its place. Luke's account of the parable is as follows.

459. A certain man gave a great supper and invited many guests. As the time drew near, he sent his servant to bid them come because everything was ready, but they all began to find excuses. One said: I have bought some land and must go out and have a look at it. Please excuse me! — Another said: I have bought five yoke of oxen and I must go try them. Do excuse me! — A third gave him short shrift: I have married a wife and I cannot even think about it! — The servant reported these answers to his master, who became very angry and ordered him to go through the streets and market places of the city and bring back to the supper the poor, the lame, the halt, and the blind! The servant obeyed and then reported: All those unfortunates have come, but there is still room. So, the master sent him out into the country to bring in all whom he found in the byways and hedges, for he was determined that his house should be filled with these poor people and that not one of the invited guests should taste his supper.

It is clear that the banquet symbolizes the kingdom of God, the reluctant guests are the Jews, and the poor who take their places are the Gentiles. This is even clearer in Matthew's version.<sup>186</sup>

Luke's account ends here, but in Matthew we have still another scene. When the banquet chamber is filled with the poor and the wretched, the host (in *Matthew*, he is a king who has prepared a wedding feast for his son) enters to see his guests. Suddenly he notices one among them who has not put on the prescribed wedding garment (which, however, has not been previously

mentioned). And the king says to him: Friend, why have you entered here without your wedding garment? — But the man is silent with confusion and shame. Then the king commands his servants: Bind him hand and foot and throw him into the darkness outside, where there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth! — And Jesus concludes: “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The end of this unique passage ceases to be figurative and refers directly to the true moral of the parable (“weeping and gnashing of teeth”). It adds, besides, a new element to the parable common to both Luke and Matthew, and that is that not all the new guests are worthy of the banquet but only those who have on the wedding garment. Not all the Gentiles, then, who have taken the seats of the Jews in the kingdom of the Messiah are worthy of the kingdom, but only those who have the proper spiritual dispositions. Jesus had, in fact, warned Nicodemus that “unless a man be born again of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God” (§288). This rebirth of the soul is an essential requisite for being admitted legitimately to the messianic banquet.

The exclamations of Jesus' fellow guest — “Blessed is he who shall feast in the kingdom of God!” — had also been a question which sought somehow to know just who was to enjoy that blessedness. Jesus answered the implied question by showing who would refuse and who would accept the messianic invitation, and who, among those who accepted, would prove worthy, and who unworthy.

## CHAPTER XX: From the Last Feast of Dedication to the Last Journey Through Judea

### THE FEAST OF THE DEDICATION

460. ABOUT two months and a half were consumed by the events we have just described, namely, the interval between the Feast of Tabernacles (§416) and the Feast of the Dedication of the Temple (§77). Since John (10:22) tells us explicitly that Jesus was present at this last feast, it is natural to link it with one of the lesser journeys barely hinted at in Luke (§415.). It was, then, the end of December of the year 29; Jesus interrupted his travels through Judea to go to the capital and there continue his ministry throughout the patriotic “festival of lights.”

His presence in the city was immediately noticed. The recent discussions regarding his missions and his journeys throughout the surrounding district of Judea had made the Galilean Rabbi the object of special attention and vigilance on the part of the supreme authorities of Judaism. One day during the octave of the feast, in fact, while Jesus lingered in the Temple, teaching and walking in Solomons Porch (§48), perhaps because of the rain —the precise John says particularly that “it was winter” —his usual adversaries, the “Jews,” confronted him and said: “How long dost thou keep us in suspense? If thou art the Christ [Messiah] tell us openly!” In form the question is not only a friendly one; it is almost an entreaty and a prayer. One might be led to believe that all they were waiting for was Jesus’ frank declaration that he was the expected Messiah before they gave themselves to him body and soul. But the question was a trap: Jesus’ adversaries were waiting for that open declaration only that they might twist it into an accusation against him and bring him to his ruin, as the facts soon proved.

Jesus himself reveals the treacherous nature of the query, for his reply is substantially the statement they were expecting but not in the form they desired. He declares who he is but without springing the trap: “I tell you and you do not believe. The works that I do in the name of my Father, these bear witness concerning me. But you do not believe because you are not of my sheep. My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me. And I give them everlasting life; and they shall never perish, neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. What my Father has given me is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch anything out of the hand of my Father. I and the

Father are one" (*en esmen*, *John* 10:25-30). His questioners had hoped Jesus would say explicitly, "I am the Messiah." Instead, he has said: Determine whether I am the Messiah from the works that I do — thereby avoiding a clear, precise affirmation as he had done before with the same adversaries during the Feast of Tabernacles (§422). The reason for this indirect answer is still the same. Anyone contemplating calmly and objectively the miracles performed by Jesus could conclude that the kingdom of God was "at hand" (§444) and that he was the Messiah, while at the same time this appeal to the miracles afforded no pretext whatever for denouncing him to the political authorities or using violence against him. If instead Jesus had plainly and explicitly asserted to these adversaries that he was the Messiah, he would have handed them the opportunity they wanted to denounce him to the Roman authorities as a political agitator, or even to use force against him directly.

461. As soon as they heard his last words, in fact, "the Jews took up stones [again] to stone him." With the adverb "again" [which occurs in the Greek text] the Evangelist deliberately recalls the similar attempt made against Jesus during the Feast of Tabernacles a few months before. On that occasion, he had declared that he was before Abraham (§423), he had described himself as the good shepherd of a faithful flock (§§432ff.), and he had learned of the Pharisees' attempt to "snatch" one of those sheep "out of his hand," namely, the man born blind whom they hunted down with questions and finally expelled from the synagogue (§430). Here he goes much further. He declares first of all that his adversaries do not believe in him because they are not of his sheep, and that these cannot be snatched out of his hand nor the hand of his Father; and the reason for this is that he "and the Father are one." Does Jesus, then, though not explicitly declaring himself the Messiah, proclaim himself God altogether?

That is the way the Jews, with impeccable logic, interpret his words, and they say so openly. Seeing them pick up the stones, Jesus asks them: "Many good works have I shown you from my Father. For which of these works do you stone me? —The Jews answered him: Not for a good work do we stone thee, but for blasphemy, and because thou, being a man, makest thyself God!" The rush to stone him was momentarily checked. In the Orient, in the shops and market places, in public and in private, people suddenly blaze with anger over nothing; they shout and gesticulate with melodramatic violence but without any tragic consequences. And so, it happened this time, and the



menacing crowd stopped to listen to Jesus' explanation: — And yet it is written in your Law: "I said you are gods" (cf. *Ps.* 81 (82), 6, Hebrew). If God himself addresses men as gods and does so in the Holy Scriptures, the testimony of which is inviolable, why do you accuse me of blasphemy because I have said that I am the Son of God when the Father himself has sanctified me and sent me into the world? In any case, observe my works; if I do not perform the works of my Father, do not believe me, but if I do perform them, then let yourselves be convinced by them and you will recognize that "the Father is in me and I in the Father" (*John* 10:34-48).

In the passage in Scripture cited as proof, the term "gods" is used loosely to mean human judges who represent the authority of God in the courts. Nevertheless, it was an effective argument *ad hominem* to silence Jesus' adversaries with their own respect for the Scriptures. If the Scriptures called men "gods," the Jews could not charge with blasphemy one who, with much greater reason, applied the term to himself. Here again, Jesus did not come down to particulars, which would only have added fuel to the fire; but the inculpating phrase, "I and the Father are one," he defined by asserting "the Father is in me and I in the Father." Far from explaining or qualifying, this was a confirmation of his previous words.

This time, too, the Jews understood him perfectly, and their fury burst into flame again: "They sought therefore [again] to seize him; and he went forth out of their hands."

These Jews were very intelligent; they understood immediately and perfectly what the Arians, three centuries later, refused to understand, namely, that these words unavoidably establish that Jesus is declaring himself equal in all things with the Father. Modern radical critics are just as intelligent as the ancient Jews, perhaps even more so. They also understand quite clearly that Jesus is declaring himself equal with the Father, but several of them — not to be outdone by the ancient Arians — are sure that he never spoke the words in question at all; these are merely a theoretical exposition of Christian dogma for which we are indebted to the author of the fourth Gospel. The "historical" proofs for their claim lie solely in the certainty with which they make it and the "impossibility" that Jesus should ever have said anything like that. It is the same procedure they apply to the episode of Caesarea Philippi (§398), for this particular destructive criticism is as uniform and monotonous in its dialectic methods as it is poor and bare of historical arguments.

## JESUS IN TRANSJORDAN

462. Shortly after the Feast of the Dedication, or at the very beginning of the year 30, Jesus went into Transjordan (Perea) to the same district where John the Baptist had baptized (§269), and he stayed there for some time (*John* 10:40; cf. *Matt.* 19:1; *Mark* 10:1; *Luke* 13:31 ff.). From there he must have made various short missionary journeys through the northern districts of Judea, finally crossing Samaria and going as far as Galilee, since *Luke* (17:11) has him come from the latter direction on his last journey to Jerusalem (§414). For this period too, we are faced with the same indefiniteness regarding time and place noted before, and *Luke's* account continues to be episodic (§415.).

A certain man asks Jesus one day: "Lord, are only a few to be saved?" Christ's reply repeats the concepts of the Sermon on the Mount according to Matthew (§333): Strive to enter by the narrow gate, for many will seek in vain to enter when the master, seeing that all the invited guests have arrived, will rise and go to shut the door. Then it will be too late, and in answer to their knocking they will hear: I do not know where you are from!

The question reflected the prevailing Jewish opinion that the chosen were to be much fewer in number than the damned.<sup>187</sup> Jesus neither rejects nor approves the notion; he simply invites men to strive (*agwnixesqe*) to enter the banquet chamber because the entrance is not easy. It is true that the one asking the question is a Jew, a member of the chosen people and a countryman of Jesus; but that is no help whatever in gaining admission. In fact, Jesus continues: — When you see yourselves shut out, you will persist, saying: How does this happen? We have eaten and drunk with you, and you have taught in our market places! — And yet the answer still will be: "I do not know where you are from; depart from me you workers of iniquity" (§333). And you will remain without where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth, though you see your ancestors, Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, in the kingdom of God. Nor will your places at that banquet remain empty, for other guests, not Jews, will come from the east and the west, and the north and the south, and sit down to feast in the kingdom of God!

463. Certain Pharisees then approached Jesus and said to him in a confidential tone: "Depart and be on thy way, for Herod wants to kill thee" (*Luke* 13:31). This was Herod Antipas, the murderer of John the Baptist; since this was the Transjordan, Jesus was in his territory, hence the Pharisees' advice.

But what was the truth of the situation? Did Antipas really intend to put Jesus to death? Very probably he did not, for he could have done so easily and in secret. Rather he was beginning to be annoyed with this Galilean Rabbi who had reappeared in his territory to excite the populace and disturb the peace and whose character reminded him so much of John the Baptist whom he had killed. His victim must have constantly haunted his thoughts, continuing, as it were, to rebuke him with even greater efficacy, and the tetrarch did not want his adulterous nights further disturbed by making a victim of Jesus too. Let him leave the territory of his own will, without forcing him to use violence. But how was he to be persuaded to do this? There were the Pharisees, quite ready to render a service. If— as is probable (§292) — they had been the ones to offer their mediation in luring John the Baptist on to Antipas' territory and facilitating his capture, they now, by way of compensation, played the role of go-between in reverse by trying to persuade Jesus to go away because of the menacing shadow of death. And the Pharisees would have been glad to perform this service because once Jesus was in the district of Jerusalem, they could do what they wanted with him. It was indeed the fine cunning of the "fox."

And Jesus, knowing very well what was going on, said to these solicitous Pharisees: "Go and say to that fox: Behold, I cast out devils and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I am to end my course. Nevertheless, I must go my way today and tomorrow and the next day, for it cannot be that a prophet perish outside Jerusalem." In other words, they were to tell Antipas, the "fox," not to worry: Jesus was going to continue his miraculous activity in the tetrarch's territory and elsewhere for two more days and on the third his course would be consummated (*teleioumai*). It was to end not in Antipas' territory, however, but in Jerusalem, out of respect for that city's tragic privilege of murdering prophets.

Once more, then, Jesus clearly appeals to his miracles as proofs of his mission. He declares besides that this mission is to last a day and another day and part of a third. Is this only a general and indefinite expression of time (like the Old Testament reference to past time as "yesterday and the day before and three days ago"), or is it specific? The first is certainly possible, but the second seems more probable. If Jesus spoke these words in January of the year 30 (§462), his death was about two and a half months away, represented by the two and a half days here mentioned.<sup>188</sup>

## THE FOLLOWING OF CHRIST

464. Luke's narrative continues through a series of detached episodes. After the Pharisees' warning he records the dinner at the home of the Pharisee and the discussions which followed it (§ §456 BE.). Next comes a list of requisites for following Jesus, which he enumerated one day when great crowds had gathered about him. Some of these requisites Matthew records in another context. They may be grouped under three principal headings: the love for Jesus must prevail over love of kin no matter what the degree of kinship; it must prevail over one's love for oneself and one's own life; it must prevail over one's love for material goods.

"If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, and wife and children, and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

"And he who does not carry his cross and follow me (§400), cannot be my disciple.

"Everyone of you who does not renounce all that he possesses, cannot be my disciple."

The Semitic phrase for liking one person less than another was to "hate" one and not the other (cf. *Gen.* 29:30-33; *Deut.* 21:15-17). That is what Jesus means when he says his disciple must "hate" his own blood relatives. As reported by Luke, the third requisite (4:33) is detached from the other two (14:26-27) and preceded by a double parable which illustrates all three. These conditions are most essential for becoming a disciple of Jesus. Let everyone ponder and calculate well before setting out, therefore, whether or not he is disposed to fulfill them; otherwise let him not set out at all.

Who, indeed, wishing to build a tower, does not first calculate the expense to see if he has the means to finish it? Otherwise, having laid the foundations he may find he has no money left to complete it and the half-finished structure will become a byword throughout the countryside and everyone will make fun of the presumptuous builder.

Or what king setting out with ten thousand soldiers to wage war with another king who has twenty thousand does not first determine whether or not his strategy or the bravery of his army or other favorable circumstances will be likely to compensate his numerical inferiority? If not, he does not engage in battle but rather begins to negotiate for peace.

Similarly, whoever wishes to follow Jesus must love him first and foremost above all other things. It may well be that other loves will not conflict with this supreme love for him, but when they do, they must give way before him who is to be the absolute master of the field. Otherwise, one cannot be a follower of Jesus in the true sense of the term.

Jesus stated these conditions with almost brusque frankness to the “great crowds” that were going along with him (*Luke* 14:25). Then- historical significance is clear. Among those so eagerly thronging after him there were many, in fact very many, who were attracted to him by the magnetism of his spiritual superiority, by the efficacy of his miracles, by vague hopes of triumph and glory, by the expectation of sharing somehow in his messianic kingdom, but these, at the very first difficulties, would beat the very hastiest retreat. Jesus, anticipating this, pricks each bubble of their blissful dreams with the harsh requisites for all who would follow him. These things are not to be taken lightly. At any moment a disciple of Jesus may be asked to become a giant of heroism. The edifice which this disciple is beginning to build is a tower whose foundation is on earth but whose peak must touch the heavens. On “his own wings” alone he must make his flight between two “so distant shores” as earth and heaven. Whoever does not feel he has the strength for it, renouncing all “human arguments,” may become the disciple of some prominent Pharisaic teacher but not of Jesus:

*See how he scorneth human arguments,  
So that he wants no oar, nor other sail  
Than his own wings, between so distant shores.*  
(Dante, *Purg.*, II, 31-33.)

## THE LOST SHEEP AND THE LOST COIN

465. Here Luke sets a row of parables, which are sheer gems. The first of them may be called the pearls of divine mercy and confirm for the jeweler the title Dante decreed for him of *scriba mansuetudinis Christi* (§138).

A few words of introduction furnish the thread on which they are strung: “Now the publicans and sinners were drawing near to him to listen to him. And the Pharisees and the Scribes murmured, saying: This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” Jesus had answered this kind of grumbling before (§306). Now he had recourse to his favorite device, the parable, which had a message both for the grumblers and for the people they condemned.

The first is drawn from pastoral life (§§432 ff.). A certain shepherd has a hundred sheep, and in the morning, he leads them from the sheep-fold out to pasture over the heath, but sometime during the day he notices that one sheep is missing. Look as he will, he cannot find it. It has been lost somewhere along the way, of this there can be no doubt. Perhaps it wandered away from the fold into some little hollow where the grass seemed greener and more abundant while the rest of the flock went munching on its way leaving it there alone, deceived by this moment of plenty and exposed to the wolves that prowl by night. He must find it quickly before the swift shadows of the Palestinian evening descend over the valley.

The anxious shepherd entrusts his other ninety-nine sheep to the hirelings and hastens in search of the one that was lost. Down through the hollows, up over mound and hill he goes, stopping now and then only to gaze searchingly over the open stretches with fear and worry in his heart. He watches the hawks, he calls, he listens; and finally, to his joy, comes the answering bleat. It is the lost sheep! He runs to it, and with never a word of reproach or threatening gesture, he lifts it bodily and sets it on his shoulders; he gives it the privilege of the little nursing lambs that cannot yet manage their legs. When it discovered it was lost, the poor sheep must have suffered very much, no less than its shepherd; it has earned the privilege! Nor is it heavy on its shepherd's shoulders; his joy makes the burden light. Then, in the evening, when he comes home, he does not bother about the ninety-nine sheep he knows are safe, but he calls his friends and companions about him because he has to share his relief and joy: "Rejoice with me, because I have found my sheep that was lost!" And Jesus concludes: "I say to you that, even so, there will be joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, more than over ninety-nine just who have no need of repentance."

The second parable has a domestic setting, but its moral is exactly the same. A certain good woman, being careful and thrifty, has scraped a few savings together from her industry and small economies. They amount to ten drachmas, ten shiny coins worth a little over two gold dollars. She keeps them carefully rolled and tied in a kerchief, jealously hidden in a dark niche in her house, where she goes to look at them now and then to make sure everything is all right and to gladden her eyes with their reassuring glimmer. But one ugly day she opens the kerchief to find not ten drachmas but only nine.

What a bitter surprise! Where in the world could the other coin be? When did it disappear? Greatly upset, the woman thinks of the last time she looked

at her little hoard; perhaps the missing drachma dropped and rolled off somewhere that time she paid for something in such a hurry, or even the other day when she turned the house upside down in her cleaning. Armed with lamp and broom she anxiously searches every dark little nook and cranny in her house, sweeps out every crack in the floor one by one, pries into every tiny hole and chink, until finally, there she spies the missing coin stuck fast between two boards. Then she fairly explodes with joy, gathering all her friends and cronies about her to tell them all her happiness, just as the shepherd has done. — And Jesus concluded: “Even so, I say to you, there will be joy among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

The conversion of men on earth means joy among the angels in heaven.

## THE PRODIGAL SON

466. The two preceding parables illustrate God’s attitude toward the sinner who repents and returns to him; but what must be the attitude of the non-sinner toward the repentant one? The answer to this is in the parable of the prodigal son, which also confirms once more the attitude of God.

From the purely literary point of view this parable is itself a miracle. While, spiritually speaking, it represents the greatest argument of hope for every last son of man, it will remain forever an argument of despair to every student of the human word, as scholars of every persuasion have long since recognized. No writer in the world has ever condensed so deep a power to move within a tale so brief, so true, so free from all literary artifice. It is extremely simple; yet its effect is far greater than other narratives justly famous for their skillful structure and limpid style.<sup>189</sup> To retell the parable in other words unquestionably clouds its beauty; but to clarify its historical setting, we are forced to mar it in this fashion.

"A certain man had two sons," and they all lived together in the country very comfortably, taking care of his vast possessions and managing the numerous servants and hired men. The older of the two boys was a veritable gem, a serious and quiet young man, who had no interest but the farm, was his father’s right hand in managing the crops, and wasted no time in merrymaking with the few sensible friends he had. The younger son was quite different; his head was full of restless notions and he felt stifled by that methodical punctual way of life. The work in the fields bored him, the smell of flock and herd irritated him, and the whole estate seemed a prison where the hired hands were so many jailers spying on what he did to run and tell his

father. The many scatterbrained friends he had in the neighborhood had told him all kinds of wonderful things about distant cities where there were gay dining, dancing, music, and amazing festivals, where at every step he might meet perfumed women and utterly pleasant friends instead of his father's smelly shepherdesses and dirty farmhands. That was real living! So, he thought gloomily through the summer evenings when, after a lazy day, he lay stretched out on the grass, resigned to the shrill singing of the grasshoppers and reflecting with no little melancholy that the months and the years were relentlessly flying by while his youth was evaporating in sheer empty boredom.

One day he decided he could stand it no longer, and he made up his mind to do what one of his friends had suggested a long time before. He went to his father and without further ado said to him: "Father, give me the share of the property that falls to me." His request was not irregular. According to Hebrew Law (*Deut. 21:17*), the first-born had a right to a double portion; since there were two sons in this case, the younger could expect one third his father's estate. The father must have looked long and searchingly into his son's eyes but he said nothing, nor did the young man have the courage to add a single word to his request. They parted in mutual silence, which lasted some days. During this time the settlement was arranged and the property due the boy was converted into cash, "and not many days later, the younger son gathered up all his wealth, and took his journey into a far country."

Life, at last, was about to begin for him! His new world was very far from home and entertained none of the Hebrew prejudices about morality whatever; in fact, its customs were those abhorred by Hebraism. The young man entered it furnished with an abundance of money, one third of a considerable estate, and he could do whatever he pleased. His old dreams began to come true. Long thirsty for pleasure, he plunged headlong into all that came his way. The text says that he began to live *aswtwz* which may be translated either "dissolutely" or "extravagantly," "as a wastrel"; but one way of life, after all, suggests the other.

The days passed swiftly and pleasantly, but the consequences had one day to be faced. After a while he found that his money, the sole source of his pleasures, had fled with the time; his purse, however full, was not without a bottom. But the fever for pleasure had so quickly possessed and blinded him that he failed to notice how thin it was getting until one day he discovered it



was empty. The life of bliss was over for him, and another, quite different, was beginning.

467. "And after he had spent all, there came a grievous famine over that country, and he began himself to suffer want." Yesterday's playboy is assailed from within and without at the same time; not only is his own purse empty, but a famine has suddenly spread over the entire region, such as pinches even those who ordinarily never feel want; and it is hardly necessary to say that the flattering friends of the day before all left our flattered young man when his money did and were now busy looking out for themselves. Reduced to these straits and in a strange land besides, he did not have to think very hard to realize where his choice lay: it was a question of either starving to death or doing any kind of work at all, even the most humiliating and disgusting. "And he went and joined one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his farm to feed swine." This was not Jewish country, otherwise there would have been no such occupation. The swine, pronounced unclean by the Law, was an animal so abominated by the Jews that they even avoided naming it, and one doctor of the Talmud declared: "Cursed is the man who raises swine, and cursed is he who teaches his son the wisdom of the Greeks" (*Baba gamma*, 82 b Bar.).

And so, the playboy became a swineherd; but if he thereby escaped death, he by no means escaped the hunger constantly gnawing within him. There was want everywhere. The pigs, rooting all day through the fields as he watched them, found little or nothing, but at least when they returned to the pen at night, they received their ration of carob pods and were more or less satisfied. But he received nothing; for him there was not even a pod. The swineherd was worth much less than the swine. And he was a Jew! "And he longed to fill his belly with the pods that the swine were eating, but no one offered to give them to him."

He spent some time in these frightful circumstances. When in the intense heat of the day the famished and exhausted swine stretched out in the shade, their emaciated herdsman dropped down beside them in the dust and the dung; but his thoughts kept traveling back to those far-off summer nights when he lay on the grass before his father's house listening to the song of the grasshoppers and dreaming with desire his gay dreams of the future. Those rosy dreams had now all come true; he could feel them about him in the grunting pigs, in the foul and stinking rags which covered him, in the hunger stabbing through his belly.

"But when he came to himself, he said: How many hired men in my father's house have bread in abundance, while I am perishing here with hunger!" What should he do? Return to his father? But how could he have the courage to do that after all that had happened? Yet he could go back to him, not as a father but as an employer; to earn his living as the least hireling on his father's estate would still be an immense gain over the horrible life he was now leading, a life which in reality was only a slow death. Certainly, it would take great goodness and condescension on his father's part to forgive the injury he had done him and take him back into his household — not as a son, of course, only as a simple hired hand. But he was such a good man, perhaps he would relent! "I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him: Father I have sinned against heaven [God] and before thee! I am no longer worthy to be called thy son! Make me as one of thy hired men!"<sup>190</sup>

468. Sustained by this hope he gathered up his last energies and set out for his father's lands. More than once in the course of his journey the ragged wayfarer's strength seemed about to fail him and he lost all hope of reaching his blessed destination; more than once, oppressed by the memory of his departure, he despaired of receiving any welcome, even that accorded a sick dog. But there was nothing else for him to do; the whole world was now, for him, enclosed within his father's farm. Along the roads he dragged himself as best he could, and finally he came home. It was a bright afternoon. His father was in the fields superintending the work, but his quick eyes, as he glanced from plow to plow and hireling to hireling, were not so clear and bright as they once had been. They were dimmed and in them burned a suffering that was old but not spent; and every now and then he fixed his gaze on the far horizon and stood motionless, contemplating who knows what ghosts. "But while he was yet a long way off, his father saw him and was moved with compassion, and ran and fell upon his neck and kissed him."

Once? Did he indeed kiss that verminous neck and dirt-matted beard over and over again? Certainly, the father recognized his son even in that state; then why did he kiss him? Why did he not command his farmhands to drive him away? Was he not the son who denied his father? Perhaps the old man should be reminded of these things. "And the son said to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before thee. I am no longer worthy to be called thy son." It was the little speech he had been practicing but he could not add the final entreaty he had intended: "make me as one of thy hired men."<sup>191</sup> Had he

perhaps lost the heart to ask for a job in the face of his father's exuberant goodness, or was his request cut short by other kisses?

Anyway, what good would it do to speak his petition? His words would be utterly useless; his father did not even hear him. In great excitement the old man turned to the farmhands who had come running and exclaimed: "Fetch quickly the best (thn prwthn) robe and put it on him, and give him a ring for his finger and sandals for his feet!" And why not? Was this not the young master come home again? When he had been cleaned up and dressed, they must all celebrate together. No more plowing and hoeing today; there was a great dinner to be prepared: "And bring out the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and make merry; because this my son was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and is found!"

And not long afterward, in the servant's dining room, the feasting and the music and the dancing began.

469. The older brother was not present at these things. That jewel of a boy was working as usual, and had gone that afternoon to the furthest part of the estate to attend to some urgent matters. So, he returned home very late when the merrymaking was well advanced and plentiful libations had reinforced the singing and the dancing. When he heard all that commotion, our sober young man came tumbling out of the clouds, and "calling one of the servants, he inquired what this meant. And he said to him: 'Thy brother has come, and thy father has killed the fattened calf, because he has got him back safe.'" Naturally the servant did not stop there but went on to tell him all the rest, how his brother came home in such a state that by comparison the mangiest dog on the place looked like the high priest in Jerusalem.

The older boy was very much hurt. Was his father celebrating like that over the young rakehell who had been the family shame and liability? Had his father gone crazy? Well, if the poor old man had lost his mind, his one good son, who had always been extremely sensible, had no intention of imitating him. "But he was angered and would not go in. His father, therefore, came out and began to entreat him. But he answered and said to his father: 'Behold, these many years I have been serving thee, and have never transgressed one of thy commands; and yet thou hast never given me a kid that I might make merry with my friends. But when this thy son comes home, who has devoured his means with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fattened calf.'—But he said to him: 'Son, thou art always with me, and all that is mine is thine, but we

were bound to make merry and rejoice, for this thy brother was dead, and has come to life; he was lost, and is found.”

Note that the older son speaks of his brother as “this thy son”; but the father answers him with “this thy brother.” The older boy is almost afraid of soiling his lips by calling that libertine his “brother,” and he would like to disown him. But the father reminds him that the libertine is his “brother” and he must therefore treat him as such, just as he has treated him as his son. This is the whole lesson in this second part of the parable: as the father is always a father, so the brother must be always a brother.

Hence, the conclusion decreed by some few critics that the second part of the parable — that is, the episode of the older brother — represents a much later addition is utterly mistaken. On the contrary, the whole parable moves toward the particular lesson illustrated in the second part. The first half underlines the mercy bestowed on the penitent sinner by God who is his father, but this is not a new thought for it has already been set forth in the parable of the lost sheep and the lost coin. The second part teaches that mercy must be bestowed on the penitent sinner also by man, who is his brother; this obligation follows from and is intimately associated with the pardon accorded him by God. Hence, this second part is the real roof of the edifice, and its crown.

Nor can it be said that the older brother, angered by his father’s goodness, represents the Pharisees, angered by Jesus’ kindness toward publicans and sinners. The allegory has a much broader significance and applies to any son of the heavenly Father who is jealous of his Father’s mercy toward another son who has at last come home from his wanderings.

## THE UNJUST STEWARD —DIVES

470. Besides being the scribe of mercy, Luke is also the Evangelist of poverty (§145); and so, among the parables we are now examining, the pearls of divine mercy are followed by others of human poverty, and these too have been saved for us among Luke’s treasures alone. That Jesus’ disciple shows foresight and shrewdness in renouncing riches is demonstrated in the parable that follows.

A certain rich man had a steward, who was accused of squandering his master’s possessions. So, the master summoned him and said abruptly: I have heard ugly things in your regard; bring me your accounts immediately! — The steward quickly began to cast about for a way out of his difficulty; unless he

found some means to live through his old age he was lost. If the stewardship is taken away from me — he reasoned — how can I support myself. I am no longer able to work in the fields and I am ashamed to beg. After pondering for some time, he fell upon a cunning trick to make the master himself bear the burden of his support in the years to come. He would alter in their favor the records of the debts his master's tenants owed him so that the latter, fraudulently benefited thereby, would be grateful and show it in some form of compensation. Calling one tenant to him, therefore, he asked: How much do you owe the master? — And he answered: A hundred jars of oil. — And the steward said: No, take the receipt and write fifty instead. So, the first debtor had half his debt forgiven him. Then calling another he asked him the same question, and he replied: A hundred measures of wheat. — And the steward said: No; here, take your receipt and write eighty! Naturally he treated all the other tenants the same way, and they obligingly showed their gratitude at the time and afterward as well. And in that way the discharged steward made provision for his old age.

This was really a theft, there is no doubt. But it was a clever theft and well planned, and it showed the foresight and shrewdness of the steward, unwilling to spend his last days in misery. Now, the whole parable — quite apart from the dishonesty involved, which does not enter into consideration at all here — tends to emphasize just that shrewdness and foresight. In fact, it goes on to relate that the master (o kurioz) commenting on the fraud of which he was the victim, praised his trickster steward "in that he had acted prudently." He had something of a sense of humor, this master, and he could take displeasures in life with a lordly spirit, pointing out their interesting aspects. The parable closes with the admonition that "the children of this world are in relation to their own generation [their own kind] more prudent than the children of the light."

But to explain a little better just how this "prudence" works, Jesus adds: "And I say to you, make friends for yourselves with the mammon (§331) of wickedness, so that [when it shall fail] they may receive you into everlasting dwellings." The functioning of this prudence is clear, and the parable, transferred to a higher plane, is given a specific application. Earthly riches are to be spent not to acquire earthly goods which are just as ephemeral and deceptive, but goods that are everlasting and reliable instead. How? By their use in helping the poor. This yields an imperishable profit because those benefited become the "friends" of the benefactor and at the end of "this

world” they will repay him by receiving him into “everlasting dwellings.” Here again the thing most in evidence is the supernatural sanction at the basis of all Jesus’ teachings (§319); to give away one’s own wealth in view of and in expectation of the future life. In that expectation (§§450ff.), poverty is the height of prudence.

471. The Pharisees who heard this exposition but did not share the final expectation found the whole business very silly. “Now the Pharisees, who were fond of money, were listening to all these things, and they began to sneer at him.” What kind of talk was this? Throw your money away and be as bare as a snail without its shell? This was not merely an idiot’s raving; it was a heretic’s blasphemy! The Hebrew Law was very clear on this point. Material prosperity is a blessing from God and a reward for those who observe his moral laws (cf. *Lev.* 26:3), while poverty and wretchedness are the heritage of the impious, according to ancient Hebrew tradition (cf. *Job* 8:8ff.; 20:4ff.; 27:13ff.).<sup>192</sup>

Jesus’ answer was addressed to the real motive behind the Pharisees’ defense of money: “You are they who declare yourselves just in the sight of men [in that you boast you are just because you are rich], but God knows your heart; for that which is exalted in the sight of men is an abomination before God.” As for the Law and tradition, this was one of the points where the old Law needed to be completed and perfected (§322). In fact, “until John [the Baptist] came, there were the Law and the Prophets; since then, the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it” (*Luke* 16:15-16). The Law lured its disciples with the promise of riches, but since the time of John the Baptist the Law has been supplanted by the kingdom of God, which holds out no promise of material goods and demands, moreover, a detachment from those goods which is a violence against our feelings. After all, the true spirit of the old Law itself did not intend that one should become attached to riches but rather that he should rise above them, for it contemplated them as a means not an end in themselves. Whoever stopped in dalliance with the siren means betrayed the spirit of the Law.

This is illustrated in another parable which is so faithful to various Judaic concepts that it seems, in that sense, the most Jewish of Jesus’ parables.

472. There were two Jews, one very rich and the other very poor. The rich man wore garments of Tyrian purple and Egyptian linen, and every day the banqueting within his hall had no end. The poor man, who bore the very

ordinary name of Lazarus, lay covered with sores in the street outside the rich man's atrium. There the distant sound of the banquet merriment reached his ears, and his happiest dream was to satisfy his hunger with what fell from those laden tables; but no one paid any attention to him. Moreover, black as his poverty was, he seems to have been of some use to Dives, for dogs (perhaps the latter's) would stop to lick the matter from the festering sores which covered him. But in God's good time, both men died and then their positions were reversed. Lazarus died first, and the angels came and bore him away to the place of everlasting bliss, where they set him in the bosom of Abraham, in the arms of the privileged "friend of God" and founder of the Hebrew race. Then Dives died and he was buried with great pomp and splendor, which proved to be his last, for from his gorgeous tomb he went hurtling down to Sheol (§79) where he was plunged into unspeakable torments.

The once rich man now raised his eyes and, on high, he saw Abraham gently holding Lazarus, the one-time beggar. And then he raised his voice as well, crying aloud: "'Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am tormented in this flame.' — But Abraham said to him: 'Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime hast received good things, and Lazarus in like manner evil things; but now here he is comforted whereas thou art tormented.'" The just Abraham points out the justice of their lot: since Dives has been declared "just in the sight of men" (*Luke 16:15*) because of his riches, and since his religion has resided entirely in them, he has been sufficiently rewarded; but since, on the other hand, "that which is exalted in the sight of men is an abomination before God," the same wealth becomes before God the cause of his suffering. The exact contrary befalls Lazarus for the reverse reason. After all, the destinies of the two men are immutable, and Abraham can do nothing even for one of his race who is not in heaven with him: "And besides all that, between us and you a great gulf (*casma*) is fixed, so that they who wish to pass over from this side to you cannot, and they cannot cross from your side to us." Here, too, the inversion is complete and perfect: just as in life Dives would do nothing for Lazarus, now Lazarus can do nothing for him. The moral abyss which separated them before has now become a physical abyss as well.

Yet even immersed in Sheol, Dives thinks of his relatives and desires that they at least may escape his destiny. And so, he beseeches Abraham anew: "Then, Father, I beseech thee to send him [Lazarus] to my father's house, for I

have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they too come into this place of torments.”<sup>193</sup> Abraham did not grant this request either but answered drily: “They have Moses and the Prophets, let them hearken to them!” That is, let them conduct themselves according to the canons of Moses and the Prophets preserved for them in the Holy Scriptures, and that will be enough to save them from the place of torment. “No, Father Abraham, but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent [change their minds — [metanoïasousin].” Abraham unequivocally rejects the reason, and ends the discussion: “If they do not hearken to Moses and the Prophets, they will not believe even if someone rises from the dead.”

In conclusion, the Hebrew Law not only is not abrogated; it is declared more efficacious than personal revelation from a dead man risen again. Besides, the spirit of the Law would use wealth as a ladder to ascend to God, but one is not to stop on the ladder itself. The kingdom of God throws the ladder away altogether.



## CHAPTER XXI: From the Last Journey Through Judea to Passion Week

### THE TEN LEPERS; THE COMING OF THE KINGDOM OF GOD

473. Jesus meanwhile was still traveling about; he had come back into Judea from Transjordan, and must have gone as far as Galilee when he came down for his last journey to Jerusalem (§§413 ff., 462).

At the beginning of this journey, at the entrance to a little village on the border between Samaria and Galilee (which a very late tradition would identify with Janin), ten lepers came toward him. Keeping a certain distance away because of the precept binding them (§304), they began to cry out to him to have pity on them. Jesus, as on another occasion of the sort, answered by telling them to go and present themselves to the priest. This was not a cure but a promise of cure, and that is the way the lepers interpreted it. They set off obediently and, on their way, they found that they were completely healed. Their joy made them forget the obligation of gratitude, and all of them went about their own business except one who, glorifying God, returned to thank Jesus. Now, this man was a Samaritan. Jesus was pleased with his homage, observed that he alone had felt any gratitude, and declared it was his faith that had saved him (§§349 ff.).

(Figure 61, Figure 62, Figure 63, Figure 64)

474. Here Luke introduces the Pharisees again and records a dialogue between them and Jesus, followed by a conversation between Jesus and his disciples. This is reported only by Luke, but various of its elements are to be found in the great eschatological discourse in the other Synoptics (§§523 ff.), which this appears to anticipate. Here again, however, Luke's sequence seems preferable because it is very probable that Jesus treated the subject more than once although the other two Synoptics for editorial reasons gather all these treatments into one.

The conversation is elicited by a question of one of the Pharisees: "When is the kingdom of God coming?" (*Luke* 17:20). Was the query ironical or did it allude in all seriousness to the spectacular coming of the nationalistic-messianic kingdom? We cannot say for certain, although Jesus' answer would incline us to the second thought. He answered the questioner summarily, as one does with persons who are not disposed to be convinced: "The kingdom of God comes unawares (*ouk .. peta paratrsew* ).<sup>194</sup> Neither will they say:

‘Behold, here it is’ or ‘Behold, there it is.’ For behold the kingdom of God is within you (entoz umwn)” The last phrase meant “in the midst of you all” and not “within each one of you,” for Jesus is pointing out that the kingdom of God does not grow in any showy or clamorous manner as the Pharisees expected, but “unawares”; in fact, it has already come among them. And Jesus said nothing further to his ill-disposed interlocutors.

475. Given the importance of the subject, however, he returned to it when he was alone with his disciples, to whom he said: “The days will come when you will long to see one day of the Son of Man, and will not see it.” The days predicted here are days of calamity and want; then Jesus’ disciples will desire “one day” of those when the Son of Man shall come “in power” (§401), unfurling the might that will secure his final triumph. And yet there will not be that longed-for day of manifest renewal and clear mastery over raging disaster. Instead, there will be false rumors, against which Jesus warns them: “And they will say to you: ‘Behold, here he is; behold, there he is,’ —the Son of Man you yearn for, returning now victorious; but do not believe them, “do not go, nor follow after” such directions. “For as the lightning when it lightens flashes from one end of the sky to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day.” Hence the Son of Man will unfailingly come in triumph to complete the consummation of the messianic kingdom, but “his day” will be sudden and unexpected like the bolts of heaven and no one will be able to foresee it. Besides, his triumph is to be preceded by his suffering (§400): “But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation” (*Luke 17:25*).

Since the coming of the Son of Man is certain but the time unknown, his disciples must be always ready and never yield to negligence as other men do: “And as it came to pass in the days of Noe, even so it will be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking, they were marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noe entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Or as it came to pass in the days of Lot. They were eating and drinking, they were buying and selling, they were planting and building; but on the day that Lot went out from Sodom, it rained fire and brimstone from heaven and destroyed them all. In the same wise will it be on the day that the Son of Man is revealed.” Hence on the day of the Son of Man many, indeed very many, will be thinking of anything and everything except him and his triumph. These many will be stubbornly attached to the world that now envelops them and they will not notice that the new world is at hand. So, it was with Lot’s wife at the time of the disaster, for her desire was still fixed on

her home in Sodom, and she was killed by that same desire which made her look back. "On that day, he who is on the housetop, having his goods in the house, let him not descend to take them away; and let him likewise who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife! Whoever attempts to save his life shall lose it, and whoever loses shall save it alive." Hence the glorious advent of the Son of Man, sudden and unforeseen, demands detachment from everything, even one's own life, that one may immediately follow the victor when he appears. This detachment is to be the criterion of selection among those who shall follow him: "I say to you, on that night there will be two on one bed; one will be taken, and the other will be left. Two women will be grinding together; one will be taken, and the other will be left."

But where will those taken go? Evidently to the victorious Son of Man. The disciples ask Jesus: "Where, Lord?" thinking perhaps of the place rather than the person. Jesus does not answer this; he simply points out that the chosen will gather naturally about the Victor from all the corners of the world, with the same confident swiftness with which the eagles gather over a body: "Wherever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together."

476. To sum up the whole dialogue briefly, Jesus spoke of the kingdom of God both to the Pharisees and to his disciples. To the Pharisees he declared that the kingdom is a fact, neither clamorous nor dazzling, but a reality nevertheless and already present among them: hence it is Jesus' very preaching, which is described with the same figure in the parables (§§365 ff.). To his disciples Jesus spoke of a new advent of the Son of Man, which would bring about his manifest triumph and the end of the messianic kingdom; it is to be sudden and unforeseen, and since it will determine the lot of the elect and the damned, all must keep themselves in readiness by absolute detachment from every present good. Hence it is the "parousia" of the glorious Christ, who will inaugurate the kingdom of manifest and universal justice which is the ultimate consequence of Jesus' teaching, just defined for the Pharisees also as the kingdom of God. Christ speaks of this "parousia" again in his eschatological discourse (§§525 ff.).

## THE GODLESS JUDGE; THE PHARISEE AND THE PUBLICAN

477. The preceding dialogue had certain echoes. Its words, as regarded earthly prospects, were of a darksome hue through which one glimpsed, beyond the final suffering and the rejection of the Master, those days of calamity and want when the disciples would yearn in vain to see just one of

the days of triumph of the Son of Man. But if the disciples prayed in those days of trial, would they not be heard? Would the trial not be shortened perhaps? Would God not render justice to His elect, anticipating a little the final victory of the Son of Man?

Yes, certainly; Jesus expressed this in a parable very similar to that of the persistent friend (§433) and given us only by Luke (18:1-8), who records it right after the preceding dialogue. "And he also told them a parable — that they must always pray and not lose heart."

There was in a certain city a man who had no fear of God or respect for anyone, and in the same city there also lived a poor widow, who like so many widows of antiquity, constantly suffered abuse from a certain individual. Every now and then she went to the judge and besought him: "Do me justice against my adversary!" — For quite some time the judge paid no attention to her, but finally, irritated by her insistence, he reasoned thus with himself: "Although I do not fear God, nor even respect man, yet because this widow bothers me, I will do her justice, lest by her continual coming she finally wear me out (upwptaxh me)." And Jesus added in conclusion: "Hear what the unjust judge says; and will not even God avenge his elect, who cry to him day and night? And will he be slow to act in their case (kai makroqumei ep autoiz)? I tell you that he will avenge them quickly. Yet when the Son of Man comes, will he find, do you think, faith on the earth?"

There is not a clear logical connection between this last sentence and what precedes, and some, not unjustifiably, have considered it a detached saying originally from another discourse. It seems to refer to the times in which the disciples will long in vain to see one day of the Son of Man (§475). Those times will be so difficult and disastrous that the confidence of many will be shaken (cf. *Matt.* 24:12; *Mark* 13:22) so that it may well be asked if the "Son of Man will find.... faith on the earth."

Whatever the meaning or the context of this statement, we know that the first generations of Christians relied in particular manner on the promises which precede it. Harassed by incessant persecution, they yearned to see the day of the Son of Man when the triumphant Christ would descend from the clouds and render them justice; from one day to the next they expected to see this justice, to view the great revelation of the Son of Man. But the Apostles corrected this anxious expectation, admonishing them not to be disturbed "as though the day of the Lord were near at hand" (2 *Thess.* 2:2) and to

remember “that one day with the Lord is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord does not delay in his promises” (2 *Pet.* 3:8-9). The first Christians dated Jesus’ promise by man’s calendar; the Apostles set it in the calendar of God.

478. The parable of the widow who was heard because of the persistence of her prayer led to another on the nature and spiritual disposition of prayer. This parable, too, is peculiar to Luke (18:9-14) and its characters are a Pharisee and a publican, the two extremes of the Jewish scale of moral values. Jesus addressed the parable to “some who trusted in themselves as being just and despised others.”

A Pharisee and a publican go up to the Temple of Jerusalem at the same hour to pray. The Pharisee acts and thinks in the sure, full confidence that he is a just man. He proceeds through the “court of the Israelites” (§47) and stands as close as he can to the “sanctuary” where dwells the God of his nation and of his sect. That God is a powerful being, but he has a particular predilection for him, just man and scrupulous Pharisee that he is, and so he can treat him with a certain familiarity. He can speak to him as his king, but in the manner of a subject come to enumerate a whole series of handsome things that he has done in his service. In fact, standing there (the Hebrews generally prayed standing), he began his catalogue of virtues: “O God, I thank thee that I am not like the rest of men, robbers, dishonest, adulterers, or even like this publican. I fast twice a week (§77); I pay tithes of all I possess” (§36). The parable does not continue the list but it may well have gone on to include other choice virtues like the washing of hands and dishes before meals, abstaining from blowing out a lamp on the Sabbath day, knowing by heart the six hundred and thirteen precepts of the Torah (§80), and any number of other remarkable gifts of the irreproachable Pharisee. In short, the man’s prayer has been nothing more than an account of the benefits he has bestowed on God; he has done nothing but air those human justices of which the ancient prophet had said: “Our justices [are] as the rag of a menstruous woman” (*Isa.* 64:6).

In the meantime, the publican, conscious of the scorn decreed him by all good Jews and certain that God shared the same feeling, has stopped just within the entrance of the court, like a barely tolerated beggar. There, afar off, without even daring to lift his eyes toward the “sanctuary,” he stands and strikes his breast, imploring: “O God, be merciful to me the sinner!” This is the whole prayer of the man the rabbis defined as a “boor” (§40), because he

knows that he cannot give God anything like what the Pharisee is giving him. Hence, he trusts in God's mercy, confessing himself a sinner with deep humility:

*. . . myself I yielded  
Weeping to him who willingly doth pardon.  
Horrible my sins had been;  
But Goodness Infinite hath such ample arms,  
That it receives whatever turns to it"*  
(Dante *Purg.*, III, 119-123.)

The contrast between these two men directly belied the judgment each had passed upon himself. For Jesus concluded: "I tell you this man [the publican] went back to his home justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."

No one has sketched the essence of this parable better than St. Augustine: "What he [the Pharisee] asked of God you may seek in his words: you will find nothing. He went up to pray: he did not want to ask anything of God but rather to praise himself; and to insult besides anyone who did ask. The publican stood afar off, yet he drew near to God.... It matters little that he stood afar off; neither did he lift his eyes to heaven.... More than that, he beat his breast . . . saying: 'Lord, be merciful to me the sinner!' He is the one who asks."

## THE QUESTION OF DIVORCE; JESUS BLESSES THE LITTLE CHILDREN

479. At this point in the sequence of events, we leave Luke to follow Matthew and Mark on the question of divorce. Luke gives only Jesus' concluding statement on this matter (16:18) without mentioning the circumstances of the discussion or linking it directly with its immediate context, recorded for us instead by Matthew and Mark. All three Synoptics relate Jesus' blessing of the children, the first two right after the discussion of matrimony. Hence it is natural to conclude that this discussion — which Luke omits possibly because he considers it beside the point for his pagan readers — occurred immediately before the episode of the children.

The Pharisees meanwhile approached Jesus and posed the following question: "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for any cause?" (*Matt.* 19:3.) The Evangelist warns us that they came to test (*peiraxontez*) him. It was indeed an old question and it was treated by the various rabbinic schools before Christ and long afterward. In the Mosaic Law divorce was permitted

only to the husband as follows: “If a man takes a wife, and have her, and she find not favor in his eyes for some uncleanness (Hebrew *'erwat dabar*), he shall write a bill of divorce, and shall give it in her hand, and send her out of his house” (*Deut.* 24:1). The wife so divorced could marry many again, but if this second marriage came to an end — either through the death of her new husband or another divorce — the first husband could not take her back again (*ibid.*, 24:2-4). The rabbis were proud of this faculty of divorce and considered it a special prerogative granted by God only to the people of Israel but not to pagans. The differences arose when they tried to define what constituted sufficient cause for divorce, described in the Law only as “some uncleanness” which the husband discovered in the wife. According to the Mishna (*Ghittin*, IX, 10), the schools of the two great pre-Christian teachers, Hillel and Shammai, were on opposite sides of this question as on others. The phrase “some uncleanness,” the followers of Shammai interpreted in a moral sense to mean adultery, which justified a divorce. The followers of Hillel allowed it a much broader interpretation, judging it referred to anything annoying in family or social life, and offered as example the wife who let her husband's dinner burn and consequently deserved to be divorced. Later Rabbi Aqiba went even further and declared it sufficient grounds for divorce if the husband found a woman more beautiful than his wife.

It is hard to say whether the Pharisees who proposed the question to Jesus were of one school or the other. Their words, “Is it lawful . . . for any cause?” suggest the laxist teaching of Hillel, but are they an invitation to accept his doctrine or a warning to reject it? In other words, are these men the laxist followers of Hillel hoping to coax Jesus to their side, or are they rigorist disciples of Shammai hoping to hear him condemn the other teaching?

As on other occasions, Christ ignores both views and goes back to the very origin of the question. “But he answered and said to them: Have you not read that the Creator, from the beginning, made them male and female, and said, ‘For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’ (*Gen.* 1:27; 2:24). Therefore, now they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man put asunder” (*Matt.* 19:4-7). The answer, and especially its conclusion, studies the institution of marriage at its very source, which antedates any human discussion whatever and even the legislation of Moses; the double quotation from *Genesis* calls God himself, the creator of mankind and the

author of matrimony, to witness, and the conclusion is simply “what God has joined together let no man put asunder.”

480. The Pharisees' reply was easy to foresee: “Why then did Moses command to give a written notice of dismissal, and to put her away?” Was divorce not a privilege of the Israelites? Had it not been regulated by the very Law of Moses? If Jesus' norm, “let no man put asunder,” was valid, it meant the renunciation of the privilege of divorce, and, this, for the Pharisees, was absurd.

Jesus answers the legal difficulty by correcting their views. This was not a privilege but a concession forced by the personal dispositions of those to whom it was granted for fear they might do worse. “He said to them: ‘Because Moses, by reason of the hardness of your heart, permitted you to put away your wives; but it was not so from the beginning.’” Again, the question is brought back to its source. This passage in Matthew is followed by another substantially parallel to one in his report of the Sermon on the Mount.



(*Matt.* 19:9): “And I say to you that whoever puts away his wife, except for immorality, and marries another commits adultery.”

(Sermon on the Mount, *Matt.* 5:32): “But I say to you that everyone who puts away his wife, save on account of immorality, causes her to commit adultery; and he who marries a woman who has been put away commits adultery.”

The same judgment occurs in the other two Synoptics, where, however, the restrictive phrase “except for immorality,” “save on account of immorality,” is wanting:

(*Mark* 10:11-12): “Whoever puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery against her; and if the wife puts away her husband and marries another, she commits adultery.”<sup>195</sup>

(*Luke* 16:18): “Everyone who puts away his wife and marries another, commits adultery; and he who marries a woman who has been put away from her husband commits adultery.”

To these two Synoptics we must add the testimony of St. Paul which is even earlier (§102. ) than the primitive Christian catechesis. He writes: “To the married, however, I command — indeed not I, but the Lord — that the wife shall not separate (mh cwrishnai) from her husband (but even if she does separate let her remain unmarried, or else be reconciled to her husband) and that the husband shall not divorce (mh afienai) his wife” (I *Cor.* 7:10-11). In this passage, St. Paul clearly distinguishes between separation and divorce; he admits the possibility of the first, provided the wife does not contract a second marriage, but he quite simply denies the lawfulness of the second.

We have, therefore, two groups of testimonies representing the earliest catechesis: one is that of Matthew whose testimony is repeated twice (5:32; 19:9), and the other that of Mark, Luke, and Paul. The first group contains the restrictive phrase and the second does not. What is the relationship between the two? Is there any contradiction between them?

Several radical critics have espied a contradiction. They admit that the early catechesis did not permit divorce even in the case of adultery according to the convergent testimonies of Mark, Luke, and Paul. But since Matthew does have the restrictive phrase, which seems to permit divorce in such a case, they have solved the difficulty in their usual fashion by declaring it an interpolation. It was supposedly inserted into Matthew’s text to suit the requirements of converted Jews who were not disposed to renounce the privilege of divorce

where the wife proved unfaithful. This is certainly a very facile explanation and, in this instance, it would be most convenient for Catholics besides. But it is also arbitrary in method if it is not supported — as it is not in this case — by any document, and it violates the norm that the more difficult text is usually the one to be preferred to the easier. Here Matthew's text, with its special difficulty, seems in every way to have more faithfully preserved Jesus' words. But what is the real meaning of the phrase in question?

481. We must remember that the Pharisees have asked Jesus if it is "lawful for a man to put away (apolusai) his wife for any cause referring, unquestionably, to the Hebrew divorce. In answer, Jesus states that she may be put away only in the case of "immorality" (adultery). This represents a twofold departure from Hebrew legislation: in the first place, in Hebrew Law the adulteress was threatened with death (§426) and not with divorce; in the second, he does not permit the man who has put away his wife because of adultery to marry anyone else, in complete accord with the principle he has just enunciated that "what God has joined together let no man put asunder." Hence, even if his questioners did have in mind the actual Hebrew divorce, Jesus has not at all granted its possibility even in the case of adultery because the husband cannot remarry and so is not divorced. Jesus has not granted "divorce" but separation. Could the Jews make this distinction?

Whatever may have been their purely legal concepts in this regard (and here we do not possess definite information), it is certain that in practice married couples did "separate" while still remaining husband and wife. The passage cited from St. Paul (§480) is conclusive in this regard. Holy Scripture itself recorded one example, though an ancient one, in which a Levite's wife left him after an angry quarrel and went home to her father for four months, after which time her husband came, made his peace with her, and persuaded her to go back home with him.<sup>196</sup> Stronger than any of these considerations is the fact, first of all, that Mark and Luke omit the restrictive phrase altogether precisely because the early catechesis considered it did not at all affect the indissolubility of marriage or favor the Hebrew divorce; and in the second place, Jesus' disciples, of pure Hebrew mentality, fully appreciated the inflexibility of the canon he set forth.

482. In fact, when the discussion with the Pharisees was over, the disciples returned to the painful subject (some of them, like Peter, were married) in the privacy of the house (*Mark* 10:10) and an altogether spontaneous exclamation

burst from their hearts: "If the case of a man with his wife is so, it is not expedient to marry!" They had thoroughly understood the uncompromising nature of Jesus' ruling. Now, according to his words, a man not only could not divorce his wife after she burned his dinner, as Hillel permitted, but he must consider himself irrevocably bound to her even after she had committed adultery against him. Their Jewish minds were disturbed; Jesus was certainly right in preference to Hillel, but in that case, they thought it better not to marry at all.

Far from tempering his previous words, Jesus for his part deemed the exclamation of the disconcerted disciples too general a statement; it could be applied to some but not to everyone. Individual human beings, according to Jesus, are not all in like case with regard to the matter under discussion. They fall into different categories and it is impossible to impose one law indifferently on them all. Some will be able to repeat with free full conscious acceptance the exclamation of the disciples, and these are the privileged ones; others repeat it through some good or evil necessity imposed on them by nature or human society, hence out of compulsion; others do not repeat it at all, and these marry. Jesus is not concerned with the latter here, for he wishes to show the disciples the merits of celibacy freely chosen for a religious motive. "Not all can accept this teaching; but those to whom it has been given. For there are eunuchs who were born so from their mother's womb; and there are eunuchs who were made so by men; and there are eunuchs who have made themselves so for the kingdom of heaven's sake. Let him accept it who can!" Hence this is not a law binding on all. It is a suggestion with certain advantages in the pursuit of the "kingdom of heaven"; it is offered only to those who "can" accept it and it can be accepted only by those "to whom it has been given [to accept it]." The rest are to act freely and marry if they wish, always on condition, however, that what God has joined together no man may put asunder.

In short, Jesus has in no sense condemned marriage but he has brought it back to its original purpose and norm, though subordinating it to virginity freely chosen for the kingdom of God. A proof of this is the fact that immediately after the discussion on matrimony, Matthew and Mark narrate the welcome Jesus gave the little children (Luke also has this incident but not in the preceding discussion), who are the fruit of that very institution of marriage which he has just pruned of dead wood and parasitic growths. He receives them with delighted warmth, showing a predilection for these little

innocents which, though so different in kind, is very reminiscent of the interested tenderness he showed the publicans and harlots.

483. “And they were bringing little children to him that he might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw them, he was indignant, and said to them: ‘Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for of such is the kingdom of God. Amen I say to you, whoever does not accept the kingdom of God as a little child will not enter into it’ (§408). And he put his arms about them, and laying his hands upon them, he began to bless them” (*Mark* 10:13-16).

Among these “little children” (*paidia*) there were undoubtedly both boys and girls, and Jesus put his arms around them all with equal affection. About thirty years before this incident, in the year 1 B.C., an Egyptian peasant working away from home wrote his wife, with child when he left her, a letter preserved for us among recently discovered papyri. It closes with this admonition to the mother-to-be: “When you have brought forth the child, if it is a male, raise it; if it is a female, kill it” (*P. Oxy.*, IV, n. 744). Nor was that peasant any different from so many other fathers in Egypt and elsewhere.

#### THE RICH YOUNG MAN; THE DANGER OF RICHES

484. As Jesus started to leave the place where the little children had been brought to him, a certain young man came hurrying up and, falling to his knees before him, asked: “‘Good Master, what shall I do to gain eternal life?’ But Jesus said to him: ‘Why dost thou call me good? No one is good but God only’” (*Mark* 10:17-18). We have noted that these words, confirmed by Luke, are recorded somewhat differently in *Matthew*; for it was feared that the statement as reported in *Mark* and *Luke* furnished a possibility of scandal since it might be interpreted as a denial of Jesus’ goodness and divinity. Hence the Greek translator of the Aramaic *Matthew*, while keeping substantially the same expressions, used them differently to prevent any possibility of misunderstanding among his readers. But precisely because it is more difficult (§480), it is more probable that the text as given in *Mark* and *Luke* is the oldest and most exact. The easier text of *Matthew* better reflects the way the early Christian catechesis related this conversation subsequently to the publication of the other Synoptics.

If we consider for a moment the historical circumstances in which the words were spoken, they are easily explained. The epithet “Good Master” (*Rabbi taba*) was never used in addressing rabbis, not even the most prominent of

them,<sup>197</sup> for it seemed an exaggerated piece of flattery. A rabbi considered himself sufficiently honored by the term “Master,” while the title “Good,” strictly speaking, belonged to God alone. Here the young man, who had seen Jesus put his arms around the children and fondle them, calls him “good” in the human and familiar sense rather than the academic or philosophic one, and Jesus takes occasion to offer him the means to deepen his acquaintance with the Master he is now addressing. Coming down to the young man’s own level, as he had done with the Samaritan woman (*John* 4:22) he says in substance: You call me master” as you would any doctor of the Law, and in addition you call me “good.” Why do you give me this title? Do you not know that it is commonly reserved for God? The young man could have justified his use of the epithet by answering: But you are the Son of God! Instead, he did not answer at all. Did Jesus really expect such an answer from this youth, who was perhaps unaware? Or had he tried to elicit it so that his disciples present, who were aware (§396), might speak it in their hearts?

Since the young man made no reply, Jesus went on to satisfy his question: “But if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.” And the young man asked: “Which?” And Jesus, confirming once again the Hebrew Law, recited for him the Ten Commandments: “Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not commit adultery, etc.” In wonder, the young man answered: But I have observed all these since I was a boy. I should like to know if something is still lacking to me. At this confident and eager response, according to Mark (10:21), “Jesus, looking upon him, loved him,” that is, his glance was clearly one of warm kindness, and then he said to him: You lack one thing. If you wish to be perfect, go, sell all your goods and distribute the proceeds to the poor, for thus you will have treasure in heaven; and then follow me! —With this invitation, recorded in its entirety in all three Synoptics, the whole picture changes. The young man so eager and so ardent suddenly went cold and was “much grieved” (*Luke* 18:23), because he was very rich. And gloomily he went away.

The bitter proposal that he give up all his goods had been sweetened by the promise of treasure in heaven, in accordance with the universal sanction of Jesus’ doctrine (§319), but the young man could not taste the sweet and the bitter seemed very, very strong. The future treasure in heaven was too far away indeed to take the place of his huge amphoras crammed with winking shekels and jealously guarded in some secret hiding place. He was unquestionably a good young man, but his was an ordinary and down-to-earth

kind of goodness, whereas Jesus had warned his followers that at any moment they might have to become giants of heroism (§464). He would certainly have made an excellent official for the Roman Empire, but he failed his first examination for high office in the kingdom of heaven. For this latter kingdom, he was not so noble of mind and heart as the ignoble publican Levi, who had not so many shekels, perhaps, but much more generosity (§306).

485. When the young man had gone off, Jesus commented on his reaction for the disciples: “With what difficulty will they who have riches enter the kingdom of God!” he exclaimed. “But the disciples were amazed at his word. But Jesus addressed them, saying: ‘Children, with what difficulty will they who trust in riches enter the kingdom of God!’<sup>198</sup> It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.’ — But they were astonished the more, saying among themselves: ‘Who then can be saved?’ —And looking upon them, Jesus said: ‘With men it is impossible, but not with God; for all things are possible with God’” (*Mark* 10:23-27). The simile of the camel is typically Oriental. The interpretations which would have it that the Greek word for “camel” (*kamhloz*) was mistakenly substituted for the similar noun for a thick rope (*kamiloz*) or that “the eye of a needle” referred to some unknown narrow and pointed little gate in the walls of Jerusalem are all unfounded. Jesus is speaking of a real camel and the eye of a real needle, just as later the Talmud speaks of rabbis who with their subtleties make an elephant pass through the eye of a needle.<sup>199</sup> Nor is it at all to the point to soften the force of the simile. Jesus used it to suggest not a great difficulty but an actual impossibility. The rich man cannot enter into the kingdom of God for the same reason that a man cannot serve both God and Mammon (§331). The conflict between these two rulers is implacable and neither gives the other any quarter, nor does one receive the subjects of the other in his kingdom on any pretext whatever.

Can no rich man, then, ever enter the kingdom of God? Yes; he may enter it provided that he first lays aside the livery of the subject of Mammon and becomes poor, either in actual fact or equally “poor in spirit” (note 109). But will it be possible for Mammon’s subjects to desert and become subjects of God? No, this desertion is so paradoxical it is humanly impossible, because men will always prefer the tangible gold of earth to the intangible treasure of heaven. However, “with men it is impossible, but not with God,” and God will accomplish the miracle whereby a rich man may prefer the far-off treasure to the gold at hand.

In substance these ideas were not new, for Jesus had already set them forth both in the Sermon on the Mount and in his recent discussion on wealth with the Pharisees (§471). The new element here is the statement that the abandonment of wealth for admission into the kingdom of God will not be the fruit of human effort but of God's power.

486. The Apostles applied these words to themselves and found they had the advantage over all other men. It is Peter, as usual, who interprets their feelings, and says to Jesus: "Behold, we have left all and followed thee." In other words, they had willingly and gladly become poor for Jesus and the kingdom of heaven, thereby fulfilling the conditions he had just laid down. And so, there follows a question recorded for us by one Synoptic only: "What then shall we have?" (*Matt.* 19:27.) Jesus' answer was directed both to the Apostles who were his particular followers and collaborators and to all his other followers present and future without the rank of Apostle.

The part which applies to the Apostles is recorded here only by Matthew (19:28); Mark omits it and Luke (22:28-30) sets it among the discussions at the Last Supper. The part addressed to Jesus' other followers is reported by all three Synoptics, but in Mark and Luke a distinction is made in the time for the fulfillment of its separate parts.

To the Apostles Jesus said: "Amen I say to you that you who have followed me, in the regeneration (*en th paliggenesia*), when the Son of Man shall sit on the throne of his glory, shall also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel." This then will happen at the "regeneration" or *palingenesis* which will renew the present "world" *ab imis*. Then, the Son of Man will sit as on his own throne upon the "throne of glory" which the rabbis reserved for God,<sup>200</sup> with the twelve Apostles on lesser thrones beside him; and with them he will judge the "twelve tribes" of Israel to whom he had directed exclusively his personal ministry (§389). This solemn assembly of judgment will close the present "world" and inaugurate the "world to come" (§§525 ff.).

Jesus' promise to his other followers reads as follows in Mark (10:29-31): "Amen I say to you, there is no one who has left house, or brothers, or sisters, or mother, or father, or children, or land, for my sake and for the gospel's sake, who shall not receive now in the present time a hundredfold as much, houses, and brothers, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands — along with persecutions, and in the age to come life everlasting." Here the reward is not associated with the solemn judgment of the twelve tribes, but it is clearly



divided into two parts.<sup>201</sup> The second will be had in the “world to come” and will consist of “everlasting life”; the first is to be had “now in the present time” and therefore the present world. In other words, Jesus’ followers are promised in the present world a hundredfold as much as what they have left for him. Now, is this a hundredfold of purely spiritual goods, or are they also to be material?

487. We know that, like the apocalyptic-messianic writers of late Judaism, who had a holiday describing the material goods which the future Messiah would set before them in his kingdom, some Christian writers of the first two centuries took occasion from these words to describe the future kingdom of the Messiah Jesus as if it were a land of Mardi Gras. Every vine was to have ten thousand branches, every branch ten thousand twigs, every twig ten thousand tendrils, every tendril ten thousand clusters, every cluster ten thousand grapes, and every grape would yield twenty-five measures of wine; the grain and other products of the soil would display a similar fruitfulness (cf. Irenaeus, *Adv. haer.*, V, 33, 3-4). The kingdom was to last a thousand years (cf. *Apoc.* 20:3 ff.). Julian the Apostate must have had similar notions, for he asked sneeringly if Jesus would also restore a hundredfold the wives<sup>202</sup> the Christians left to follow him. But as early as the third century, Origen inflicted serious blows on this materialistic millenarism, and later St. Jerome repeated: “On the basis of this passage [of the hundredfold reward], some say one thousand years will pass after the resurrection and that then we shall be granted one hundredfold all the things we have left as well as life everlasting, not understanding, however, that if with regard to the other things such a promise would be fitting, in the matter of wives its indecency is evident, since he who has left one wife for the Lord would receive a hundred in the future. The meaning, therefore, is this: Whoever for the Savior has left the things of the flesh shall receive instead spiritual things which by comparison and in intrinsic value will be as the number one hundred to a small number.” Thus for St. Jerome, as for others of the Fathers also, the hundredfold is to be taken in a spiritual sense.

The explanation is substantially correct, but from the historical point of view it seems incomplete. To round it out we must attribute also a subordinate material sense to the promised hundredfold. Even in this other sense, Jesus’ promise was immediately fulfilled among the earliest Christians, who formed a family in which they found the material goods and natural affections they had left for love of Christ multiplied many times over. The *Acts* (2:44-45)



narrate that "all who believed were together and held all things in common, and would sell their possessions and goods and distribute them among all according as anyone had need." And shortly afterward (4:32) they confirm for us that "the multitude of the believers were of one heart and one soul, and not one of them said that anything he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common." From the *Acts* and various *Epistles*, we also learn that the Christians of distant communities felt bound to one another by ties of charity so strong that they felt amply compensated, even in the matter of affection, for the natural bonds they had perhaps broken to follow Christ. If, then, the first Christians had left a house or a heart behind them, they did truly find another hundred houses and hearts in compensation. Modern scholars of various beliefs quite rightly see in these material benefits of religious brotherhood the hundredfold promised by Jesus "now in the present time," just as historians of succeeding eras in the Church discover the fulfillment of the same promise in the numerous associations whose members, to imitate more closely the spirit of Christ, put their goods in common, so that like St. Paul, they can speak of "having nothing yet possessing all things" (2 Cor. 6:10).

Note, however, that this hundredfold of material blessings is accompanied in Jesus' promise by "persecutions." The followers of the murdered Messiah (§400) were in truth to imitate him in some way and to follow him —as St. Paul also says (*ibid.*, 6:4-10) — "in much patience; in tribulations, in hardships, in distresses; in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults; in labors, in sleepless nights, in fastings"; but they could also declare with the same author that they existed as "chastised but not killed, as sorrowful yet always rejoicing."

## THE LABORERS IN THE VINEYARD

488. What is to be the criterion for the distribution of these promised rewards to Jesus' followers? He himself gave the answer in a new parable, this, too, based on the farm life of Palestine.

At the first signs of spring there is a great deal to be done in the vineyards, pruning, weeding, etc., and all this must be finished before the vines begin to bud. Hence there are several weeks of intense labor when all the husbandmen are looking for help. Now, the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a vineyard, who at this season, went out early in the morning in search of hired hands. He found some in the market place of the town and having agreed to pay them a silver denarius (a little more than twenty cents) for the day, he dispatched them into his vineyard. Around the third hour, or about nine

o'clock in the morning, he again went to the market place where he saw other laborers standing idle. So, he said to them: You also go into my vineyard, and I shall pay you what is just. — Then he went out about the sixth and ninth hours (toward noon and three in the afternoon) and finding some idle laborers still there he sent them also into his vineyard promising them a just wage. At the eleventh hour, or an hour before sunset, he went out once more and still finding men standing there idle, he said to them: But why have you stood here all the day idle? — And they answered: Because no one has hired us. — Then the owner said: Well, do you go also into my vineyard. At sunset, he said to his steward: Call the laborers and pay them, beginning with the last to arrive and proceeding backwards to the first. — So, the steward called all those hired last and gave each of them a silver denarius. When the other laborers, who were steadily eyeing the paymaster, saw that the last to come were paid so generously, they began to hope they would be paid off with proportionate liberality. But as their turn came, those of the ninth and the sixth and the third hours each received the same amount; even those hired in the early morning got only one silver denarius. Disappointed, they began to grumble against the owner, saying: How is this? The last to come have worked hardly an hour and that when it was cool, and you have treated them like us who have borne the whole burden of the day and the heat? But the owner replied: Friend, I do you no wrong. Did we not agree on one denarius a day? I have given it to you, so go your way. If I want to give the last worker who came as much as I have given you, can I then not do what I please with my money? Or am I not permitted to be generous with your colleagues just because you become envious of my generosity? — And Jesus closed the parable saying: "Even so the last shall be first, and the first last."

There are various similitudes in the rabbinic writings which bear conspicuous resemblances to this parable,<sup>203</sup> but besides being of a much later date, the teaching they aim to inculcate is quite different. In general, the moral of this parable is that God showers his generosity on whom and in what manner he wills, and that the final reward of Jesus' followers will in its essence be the same for all. The hired men of the vineyard do not strictly parallel the souls rewarded in the kingdom of heaven, for the latter certainly do not grumble, or accuse him who has rewarded them of partiality, or feel envy toward others. But historically they do represent those followers of Jesus who, in view of the kingdom of heaven, considered themselves for any reason whatever more adorned with merits than the rest, and especially those Jews

of pure intention but strictly Judaic mentality who still believed themselves more acceptable to God simply because they belonged to the chosen nation. These agreed that the publicans, the harlots, and even the Gentiles, could indeed be admitted into the kingdom of heaven upon their conversion, but in that kingdom, they would nevertheless be far behind the faithful and genuine Israelites, laden with centuries of merit in the sight of God. Jesus, on the other hand, is teaching that all such priorities are to disappear and that in his generosity the King may send the last to the first places so that those who were first will become the last.

## THE RESURRECTION OF LAZARUS

489. About two months had passed since the Feast of the Dedication and it must have been now about the end of February or the beginning of March of the year 30 (§460.-§462). In the course of his travels down from the borders of Galilee (§414), Jesus must have neared the Jordan and followed for a stretch the road to Jerusalem which flanked the river. It seems that at a certain point he crossed the river into Transjordan and stayed there a while, perhaps in the same favorite spot to which he had withdrawn after the Dedication (§462).

While he was there, sad news reached him from Bethany, the village of Mary and Martha. Their brother Lazarus, who was perhaps already ill at the time of Jesus' last visit (§441), had grown much worse and lay in imminent danger of death. Though the two sisters remained at home all this while caring for the sick man, they had kept more or less informed of Jesus' travels and the places where he stopped, and having learned now that he was in Transjordan only about a day's walk from Bethany, they sent him word of their brother's condition. Confident in the particular affection he bore all three of them, they hoped he would come immediately to their aid and by his very presence prevent their brother's death. John (11:3) relates the sisters' message and Jesus' reaction as follows: "The sisters therefore sent to him, saying: 'Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick.' — But when Jesus heard this, he said to them: 'This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that through it the Son of God may be glorified.' Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary, and Lazarus."

We might expect that this love which the Evangelist mentions especially would have sped Jesus immediately on his way to the friends who were expecting him for various reasons; but instead, the account continues: "So

when he heard that he was sick, he remained two more days in the same place. Then afterwards he said to his disciples: 'Let us go again into Judea.'

From where Jesus was now staying, to go into Judea meant to go to Jerusalem or its environs and hence right into the lair of his enemies. The disciples thought immediately of the danger and reminded him of it: "Rabbi, just now the Jews were seeking to stone thee (§461); and dost thou go there again?" In Jesus' answer we find once more the themes which John sought out and recorded with particular care: "Jesus answered: are there not twelve hours in the day? If a man walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if he walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." The twelve hours of Jesus' mortal day were not all yet finished although the evening was drawing near. He, the light of this world (cf. *John* 1:9; 3:19; 8:12), was to finish his walk through to the last hour, nor could his enemies work him any harm on the way for their hour was not yet come; the hour of their mastery would be the hour of darkness.

Then Jesus continued: "Lazarus, our friend, sleeps. But I go that I may wake him from sleep." These words seemed to confirm the disciples' mistaken interpretation of Jesus' answer to the sisters' message ("this sickness is not unto death") and also of Jesus' two-day delay, and so they answered confidently: "Lord, if he sleeps, he will be safe." Medicine at that time, in fact, considered deep sleep a sign that the body was reacting against the sickness and beginning to cast it off. Here was another reason, then, for not going into Judea to visit Lazarus now, in order not to disturb him. "So, then Jesus said to them plainly: 'Lazarus is dead; and I rejoice on your account that I was not there, that you may believe. But let us go to him.'"

The disciples were thunderstruck by the news of Lazarus' death, nor did they even remotely suspect Jesus' real intentions. Since the worst had befallen and there was nothing more to be done, why should they persist in going into Judea straight into that den of chief priests and Pharisees? The disciples did not relish the idea of the journey at all, and they hesitated between their fear of the Pharisees and their respect for Jesus. On the other hand, the Master seemed fixed in his determination to go. Therefore, they had to go with him even at the cost of not coming back, of losing their lives down there among the hate-ridden enemies they were about to provoke. The Apostle Thomas was the one who spoke the words of persuasion though he made no secret of his own misgivings regarding the outcome of the trip: "Let us also go, that we

may die with him!” So, they all set out for Bethany, arriving there at the end of the day. But here we must listen to John:

“Jesus therefore came and found him [Lazarus] already four days in the tomb. Now Bethany was close to Jerusalem, some fifteen stadia distant. And many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to comfort them on account of their brother. When, therefore, Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went to meet him. But Mary remained at home. Martha therefore said to Jesus: ‘Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever thou shalt ask of God, God will give it to thee.’

“Jesus said to her: ‘Thy brother shall rise.’ —Martha said to him: ‘I know that he will rise at the resurrection, on the last day.’ — Jesus said to her: ‘I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, even if he dies, shall live; and whoever lives and believes in me, shall never die. Dost thou believe this?’ — She said to him: Yes, Lord, I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God [the one who comes — §339, §505], into the world.’

“And when she had said this, she went away and quietly called Mary her sister, saying: ‘The Master is here and calls thee.’ — As soon as she heard this, she rose quickly and came to him, for Jesus had not yet come into the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him.

“When, therefore, the Jews who were with her in the house and were comforting her, saw Mary rise up quickly and go out, they followed her, saying: ‘She is going to the tomb to weep there.’

“When, therefore, Mary came where Jesus was, and saw him, she fell at his feet, and said to him: ‘Master, if thou hadst been here, my brother would not have died.’ —When, therefore, Jesus saw her weeping, he groaned in spirit and was troubled” (evebrimhsato tw pneumati kai etaraxen).

490. These words tempt us to suspend the reading a moment for a few considerations. If the narrative ended here, no one in the world would find anything the matter with it. The account is clear, transparent, without the least shadow of hidden meaning; besides it adheres so faithfully to other historical data we possess that every line can be confirmed. I list only a few examples.

By the ancient highway Bethany was truly “close to Jerusalem, some fifteen stadia distant,” or about three thousand yards (today, on the other hand, the village stretches further away, toward the east). Since it was so near

Jerusalem, many Jews had come from the city to express their sympathy for the distinguished family of the dead man, as social convention required.

Among the Jews, a person was buried on the same day he died, and that was true also of Lazarus (§491). It was commonly thought that the soul of the deceased lingered around the body for three days hoping to be able to enter it again, but on the fourth, when decay began to set in, it departed from it forever.

The family of the deceased received visits of condolence for seven days but these were more numerous during the first three. The visitors first expressed their grief with the usual Oriental noisiness — weeping, moaning, wailing aloud, and tearing their garments; then they sat down on the ground and stayed awhile in gloomy silence.

When Jesus arrived, Martha and Mary were surrounded by such visitors come to pay their respects. John calls them “Jews,” which is his usual term for Jesus’ adversaries, and that is exactly what some of them proved to be as the rest of the narrative shows.

Martha, whom we have already met as lady of the house (§441), went to meet Jesus first, and then came Mary followed by the visitors. When he had exchanged a few words of greeting with the sisters and seen all those people crying, Jesus “groaned in spirit and was troubled,” as true man, with a real heart in his breast, who deeply feels all human loves and sorrows.

Is it possible to imagine a narrative more ingenuous, exact, and “realistic” than this?

Such even the most radical scholars would doubtless have judged it if it did not end with a miracle. But since the whole story is climaxed with the resurrection of a dead man, before so many and such hostile witnesses, it has been decreed that it must contain either evidences of a trick planned in advance or at least the unmistakable signs of myth or allegory. The older critics (§198) thought of fraud or trickery of some sort, but their ideas all lie now in the tomb with no hope whatever of resurrection. Several modern critics think that the narrative is sheer allegory, that it has no element of fact in it but is, in one way or another, only an apparently historical illustration of an abstract idea. It is beyond question, however, that if this account is allegorical, then so is any death certificate signed by doctors or coroners in the presence of the corpse and a number of unfriendly witnesses; if such certificates do have historical value, then so much the more does this

testimony of Lazarus' death. And this is even clearer in the rest of the narrative.

491. At the sight of all the weeping people that had come out to meet him, then, Jesus "groaned in spirit and was troubled, and said: 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him: 'Lord, come and see.' And Jesus wept. The Jews therefore said: 'See how he loved him.' But some of them said: 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind (§428), have caused that this man should not die?'

"Jesus therefore, again groaning in himself, came to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone was laid against it. Jesus said: 'Take away the stone.' — Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to him: 'Lord, by this time he is already decayed for he is dead four days.' — Jesus said to her: 'Have I not told thee that if thou believe thou shalt behold the glory of God?' — They therefore removed the stone. And Jesus, raising his eyes, said: 'Father, I give thee thanks that thou hast heard me. Yet I knew that thou always hearest me; but because of the people who stand around, I spoke, that they may believe that thou hast sent me.' - When he had said this, he cried out with a loud voice: 'Lazarus, come forth!' - And at once he who had been dead came forth, bound feet and hands with bandages, and his face was tied with a cloth. Jesus said to them. 'Unbind him, and let him go.'"

In Palestine at the time of Jesus, tombs were situated either on the outskirts of inhabited places or not far from them. In the level places those of more prominent persons were usually dug into the rock (tufa) like a grave; in hilly regions they were hollowed out of it like a cave. They consisted essentially of a burial chamber with one or two loculi or niches for the bodies and often a little vestibule before the chamber itself. The very narrow doorway between the two was always open, while the outside entrance to the vestibule was always shut with a huge stone (§618). After the body had been washed and anointed with spices, it was wound in bandages or wrapped in a sheet and laid in its niche in the burial chamber. Hence it was exposed to the air inside and it is easy to imagine how after three or four days the interior of the tomb would be tainted with the odors of the decaying body, the spices notwithstanding.

That is what Martha was worrying about when Jesus ordered that the stone at the outside entrance be removed. Lazarus' body had lain within for four days. Counting backward, we find that Jesus had spent one day coming to

Bethany from Transjordan by way of the road from Jericho to Jerusalem (§438); the two days immediately preceding that had been spent in deliberate delay after the message came that Lazarus was seriously ill. Hence, on the first of these four days the sisters had sent their message to Jesus and Lazarus had died and been buried. Therefore, Lazarus must have died a few hours after word had been sent to Jesus.

492. Today, on the site of ancient Bethany, there is a tomb which a tradition, attested in the fourth century, identifies as that of Lazarus. It is certainly a typical Palestinian sepulcher, but it is difficult now to form a correct idea of its relation to the original terrain surrounding it because of the repeated modifications the whole place has undergone throughout the centuries. The ancient outside door was walled up by the Mohammedans in the sixteenth century when the present mosque was built above it. Shortly afterward, the modern entrance was added, with a flight of twenty-four steps leading down into the original vestibule of the tomb, a small room about three yards square. Three more steps lead from a narrow opening down into the burial chamber, which is somewhat smaller and today contains three niches for bodies.

Whether or not this is the tomb of Lazarus, the narrative is strictly faithful both to Palestinian burial customs and to archeological data from that region, and this is another reason for considering the author an eyewitness. Nor is the narrative any less faithful to the psychology of the Jews both during the incident and immediately afterward. During it, some of the Jews object, not without a trace of mockery, that Jesus did not prevent Lazarus' death although he had restored the sight of the blind man in Jerusalem. Afterward, there was a division of opinion among them, as our eyewitness relates: "Many therefore of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen what he did, believed in him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees, and told them the things that Jesus had done." The result of this zealous report was, as we shall see, the Pharisees' decision that the worker of such impressive public miracles must be put out of the way. Here we must not fail to note how this division of opinion has a perfectly historical psychological basis. Among Jesus' enemies, those who had not forgotten they were men surrendered to the miracle and believed in him who had wrought it. On the other hand, those who had subordinated their brains and hearts to their membership in a party were concerned only with the triumph of that party and immediately ran off to denounce Jesus. The history of mankind is full of similar examples of paradoxical partisan stubbornness, but none has ever been so dense and



massive as that of the Pharisees. Let the world crumble to ruin, but Pharisaism must remain at any cost (§431).

The world did indeed crumble to ruin and Pharisaism did remain, but only as the incontrovertible testimony of its own defeat.

493. To demonstrate that the account of Lazarus' resurrection is entirely allegorical with no foundation whatever in fact, modern radical critics (who follow the methods of ancient Pharisaism more closely than it would seem) bring forth a reason which should be compelling; namely, that it is related only by John and not by the Synoptics, while if it were a genuine event the Synoptics could not for apologetical reasons omit an incident so forceful and so provocative of faith in the Messiah Jesus.

The reason is in truth a compelling one but only in so far as it demonstrates the poverty of argument on the side of the radical critics. In the first place, they might be reminded *ad personam* that Jesus' resurrection is recounted by all three Synoptics and by John, yet they do not consider this sufficient reason for accepting it as historical fact. In addition, the reason they put forth is an argument *a silentio*; such an argument is always very weak and in this instance is worth absolutely nothing. We know that John aimed to fill out and complete to some extent the narratives of the synoptic Gospels (§§163 ff.), and the episode of Lazarus is a case in point. On the other hand, the Synoptics, far from claiming to include all the works and miracles that Jesus did, are proof in themselves that a great many were omitted. We have noted, for instance, that they quote those words of Jesus which indicate he had worked many "signs" at Corozain, yet no one fact regarding Corozain is recorded either in the Synoptics or in *John* (§412). As for the reason why the Synoptics omitted the episode of Lazarus, there is nothing we can do but guess. One very plausible conjecture is that the first three Evangelists did not wish to expose Lazarus and his sisters to the reprisals of the hostile "Jews" still lording it in Jerusalem, since the Sanhedrin had already contemplated killing Lazarus because he was such an inconvenient witness to have around (§503.). Later, however, when John wrote his Gospel, there would no longer be any reason for this caution since Jerusalem was by then a heap of ruins.

There is an Olympic serenity about Renan's explanation of the resurrection of Lazarus. Really it is his second explanation, since his first, that Lazarus was in a coma and that he and his sisters had arranged the whole thing as a trick (§207), did not entirely satisfy him. So, without abandoning it altogether, he

fortifies it with his definitive opinion.<sup>204</sup> One fine day Jesus' disciples ask him to perform a miracle to convince the citizens of Jerusalem. Jesus answers that he does not trust them to believe even if Lazarus rose from the dead, meaning the Lazarus in the parable of the rich man (§472). This answer was enough for the disciples, later, to speak of a resurrection of the real Lazarus. And that is the whole miracle. Certainly, everyone, scholar or not, will admit that this explanation is good for a rather hearty laugh, but everyone may also wonder if a biography of Jesus is the proper place for trying out that kind of punchinello humor.

## JESUS IN EPHREM AND JERICHO

494. The prominent Jews of Jerusalem took the denunciation of Jesus' resuscitation of Lazarus very seriously. The Pharisees became anxious and turned to the chief priests for a decision. A council (sunedrion without the definite article) was called, to which no doubt came many members of the Sanhedrin. And the question was stated: "What are we doing? for this man is working many signs. If we let him alone as he is, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our [holy] place and our nation." They did not discuss the reality of Jesus' miracles, nor did they discuss Jesus himself at all. For a long time now wonder-workers had been cropping up to claim they were sent by God and preaching revolution to the populace (§433), and so they merely considered Jesus another such. Moreover, his case was all the worse because he performed more numerous and spectacular wonders which were more apt to attract the attention of the Romans. They were already the real masters of Palestine, although they did not interfere in matters regarding the "[holy] place," or Temple, and permitted the "nation" a certain amount of autonomy in internal affairs (§22). But they were beginning to be annoyed by that interminable procession of subversive wonder-workers, and perhaps this Galilean Jesus would be the very one to provoke the extreme severity that would end the procession forever. It was easy to foresee what would happen. Jesus would continue to work his astounding miracles; the people would flock to him en masse; they would unanimously proclaim him king of Israel in opposition to the procurator of Jerusalem and the emperor of Rome. The Roman cohorts stationed in Palestine and eventually the legions of Syria would fall upon the rebels; the result would be first a massacre of the Jews and then the destruction of the "[holy] place" and the entire "nation." The

danger was grave and imminent. Some measure must be decided upon immediately.

Caiphas (§52), then high priest, was present at the council, and after listening a while to various remedies being proposed, he expressed his opinion with all the imperiousness permitted him by his office: “You know nothing at all; nor do you reflect that it is expedient for us that one man die for the people, instead of the whole nation perishing.” Caiphas had not named anyone, but they all understood: the “one man” to die “for the nation” was Jesus. It is true that he was not inciting the populace nor had he ever paid any attention whatever to matters political; it is true that he was innocent, as some of those present had probably just pointed out. But what did that matter? If he died, the whole nation would escape ruin and that was sufficient reason for him to die. In saying this, Caiphas had spoken only as a politician and for the interests of the Sadducean sacerdotal class, which here fully coincided with those of the Pharisees. But the Evangelist sees in his words a much deeper meaning and he observes: “This, however, he said not of himself; but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus was to die for the nation; and not only for the nation, but that he might gather into one the children of God who were scattered abroad.”

The phrase, “being high priest that year,” has been sufficient warrant for accusing the Evangelist of not knowing that the office of high priest was not an annual one. This was by no means a rare piece of information, for any reader of the Old Testament knew very well the office was for life, although in Jesus’ time — as we have seen (§50) — a high priest rarely lasted that long. Hence John, mindful of the prevailing abuse, merely wants to specify that in the solemn year of Christ’s death Caiphas was the lawful high priest and as such pronounced the words which, without his being aware of it, bore a much deeper significance than he intended. In John’s eyes, this last high priest of the Old Law fell from office in the very year that the New Law was established by the Messiah Jesus; and before he fell, and by virtue of his legitimate office, he rendered official homage to the founder of the New Law, unconsciously proclaiming him the victim of salvation for the nation of Israel and for all other nations on earth.

The council decided to act on Caiphas’ suggestion: “So from that day forth their plan was to put him to death.”

The Apostles, or Jesus himself, were probably told of the decision by some kindly person who learned of it. And Jesus no longer went about openly but withdrew with his disciples from the district of Jerusalem to “a town called Ephrem,” which was known to fourth-century tradition (cf. Eusebius, *Onomasticon*, 90) and almost certainly corresponds to the modern *Taiyibeh*, about twenty miles north of Jerusalem on the edge of the desert.

It was Jesus’ custom to withdraw to lonely places on the eve of important events in his mission.

495. He did not stay at Ephrem many days. The Pasch was drawing near and the first companies of pilgrims were beginning to travel up toward the Holy City, where his arrival, too, was awaited from moment to moment. In any case, to make sure the council’s deliberation would not be confined to wishful thinking, “the chief priests and Pharisees had given orders that, if anyone knew where he was, he should report it, so that they might seize him” (*John* 11:57).

Despite these orders, Jesus left his retreat at Ephrem at the beginning of the month *Nisan* of the year 30 and set out for Jerusalem along the road that followed the Jordan and passed by way of Jericho. The disciples sensed tragedy in the air, and they walked slowly and reluctantly though ahead of them strode the Master, betraying no reluctance whatever: “They were now on their way, going up to Jerusalem; and Jesus was walking on in front of them, and they were in dismay, and those who followed were afraid” (*Mark* 10:32).

There were two groups in their caravan, then; the first was composed of the Apostles and a few of Jesus’ oldest and most devoted disciples, and he himself walked on alone ahead of them so that they were “dismayed”; the second, which “followed” at a certain distance, was made up of other more recent disciples, together with Paschal pilgrims, perhaps, who already knew Jesus and were concerned for him, and all these especially “were afraid.” To the right of them the hills of Jerusalem brooded in the distance.

At a certain point Jesus beckoned the twelve Apostles to him and “began to tell them what would happen to him, saying: Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the Scribes; and they will condemn him to death, and will deliver him to the Gentiles; and they will mock him, and spit upon him, and scourge him, and put him to death; and on the third day he will rise again.” The prediction was not

new (§400, §475), but under the circumstances it was well to recall it to their minds. Since the time was drawing so close when Jesus would be made manifest to the world as the Messiah, it was an opportune moment to remind his followers of the correct concept of his messianism. But this time, too, the corrective bore little fruit. Luke (18:34) patiently tells us that the Twelve ‘understood none of these things and this saying was hidden from them, neither did they get to know the things that were being said.”

How thick and heavy their incomprehension was is evidenced in a little scene which follows immediately.

496. Among those Jesus beckoned to him who “understood none” of his prediction, were the two brothers James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and in the second group following at a distance was their mother, who was perhaps one of the good housewives that provided for the material needs of Jesus’ helpers (§343.). The two young men must have communicated Jesus’ announcement to their mother and all three commented on it in the rosiest and most mistaken fashion. They probably spoke of the Messiah as ruler, of victories and glory, of a throne and a court and courtiers, and of all the other dreams dear to political messianism. And since the time was getting short, they considered it expedient to do something toward securing good places for themselves. That is why, in a very little while, the mother, accompanied by her two sons, presented herself in all humility and reverence before Jesus to ask him a question. It is so important to them that they all talk at once and interrupt each other, so that while Matthew (20:20 ff.) attributes the question to the mother, Mark (10:35 ff.) assigns it to the sons. — What is it? What do you wish? asks Jesus. And the mother sets forth her request with the help of her sons. Now that Jesus is about to found his kingdom in Jerusalem, he must not overlook these two good young men. They have always loved him very much, and for love of him they have left their homes and their father’s boats. Will Jesus please be grateful and in his messianic court assign them to the places on the right and on the left of his throne? The mother asks nothing for herself, but she hopes before she dies to have the merited consolation of seeing her two fine sons in positions of honor beside the glorious Messiah.

They have finished speaking. Jesus looks long at all three and then with infinite patience, he says to the youths: “You do not know what you are asking for. Can you drink of the cup which I drink, or be baptized with the baptism with which I am to be baptized?” The glory of the Messiah will come, yes, but first he must drink a chalice and receive a “baptism” which fulfill the tragic

prediction he has just given his Apostles: before the life of glory there will be an ignominious death, and can they face it? The young men, with the impetuous fearlessness of the confident, answer, "We can!" Jesus unexpectedly agrees with them, but he refuses their request. — Yes, yes, you will drink of my chalice and receive my baptism, but it is not in my power to give you the places on the right or the left; they will belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my heavenly Father.— The prediction of the chalice and the baptism refers to the future trials of the Apostles (note 31); the rest of the answer distinguishes two things the questioners have confused, namely, the kingdom of the Messiah on earth and the glorious kingdom in heaven. The first is the present "world" and will be full of suffering and "persecutions" (§486); the second will begin with the "regeneration" and will be the consequence of the patience with which the sufferings and persecutions of the present "world" have been endured. Then the "Son of Man" will sit "on the throne of his glory," but the other places beside it will be assigned by the heavenly Father.

The other Apostles learned of the ambitious request and could not contain their jealous indignation against those who had made it, thereby betraying that they too shared the ambition. Jesus gathered them all about him again to admonish them and once more turned their notions upside down (§318): among the pagan nations the rulers lord it over the rest and make them feel the weight of their authority, but among the followers of Jesus whoever wishes to be greater than the rest must become less, and whoever wishes to be first must be the slave of all<sup>205</sup> in imitation of Jesus, who "has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom [from slavery] for many" (*Matt.* 20:25-28). Jesus had pictured himself as the good shepherd who serves his numerous flock all day and gives his own life for them (§434); here he returns to the latter concept and declares he gives his life as a "ransom" (lutron) from slavery for his many followers. This is the teaching which St. Paul later emphasizes so much.

497. Now Jesus arrived in Jericho. The aristocratic city of those times was truly a place of delight and diversion especially in the winter, for there the Hellenistic Herod the Great had abundantly indulged his passion for building, and so, to a lesser extent, had his son Archelaus. There one might behold a wonderful amphitheater, a stadium, a magnificent royal palace entirely rebuilt by Archelaus, and large pools into which flowed the waters of the surrounding countryside. But the site of this city was not that of the ancient Jericho of the

Canaanites, the ruins of which lay almost two miles to the north near the fountain of Eliseus ('Ain es-sultan). The cursed ruins of the city destroyed by Joshua remained uninhabited for a long while, but the proximity of the precious fountain brought many people there and in time gave rise to a cluster of dwellings, which in Jesus' time formed a kind of suburb to the Jericho of his day (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, IV, 459 ff.).

Anyone coming from the north, as Jesus was in this instance, first had to pass through this suburb near the site of ancient Jericho, and after about a half hour's walk reached the Herodian city just at the entrance to the narrow valley (wadi el-Qelt) through which lay the road to Jerusalem. At this point an incident occurred which is related with interesting discrepancies by the three Synoptics (*Matt.* 20:29 ff.; *Mark* 10:46 ff.; *Luke* 18:35 ff.).

According to Matthew and Mark the episode took place when Jesus had left Jericho, and according to Luke, when he was approaching it. In *Mark* and *Luke*, it is one blind man who is cured and whom Mark calls Bartimeus . . . son of Timeus, while according to Matthew there were two. The problem is an old one and many solutions have been presented, some with little or no foundation. One of these supposed that there were three blind men altogether, one encountered at the entrance to Jericho and the other two on the road away from the city. The best explanation seems to be one that remembers there were two Jerichos, the ancient city and the Herodian. Anyone crossing the short distance between the two could very well be described as "leaving" (ancient) Jericho or "drawing near" (Herodian) Jericho. As for the difference in the number cured, whether one or two, we have met it before in the incident of the Gerasene demoniac, who according to Matthew had a companion with him (§347); here again it is only Matthew who records two unnamed blind men. But if we transport ourselves back to those times, the difference is not hard to understand. The blind often went about in pairs in Palestine, more or less to help each other (§351), and the more enterprising of the two comes almost to personify them both, while the other hangs back in his shadow. Here it is Bartimeus who speaks but the careful Matthew notes that he is speaking for two.

Bartimeus, then, accompanied by his more timid companion, was begging alms beside the road. The thick sound of many footsteps told him a large group of people was passing by and he asked who they were. The answer was that Jesus of Nazareth was going by, whose fame for miracles was certainly known to him. Whereupon both beggars began to cry out: "Lord, Son of David,

have mercy on us!” Those in the crowd angrily shouted at them to keep still, but the two kept crying out all the louder: “Lord, have mercy on us. Son of David!” Jesus stopped and bade that they be brought to him. Then those nearest Bartimeus said to him hopefully: “Take courage. Get up, he is calling thee!” Up he jumped, throwing off his cloak, and approached Jesus followed by his lesser partner. Jesus asked them: “What will you have me do for you?” — What was the only thing a blind man could want? Bartimeus answered: “Rabbi, that I may see!” — And then both of them talking at once and saying over and over: “Lord, that our eyes be opened! Jesus said: Go thy way, thy faith has saved thee! It was substantially the same answer he had given the two blind men of Capernaum (§351). He touched their eyes; they were both cured on the instant and immediately joined the crowd following him.

498. Jesus then entered Jericho naturally amid great enthusiasm. People came running from all directions to see the famous Rabbi the Pharisees were hunting down to kill, the one who had just cured the familiar pair of blind men, right there before you could draw a breath, and the general excitement was fed by the men themselves who were busy showing their eyes to whoever wanted to examine them.

Among those who came running out was a certain Zaccheus, one of the chief publicans. Being a border city and an important commercial center, Jericho must have harbored many tax collectors, and one of those in charge was none other than this Zaccheus. His Hebrew name Zakkai showed he was a Jew; but if despite this, he exercised the hated profession, as Levi-Matthew (§306) had done, the fault was not his but of the fat profits it garnered him. In fact, he was a rich man, but in him, as in Matthew, wealth had not stifled all spiritual feeling; rather, a surfeit of material things at times nauseated him and sharpened his desire for riches far superior to gold and silver. This was Zaccheus state of mind on that day when Jesus entered Jericho, and he most anxiously yearned to get near him and speak to him, or at least to see him. But when he got to the road, he realized this would be very difficult. Jesus was surrounded by a close-packed throng and to squirm one’s way through was impossible. On the other hand, poor Zaccheus (not Jesus as Eisler fancied, §189) was a short man and from where he was standing, he could not even glimpse the top of Jesus’ head. Should he give up the idea? Not for the world! The resourceful Zaccheus ran ahead of the crowd, which was progressing somewhat slowly, and catching sight of a handy sycamore tree, up he scrambled into it. It was one of those low trees, still to be seen today in



Jericho itself, with long hanging roots that look like ropes, and with their convenient help it was nothing at all to climb the tree. He presented a startling picture, however. If he had been an ordinary peasant or some humble townsman, no one would have paid any attention to him; but that little man up there was a chief publican, one of the superintendents of those leeches who bled the very heart out of the people. Perhaps more than one of those passing by thought it would be a good idea to send him flying from his roost or at least to light a good bonfire under him; in any case, they were all pointing at him with an abundant accompaniment of jibes and jeers.

At last Jesus approached the sycamore. Everyone was looking up into it and so did he. The people of Jericho near him explained that the ridiculous little man perched up there was a no-good, a “sinner,” in fact a chief sinner and head leech, who, with the cruelest kind of irony was named Zakkai (“pure”) when there were any number of other names he might more appropriately be called. It would not be fitting for the Master to speak to him nor even to stop and look at him. But Jesus not only stopped and looked at him, he seemed entirely unimpressed by all the information he had just received. When his informants had stopped chattering, he turned to the little man in the tree and said to him of all things: “Zaccheus, make haste and come down; for I must stay in thy house today.”

This was a general scandal. Joyfully Zaccheus tumbled out of his tree and the Master started home with him, but “upon seeing it all began to murmur, saying: ‘He has gone to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.’” Since Zaccheus’ house was the home of a sinner it was unclean, and so those faithful to Pharisaic norms naturally stayed outside; and yet that house became much purer than many others belonging to Pharisees. Zaccheus, who had more than a few little things weighing on his conscience, chose to honor his guest by making ample amends for his past; and so, he said to Jesus: “Behold, Lord, I give one half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.” And his guest, entirely pleased, answered: “Today salvation has come to this house, since he, too, is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost.” In like manner had Jesus defended another publican, Levi-Matthew, who became his disciple.

The miraculous cure of Bartimeus had excited the wonder and admiration of the crowds. The amends offered by Zaccheus probably excited the wonder and admiration of no one, and there were some, perhaps, whose remarks in

this regard were not a little malicious. Yet, in Jesus' eyes, the conversion of Zaccheus was, though different, no less a miracle than the cure. If in the case of Bartimeus, a blind man was restored his sight, in the case of Zaccheus, a camel had passed through the eye of a needle, a thing which "with men ... is impossible, but not with God" (§485).

## THE PARABLE OF THE GOLD PIECES AND OF THE TALENTS

499. Perhaps Zaccheus' offer of retribution and Christ's answer were spoken during a dinner which the leading publican offered his guest. Besides the disciples, there probably were other admirers of Jesus present who were expecting great things of him; and a tremulous anxiety must have quivered through the room as here and there the guests spoke in hushed tones of the kingdom of God and the glorious Messiah, of dazzling victories, judgment seats, gleaming thrones, and courtiers resplendent with beatific glory. But these things were mentioned with a certain cautious reserve in order not to displease the Master, for they all knew that for some hidden reasons of his own he did not approve such talk and always substituted other prospects as lugubrious as theirs were rosy. Yet now there was no doubt this was the eve of decisive events; everything indicated that from one day to the next the wonderworking power of the Master would be completely unfurled, the whole state of things would be entirely changed and the kingdom of God openly inaugurated. From some of the windows of the banquet chamber could be seen, perhaps, the magnificent palace rebuilt by Archelaus, and some excited fancies must have reflected on the obscure and short-lived rule of the tetrarch (§14), contrasting it in their hearts with the permanent and glorious kingdom which the Messiah Jesus would establish within a few days.

Jesus overheard part of these subdued conversations, and in any case, he understood full well the state of mind of all those present; and so 'he went on to speak a parable, because he was near Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God was going to appear immediately" (*Luke 19:11*). And this was the parable.

A certain nobleman departed for a far-off country in order to be invested as king and then return to rule with full power. In order not to leave his wealth lying idle, he gave a *mna* — a little over twenty gold dollars — to each of ten of his servants charging them to trade with it until he returned. But his citizens hated him and they sent a delegation of their own after him to tell the one

who was to invest him that they did not want him as their king. Nevertheless, the kingdom was granted him and he returned as the real and lawful ruler.

This short preface to the parable was suggested by actual historical fact, as we have seen, for it corresponds exactly to the journey Archelaus had made to Rome some thirty years before to receive from Augustus the kingship over his own territories, and to the delegation of fifty Jews sent after him from Jerusalem (§13). We must also remember that while Jesus was speaking, his listeners could all have pointed without hesitation toward the near-by palace of the same Archelaus which had been standing empty so long there in Jericho.

When the new king returned, he asked his servants for an account of the *mnas* he had entrusted to them. First came the servant who had earned ten more gold pieces with the one given him; and the king praised him because he had been "faithful in a very little" and rewarded him by giving him authority over ten towns. Then came a second who had earned five gold pieces, and he was rewarded with authority over five towns. Then came a third who said: Lord, here is your gold piece which I have kept tied up in a handkerchief; I was afraid of you because you are a stern man and you withdraw what you have not deposited and reap where you have not sown! — Evidently this servant had not supported the hostile delegation sent after the pretender to the crown, but neither had he bestirred himself in his master's favor. Knowing him besides to be a very exacting man, he had kept the sum just as he had received it so that the future king would not be able to accuse him of unfaithfulness or theft. But the king answered: "Out of thy own mouth I judge thee, thou wicked servant. Thou knewest that I am a stern man, taking up what I did not lay down and reaping what I did not sow. Why, then, didst thou not put my money in a bank, so that I on my return might have gotten it with interest?" Then turning to the bystanders, he said: Take away his gold piece and give it to the one who has ten! — But they observed: Lord, he already has ten *mnas*! — The king, however, replied: It makes no difference! To him who has shall be given, and from him who has not even that which he has shall be taken away. In addition, let all those enemies of mine who did not want me to rule over them be brought here and slain in my presence!

500. The eager expectation of the messianic kingdom cherished by Jesus' listeners could hardly be satisfied with this parable. In the first place, it teaches that the manifest triumph of the kingdom of God will be either a reward or a punishment according to the previous behavior of the individual,

and, in the second place, that this triumph will come about only after the departure and prolonged absence of the claimant to the throne, who will appear and act as king only on the occasion of his future coming. Hence, the claimant is Jesus himself, who is already in full possession of his royal rights but has not yet gone away to be solemnly and publicly vested with kingship in his heavenly country, absenting himself from his subjects, some of whom are openly hostile to him and do not want him to reign over them. His absence is not a brief one, for the claimant to the throne departs for a distant country and entrusts business to his servants which requires a great deal of time. (Matthew 25:19, in fact, says that the master in the parable returned "after a long time.") When Jesus returns from his heavenly Father, then will his kingdom be manifestly and solemnly inaugurated with the distribution of rewards to his faithful subjects and punishments to the negligent or rebellious.

Hence the disciples are not to live in continual trepidation, expecting to behold at any moment the solemn triumph of the kingdom of God. Before that triumph will come to pass, Jesus must depart for a far-off country and remain absent from them until his second parousia, or coming. During this indefinite absence, his enemies will scheme and plot with bitter intensity that he may not reign; moreover, when they are invited to recognize officially his royalty as the Hebrew Messiah, they will promptly reply that they recognize no royalty except the pagan Caesars (*John* 19:15). Hence his absence will be a period of bitter trials for the faithful subjects left alone, but in surmounting them they will earn the right to share in the final triumph of the parousia.

Though the definitive triumph was reserved for the parousia, Jesus himself, however, had already promised a great manifestation of the "power" of the kingdom of God which might well be considered a partial anticipation of its final victory (§401); he had also promised particular assistance precisely during the times of difficulty and trial (§486).

The parable of the gold pieces, characteristic of Luke, is also recounted by Matthew (25:14-30) but in other context and with some differences: Matthew has Jesus give it during the great eschatological discourse spoken in Jerusalem on Tuesday of Passion Week (§523); the master is not a claimant to the throne but a wealthy man; he does not give his servants each one gold piece, but instead gives five talents to one, two to another, and one to a third, each talent being worth sixty *mnas*; and there is no mention at the end of the punishment to befall the enemies who schemed against him in his absence.

The parable is certainly in better context in *Luke* than in *Matthew*, for in the former it tallies so strikingly with the actual moment and circumstances in which it is spoken. This is true also of the mention, in Luke's version, of a claimant to a throne and the eventual punishment of his enemies. Otherwise, the two parables are substantially parallel. Matthew's account may be a shortened version of Luke's, or it may be that the additional material in Luke (especially the punishment of the enemies) derives from a different parable. (Figure 65)

## THE BANQUET AT BETHANY

501. On his way up from Jericho to Jerusalem, Jesus had to pass through Bethany, which he had left only a few weeks before. He arrived there "six days before the Passover" (*John* 12:1), that is, on a Sabbath. Since the trip from Jericho to Bethany (§438, §489ff.) was too long to be permissible on the Sabbath itself, he probably made it on Friday, arriving in the town around sunset when the Sabbath officially began. Here again John's information is specific where the Synoptics have been indefinite. According to Matthew (26:6ff.) and Mark (14:3 ff.), it would seem that this visit to Bethany took place on the following Wednesday, but this arrangement in their narrative was prompted by the desire to emphasize the relationship between the words Judas spoke on this occasion and his subsequent betrayal.

In going to Bethany, Jesus seemed to be deliberately exposing himself to danger. His enemies, who had but recently decided he must be killed and ordered his arrest (§494, §495), were only a short walk away; it would take no time for them to be informed and take action against him. The danger was there undeniably, but it was less immediate than it seemed. In the first place, after the order had been given for his arrest, Jesus disappeared, and so the first intense animosity had somewhat abated — except that his reappearance would be sufficient to rekindle it instantly. In addition, it was a time entirely devoted to preparations for the Pasch and crowds of Jews were arriving hourly in Jerusalem; since countrymen and admirers of Jesus were certainly among them too, it would not be wise to run the risk of provoking a riot by using violence against him while the city was so jammed with people. In any case, the Sanhedrists and Pharisees, while not at all neglecting their decision, would proceed according to circumstances and the dictates of prudence! Meanwhile the ordinary Jews of the capital were curious to see the outcome of the conflict, to see whether the Sanhedrin or Jesus would win in the end.

At Bethany Jesus must have been accorded a triumphant welcome, inspired by the memory of the recent resurrection of Lazarus. On the evening of that Sabbath, a dinner was given in his honor in the house of a certain Simon the Leper, who was undoubtedly one of the wealthy men of the town and owed his nickname to the sickness from which he had been cured, perhaps through Jesus' intervention. Lazarus could not have failed to be among the guests, and, in fact, was there. His sister, the good housewife Martha, directed the serving, while his other sister, Mary, less expert in domestic matters, contributed in her own way to the honor of their guest. The guests reclined on divans with their heads toward the table and their feet away from it, as we have already seen (§341). At a certain moment Mary entered carrying one of those slender-necked alabaster vases in which the ancients used to keep valuable perfumes. Pliny gives us the reason when he says of alabaster "they hollow it out for perfume jars, because it is said to preserve excellently well against spoilage" (*Nat. hist.*, XXXVI, 12). Mary's vase contained a pound of genuine nard of great value." The adjective "genuine," or trusty (*pistikh*)<sup>206</sup>13 as the Greek said, was most appropriate, for Pliny also says that nard ointment was easily adulterated by means of a "false- nard" herb that grew everywhere (*ibid.*, XII, 26). Mary's nard was as valuable as it was genuine. Judas, who knew his prices, estimated it at more than three hundred denarii" or more than eighty dollars. Pliny (*ibid.*) says that in Italy nard cost one hundred denarii a pound, and other less precious kinds could be bought for less; elsewhere (*ibid.*, XIII, 2), however, he also mentions ointments which cost from twenty- five to three hundred denarii a pound.

When Mary reached Jesus' divan, instead of removing the seal from over the mouth of the vase, she broke off the neck of it, as a sign of greater homage, and poured the perfume abundantly on his head first, and then all that was left on his feet. Also, as a sign of special homage, she wiped the master's feet with her hair, imitating, in part, the penitent woman (§341). "And the house was filled with the odor of the ointment.

502. Mary's act was not unusual. It was customary at banquets to offer exquisite perfumes to special guests after their hands and feet had been washed. This delicate attention was all the more natural in Mary since she was bestowing it on him who had raised her brother from the dead. She did use a truly extraordinary amount of ointment, but this, after all, only reflected the exuberance of feeling within her.

Her prodigality surprised some of the disciples, and especially their treasurer Judas Iscariot (§313), who, as John explicitly mentions (while the other Evangelists speak only of the disciples in general) protested bluntly on the pretext of charity: “To what purpose has this waste of ointment been made? for this ointment might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and given to the poor (*Mark* 14:4-5). But the Evangelist John, no less realistic than he is spiritual, offers his own observation: “Now he said this, not that he cared for the poor, but because he was a thief, and holding the purse, used to take what was put in it” (*John* 12:6).

Thus, we learn that the little group of Jesus’ constant followers lived together, undoubtedly with the master, pooling their resources, which they deposited in a “purse” (glwssokomon) entrusted to Judas. He was their steward, then, and was undoubtedly helped on occasion by the pious women who, when they could, followed the group and provided for their material needs (§343.). But Judas was a thief, and he took money from the purse. Now, it would have been difficult for the Apostles to notice this continued stealing because they were entirely occupied with the spiritual ministry and left all practical matters to Judas. But there was every possibility that the pious women would notice it since they often took care of the expenses, furnishing a good part of the money themselves. Hence, they could check approximately what went in and what came out of the “purse” and it would naturally not escape them when Judas subtracted more than usual from the common fund. Perhaps they had told the other Apostles or even Jesus himself about these private forays of Judas, and from then on, the unfaithful steward was perhaps watched with sorrowful pity; but nothing was said to him and they let him keep his office hoping that he would become ashamed and change his ways. On this occasion, however, Judas betrays that he has become hopelessly calloused. “More than three hundred *denarii*” was a sizeable sum, almost a year’s pay for a laborer (§488) and the thief cannot help exploding his annoyance, using the poor as an excuse, when he sees that handsome income evaporate into thin air. The disciple of mammon still wants to wear the uniform of the disciple of God (§485).

Jesus answered Judas’ protest: “Let her be —that she may keep it [it is as if she kept it] for the day of my burial. For the poor you have always with you, but you do not always have me” (*John* 12:7-8; cf. *Matt.* 26:10-13; *Mark* 14:6-9). For Jesus, therefore, this anointing merely anticipated his imminent burial, for the bodies of the dead were sprinkled with spices and ointments before

being laid in the tomb. Even this new prediction, however, does not seem to have persuaded the Apostles that Jesus' death was near at hand except perhaps for Judas, who, being a good earthly financier, foresaw the bankruptcy of the rest and from then on thought only of saving himself.



## CHAPTER XXII: Passion Week—Sunday and Monday

### THE TRIUMPHAL ENTRY INTO JERUSALEM

503. JESUS' arrival in Bethany was known immediately in Jerusalem. Word of it could have been brought by pilgrims who made the journey from Jericho to Bethany with him that Friday (§501) or by spies of the Sanhedrin complying with its order to report where Jesus was (§495).

The news caused a stir in the city. Perhaps even before the Sabbath began and certainly as soon as it was over, any number of curious persons hurried from Jerusalem to Bethany, sped on their way by the double desire to see Jesus and Lazarus together, especially since Christ had not set foot in the city since the resurrection of his friend. "Now the great crowd of the Jews learned that he [Jesus] was there; and they came, not only because of Jesus, but that they might see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead." And what had happened right after Lazarus' resurrection was repeated through this crowd many times over, namely, a great number yielded to the evidence of the miracle and believed in Jesus. This, too, was immediately known in Jerusalem and then the chief priests, more determined than ever to put Jesus to death, "planned to put Lazarus to death also" (*John* 12:10) and thus dispatch once more to the next world the witness who had returned from it to the great scandal of Jewish orthodoxy.

Certainly, this remedy was, or seemed, definitive. Once Jesus and Lazarus were killed, the excitement aroused in the populace by the Galilean preacher would subside immediately. But the plan was difficult to carry out not only because of the great influx of Paschal pilgrims, but also because of this same excitement which might explode in violent reaction and lead to complications with the Roman authorities that were to be avoided at all costs. From then on, therefore, the Temple authorities began a watchful waiting until a good opportunity should present itself to carry out their design without any noisy consequences. Jesus, for his part, continued to go his own way independently of external circumstances, and just as he was not afraid of the intrigues of the Sanhedrin neither did he pay any attention to the favor of the populace, although for the moment it was a protection. In fact, Jesus himself makes the next move, going straight to meet the danger by leaving Bethany for Jerusalem.

504. It was Sunday morning. Early that morning as well as the evening before, many excited enthusiasts had been gathering about Jesus, some of them his countrymen come from Galilee for the Pasch and others citizens of Jerusalem just persuaded by the miracle of Lazarus. The crowd was aquiver with emotion and it could not refrain from doing Jesus honor in some open and solemn manner. This was a good opportunity to do so because it was customary for the citizens of the holy city to go out to meet the largest or most important groups of pilgrims and conduct them into it amid singing and other joyous manifestations. Hence when the Master declared his intention to proceed to Jerusalem, it was no more than right to prepare a solemn entrance into the city for him. Even if he should be as unwilling as he had in the past, some such kind of solemn manifestation was absolutely necessary this time after what had happened in Bethany and Jerusalem and the Master would have to yield to them, willing or no.

But contrary to all expectations, Jesus this time was not reluctant. He announced his intention to go that very morning to Jerusalem and chose the shortest and most crowded road — about three thousand yards (§490) long — which went from Bethany up the Mount of Olives and then down its western slope, finally entering the city near the northeast corner of the Temple. Along the route one passed near the ancient village of Bethphage (*Beth-pa'ghe*, "house of the [unripe] figs"), which the Talmud considers a suburb of Jerusalem and which was certainly near the place today identified as Bethphage about a half mile northwest of Bethany. The whole company was climbing joyously toward the top of the Mount of Olives and was already in sight of Bethphage when Jesus gave an order which filled them brimful of happiness. Calling two of his disciples to him, he said: "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately on entering it you will find a colt tied, upon which no man has yet sat; loose it, and bring it. And if anyone say to you: What are you doing?' you shall say that the Lord has need of it, and immediately he will send it here."

In Palestine the donkey had been the mount of important personages since the time of Balaam (*Num.* 22:21 ff.), and in seeking one on this occasion Jesus seemed to be seconding the festive intentions of his company, which was thereupon filled with delight. But Jesus' purpose was far different; Matthew, careful as usual to show how the messianic prophecies came to pass, points out that here was fulfilled the prediction of the ancient prophet Zacharias (9:9) that the king of Sion was to come to her meek and seated upon an ass

and upon a colt.<sup>207</sup> And that is why only Matthew records the fact that in Bethphage in the place Jesus had indicated there were an ass and a colt which were both led to him, while the other Evangelists mention only the colt, on which he actually rode.

The two disciples did exactly as they were bid; and while they were loosing the animals, the owners asked why they were doing it but, hearing it was for Jesus, said no more. Probably they were friends of the family of Lazarus and therefore friendly to Jesus also.

Upon the arrival of the two animals, the crowd could contain itself no longer. Now they could make a truly triumphal entry into the city. If the colt had never been ridden by anyone before, it was all the more suitable to bear as its first burden the sacred person of Jesus, for the ancients did not consider an animal that had been trained for profane tasks appropriate for religious uses.<sup>208</sup> The procession was quickly formed. Some threw their cloaks over the little donkey by way of a saddle and trappings, and Jesus was made to mount him. Others ran ahead and spread their coats across the road before him like carpets, and as the procession neared the city many more came thronging along the way, strewing it with fresh branches and waving the festive palm leaves they broke from near-by trees, while all of them kept shouting and crying out: "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Blessed is the kingdom of our father David that comes! Hosanna in the highest!" (*Mark* 11:9-10.)

505. Through these shouts swelled all the fiery emotionalism of the Orient; but through them also swelled the feverish expectation which the cheering multitude had cherished and repressed so long a time in their hearts, the expectation of the messianic kingdom. The terms they use are typical: "he who comes (o ercomenoz) in the name of the Lord" is the Messiah (§339), and the "kingdom" of David "that comes" is the messianic kingdom established by the Messiah, son of David. The tokens of its inauguration were certainly very modest — a little donkey and a few branches of palm; but those enthusiasts found no scandal in that, so very sure were they that any day now troops of proud war (horses would take the place of the colt and that the palms would give way to a forest of well-burnished lances. Father David from his tomb and Yahweh from his heaven would work this miracle for their Messiah.

Just this once do the messianism of the people and the messianism of Jesus meet, if only fleetingly and almost by chance. For the multitudes the triumphal entry into Jerusalem was to be the first spark of a vast conflagration to come; for Jesus it was the one and only official display of his messianic royalty. The royalty which he had concealed so carefully and confided with so many precautions and correctives only to his most intimate friends yet had to be made manifest officially at least once now that his days were growing short and there was so little probability that the mistaken political interpretation would have time to take root. Well, this was his solemn and official manifestation, and it was in perfect harmony besides with the ancient prophecy of Zacharias; but it would all end there, with that little colt and the cheering crowd of some few hundred people. Immediately afterward all would return once more to what men called shadow, but what for the kingdom of God was the nighttime of hidden growth and activity (§369). In short, Jesus stopped where the populace thought to begin.

About forty years later the renegade Jew, Josephus, spent several long pages describing another triumphal entry which he had witnessed (*Wars of the Jews*, VII, 120-162), just as the Evangelists witnessed this one. And the two narratives seem to have been written on purpose to be contrasted. The renegade Jew describes the triumph of one who has just destroyed Jerusalem and enters pagan Rome amid a display of incredible splendor and power; the Evangelists describe the triumph of one who is about to destroy pagan Rome and now enters Jerusalem amid the humblest accompaniments, weeping over the imminent destruction of the city. The Roman brings his triumph to a close at the foot of the Capitoline with the execution of the leaders of his enemies who have been dragged in chains behind his chariot. The triumph in Jerusalem ends with the execution of its hero after his brief victory of a day. In Rome when the celebrations are over, they lay the foundations of a new idolatrous temple dedicated to Pax Romana; in Jerusalem it is prophesied that the Temple built by hands to the living God will be reduced to a heap of ruins and in its place are laid the foundations of a Temple not built by hands (aceiropoihtoz: *Mark* 14:58) where the living God will be adored in “spirit and in truth” (§295). Yet there is one very important point on which the two narratives, different as they are, agree. In both the hero of the triumph is the Messiah: for the Evangelists the Messiah is Jesus, the carpenter of Nazareth; for the renegade Jew it is Titus Flavius Vespasian, a farmer born at Falacrine near Rieti in the year A.D. 9 (§83).

When we compare today what still remains of the two triumphs, we are forced to conclude that the Jew was ill-advised by his apostasy and made a serious mistake.

506. However humble, the triumph in Jerusalem was an enthusiastic one, certainly more enthusiastic than the one in Rome. John (12:16 ff.) tells us that the enthusiasm was great even among the citizens of Jerusalem who had either witnessed the resurrection of Lazarus or heard it described. No doubt the fervor of Jesus' disciples was equally great, though still inspired by superficial motives and unaware of the profound significance of what was taking place; for according to the same Evangelist, "these things his disciples did not at first understand. But when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written about him, and that they had done these things to him." In short, the disciples were still too much under the influence of the emotion of the populace to rise to higher and more spiritual considerations regarding the brief human triumph of their Master.

But Jesus himself defended the triumphal character of the procession. Since the Pharisees remained Pharisees even amid the general exuberance and fervor, and since they also understood very well that it would be much too dangerous to say anything to the excited mob, a few of them decided to protest to Jesus himself. "Master, rebuke thy disciples," they said, just as if most of the responsibility for that display lay with his disciples and not with the Jews who had seen the resurrection of Lazarus. But Jesus answered: "I tell you that if these keep silence, the stones will cry out" (*Luke 19:40*).

The protest was repeated a little later when, after Jesus had entered the Temple, groups of children in the crowd began to shout: "Hosanna to the Son of David!" under the very noses of the chief priests and the Scribes. These very worthy persons, greatly irritated by the cries of the urchins, objected to Jesus: "Dost thou hear what these are saying?" And this time Jesus answered: "Yes; have you never read: Out of the mouth of infants and sucklings thou hast perfected praise?" (*Matt. 21:16*.) The quotation (from Ps. 8:3) was most appropriate, because in it the poet is contrasting the ingenuous praise lifted to God by babes and sucklings to the forced silence of his enemies. If these children in the Temple, therefore, were praising God, it was not hard to recognize in the priests and Scribes the enemies of God reduced to silence.

Jesus' answers and his unquestioned triumph must have driven the Pharisees nearly mad. When they balanced up what they had accomplished

with all their plans to seize Jesus, to have spies reporting on him, to put him to death along with Lazarus, they had to admit complete failure. Jesus was moving freely about Jerusalem itself, his life and Lazarus' were protected by the ardent enthusiasm of the people, he kept winning more and more followers and he even dared to make a triumphal entry into the holy city. The Pharisees themselves recognized their defeat, and they said one to another: "You see that you are making no headway. Why, the [entire] world is gone after him!" (*John* 12:19.) This confession, however, did not mean surrender; rather it set the seal on their unrelenting hatred, and they kept waiting for the chance to make some move against him.

At one point in its course, the triumphal procession crossed the top of the Mount of Olives to descend the western slope in the direction of the Temple below them. The entire city lay spread before them; it was the city that had risen thirty years before from the hands of that tireless builder, Herod the Great, less solemn and less laden with memories than the old city, but incomparably more dignified and more beautiful. At the foot of the mountain and just beyond the stream of the Cedron, rose the majestic structure of the Temple dazzling in its sun-white marble and sparkling gold. At its northern corner, like a roost of hawks brooding on their prey, stood the formidable square tower of the Antonia where the Roman troops were garrisoned. On the opposite side, toward the west, rose the palace of Herod, protected on the north by the three towers which the expert Titus forty years later considered impregnable. Two walls protected the northern part of the city, and beyond the outer wall stretched the suburb of Bezatha (§384) which Agrippa I, ten years later, began to surround with a "third wall." Several new and more ornate buildings rose conspicuously from among the aged houses, while the most neglected quarter of the city seemed to be the southeastern end just below the Temple, where once had been the original Jerusalem of the Jebusites, the city of David and of Solomon.

And as he gazed on all this scene spreading before him, Jesus wept.

507. His tears, amid so much joyous acclamation and before so impressive a panorama, were indeed unexpected. The disciples must have been disconcerted to say the least, and perhaps they wondered in their hearts if this was another of the messianic correctives the Master was used to apply (§400, §475, 495). But he himself explained why he wept, for turning toward the city he exclaimed: "If thou hadst known, in this thy day, even thou, the things that are [necessary] for thy peace!" But now they are hidden from thy

eyes. For days will come upon thee when thy enemies will throw up a rampart about thee, and surround thee and shut thee in on every side, and will dash thee to the ground and thy children within thee, and will not leave in thee one stone upon another, because thou hast not known the time of thy visitation" (*Luke 19:42-44*). His tears were not for the present, but for the more or less distant future.

We all know that Jesus' words refer to the terrible siege with which Titus surrounded Jerusalem in 70. The "rampart" is the wall of thirty- nine stadia (about 7800 yds.) which the Roman legions threw up in three days around the city to starve it out; it is minutely described by Flavius Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, V, 502-511) and some probable traces of it have recently been discovered. It is interesting to note that the part of the rampart east of the city followed the stream of the "Cedron toward the Mount of Olives" (*ibid.*, 505), where Jesus was when he wept.

It is hardly necessary to say that the rationalists have found so accurate a prediction an absurdity and have decided that Jesus never spoke these words at all. They were made up by the Evangelist instead, who was writing after the catastrophe of 70. While waiting for historical proofs which will not be the usual and monotonous "impossibility" of the miracle to be discovered in support of their theory, we may glance at another parallel also offered us by Josephus. He narrates (*ibid.*, VII, 112-113) that a few months after the destruction of Jerusalem, Titus went from Antioch into Egypt, and "as he journeyed, he went to Jerusalem; and then, when he compared the gloomy solitude he beheld there with the former magnificence of the city and recalled to his mind the greatness of the buildings that had been ruined and their former beauty, he deplored (wkteire) the destruction of the city, not boasting, as another [would have done] that he had taken it despite its greatness and strength, but cursing again and again the guilty ones who had begun the revolt and drawn such a punishment down on their City." Hence, Jesus and Titus agree in fixing the responsibility for the destruction on certain individuals and in declaring it would not have come to pass had they acted differently. But Jesus, who is a Jew and a worshiper of Yahweh, also weeps burning tears over the destruction of his city and his Temple, whereas Titus, a Roman and a worshiper of Jupiter Capitolinus deplores the loss of magnificent edifices and works of art. One weeps for the spiritual ruin, the other regrets the material ruin, but above all, Jesus weeps for the city which is to kill him in a few days,

while Titus bemoans the lot of the city he himself has destroyed and where he was proclaimed emperor while the Temple was still flaming.<sup>209</sup>

## THE GREEKS ASK TO BE PRESENTED TO JESUS

508. Finally the triumphant procession reached the city and entered the Temple. There, in the outer court, the cheers and the tumult continued, and the children repeated the cries quoted above. The blind and the lame, who flocked there where the begging was so profitable, took advantage of the general atmosphere of jubilation and had themselves brought to the triumphing wonder-worker to implore a cure; and Jesus healed them all.

The Temple was already crowded with pilgrims, and among them were also many who were not Jews but were interested in Judaism. The Jews of the Diaspora had in fact worked hard to win followers for their faith, and the latter were divided into two groups: the lower was that of the “devout” or “fearing God” (*sebomenoi*, or, *fobonmenoi ton qeon*), who were obliged to keep the Sabbath, recite certain prayers, give alms and fulfill other minor precepts but were still outside the chosen nation of Israel; the upper class was that of the true “proselytes” who had been circumcised and were therefore equal in all things, or almost all, to the Israelites and were bound by the same obligations.

When the procession entered the Temple, some of these “devout,” who were “Greeks,” as John calls them (12:20, Greek text), were there in the outer court, having come up to Jerusalem “to worship on the feast,” although they could not take part in the actual Paschal rites since they were not equal to the Israelites. They were struck by the spectacle of the procession and above all by what they saw and heard concerning Jesus’ miraculous power, and they wanted to be presented to him. In order to be able to get to him through the crowd, they appealed to the Apostle Philip (§314), saying: “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip was somewhat surprised and took counsel with his fellow townsman, Andrew, and finally both carried the request to Jesus.

John relates what happened next in his usual characteristic fashion, highlighting the eternal principles rather than the fleeting details of the episodes themselves. In his account the Greeks are not mentioned again; instead, Jesus speaks of his mission as solemnly confirmed by divine testimony. We might almost say that in these Greeks seeking Jesus John sees all of humanity that will come seeking him in fuller measure, and he slights the episode itself to linger over its everlasting consequence. Jesus said to his two disciples: “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Amen, amen, I say to you,



unless the grain of wheat falls into the ground and die, it remains alone. But if it dies, it brings forth much fruit." Here again is the concept of the glorification of the Messiah Jesus, to be preceded, however, by a trial of suffering and death; the kingdom of God will be completely diffused in the manner destined for it in the present "world" only after its Founder has been destroyed like the grain of wheat buried in the damp earth: from that hidden death will spring a powerful and unlimited fruitfulness.

And the destiny of Jesus' followers is like his own: "He who loves his life, loses it; and he who hates his life in this world, keeps it unto life everlasting. If anyone serve me, let him follow me; and where I am there also shall my servant be. If anyone serve me, my Father will honor him." And then Jesus thinks of the supreme trial he must face before his glorification and he says: "Now my soul is troubled. And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, this is why I came to this hour! Father, glorify thy name!" The possibility of hesitating in that supreme trial no sooner suggests itself than it is rejected; it comes back in a different way and with different consequences in Gethsemani (§555).

509. The heavenly Father heard the invocation; and as at Jesus' baptism and transfiguration (§270, §403), there came a voice from heaven, saying: "I have both glorified it, and I will glorify it again." The object of this glorification is not expressed but it is clearly the name of the Father which will be glorified by the mission of his Son Jesus and above all by the conclusion of that mission.

The crowd standing around heard the sound but did not understand the words; and so, some thought there had been a clap of thunder, which the Hebrews often called the 'Voice of God" (cf. *2 Kings* 22:14; Ps. 29:3, 9 Hebrew; *Job* 37:5, etc.), while others supposed that an angel had spoken with Jesus. And then the Master explained: "Not for me did this voice come, but for you. Now is the judgment of the world; now will the prince of the world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself." In other words, God was about to fulfill the judgment of damnation on the present world and Satan, its prince; the visible sign that the judgment was beginning was the voice they had just heard, which recalled the voice of God from Sinai when the ancient covenant had been established. The judgment would reach its end and climax when Jesus was "lifted up from the earth," for then he would draw all men to him, delivering them from their subjection to Satan. No sooner has the "lifting up" been mentioned than the Evangelist hastens to add: "Now he said this signifying by what death he was to die." We

do not know for certain, however, just how Jesus' listeners interpreted his prediction; from their words it seems they were thinking of a kind of "assumption" similar to that of Enoch. "The crowd answered him: 'We have heard from the Law that the Christ [Messiah] abides forever. And how canst thou say: "The Son of Man must be lifted up"? Who is this Son of Man?'" According to the Holy Scriptures (the "Law") the kingdom of the Messiah was indeed to be eternal; instead, Jesus had just said that he was to be "lifted up" or, as they interpreted it, "assumed" into heaven. Hence his kingdom here on earth would not last forever. Besides, the title "Son of Man" was not clear to these listeners, who perhaps were little or not at all familiar with the book of *Daniel* (§81). Hence, they were doubtful and waited for Jesus to give them the light.

This time, however, he did not enter into long explanations, or at least, none have been handed down to us. All we have is what seems a general, final exhortation: "Jesus therefore said to them: Yet a little while the light is among you. Walk while you have the light, that darkness may not overtake you. He who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light.'" As Jesus was speaking, the first shadows of evening were falling, and Mark (11:11) tells us specifically that "it was already late." But while his words spontaneously suggested the time of day, in reality they referred to the days of Jesus' life and to his spiritual light which was near its setting.

When the last rays of that day of triumph had faded into the dusk, Jesus returned with his Apostles to Bethany, where he spent the night (*Mark* 11:11; *Matt.* 21:17; cf. *John* 12:36).

## THE CURSED FIG TREE

510. We find the division of these last days of Jesus' life clearer in Mark than in the other Evangelists. He explicitly mentions the night between Sunday and Monday (*Mark* 11:11-12), the night between Monday and Tuesday (11:19-20), Wednesday (14:1), Thursday (14:12) and Thursday evening (14:17), and finally Friday morning (15:1) and afternoon (15:25, 33), the last day of Jesus' life. The other Evangelists are more indefinite regarding the first days of this week. Luke adds the general information that "in the daytime he was teaching in the temple; but as for the nights, he would go out and pass them on the mountain called Olivet. And all the people came to him early in the morning in the temple, to hear him" (*Luke* 21:37-38).

We cannot with absolute certainty distribute the various events narrated by the four Evangelists through these several days. Even if we follow Mark's sequence, we should have to assign most of Jesus' actions and discourses to Tuesday, which would leave very little for Monday and Wednesday. Now it may be that this order corresponds to fact but it may also be Mark's own arrangement; and this latter opinion seems favored by several episodes, like the cleansing of the Temple (note [91](#)), which he appears to ascribe to this Monday, and the dinner in Bethany (§501), which he seems to set on this Wednesday.

Certainly, Jesus' activity in these last days was very intense, and it is justifiable to suppose that only a part of it has been recorded for us. The favor of the populace, which lasted two or three days after that Sunday of triumph, was still sufficient protection against the hatred of the Jewish leaders and permitted him to spend the day in Jerusalem teaching and discussing openly in the Temple, where the people eagerly awaited him as Luke tells us. But at night, when the people could do little to help him and the leaders could accomplish much against him, Jesus left the treacherous city, crossed the Cedron, and withdrew to the neighboring Mount of Olives, where lay the friendly town of Bethany as well as the garden of Gethsemani, which was even nearer and also one of Jesus' favorite spots. Hence the only obstacle to the hatred and hostility of the leaders was the good will of the populace; but the leaders were well aware that such good will is the most fickle and changeable thing in the world, and they merely bided their time for a chance to turn it suddenly against him without provoking any public disturbances.

On Monday morning Jesus left Bethany early for Jerusalem, accompanied by his Apostles. He had not eaten before leaving, and so he felt hungry along the road. It is strange that he could have left the house governed by the careful Martha without taking any food; the Talmud recommends a very early meal and Rabbi Aqiba admonishes: "Rise early and eat...; sixty couriers may run but not overtake the man who has eaten early in the morning." But this is not the only paradox in the episode. Other details also suggest that it was one of those symbolic acts such as were frequently performed by the ancient prophets, especially Ezechiel. The act itself was real and genuine, but it transcended ordinary life, its sole purpose being to present in a visible, almost tangible manner, a given abstract teaching.

511. To stay his hunger, then, Jesus approached a fig tree near the road, like those still common today on the Mount of Olives, and sought among its truly

luxuriant foliage for a bit of fruit. But there could be no fruit for the simple reason, as Mark says (11:13) that “it was not the season for figs.” It was, in fact, the first of April, and in the sunnier regions of Palestine in that season it was possible for the fig trees to have already budded, or to have put forth the so-called “fig flowers,” but these would not be edible at this date, ripening only toward the first of June. The second or autumn crop of fruit may hang on the tree until the beginning of winter but would never last till the following April. If we were to judge the tree as we would a moral and responsible person, we should have to say it was “not guilty” for having no fruit in that season. Jesus was, in reality, seeking what was not to be found in the normal course of things. Nevertheless, he cursed the tree, saying: “May no one ever eat fruit of thee henceforward forever!”

All these considerations indicate that Jesus’ act was intended to be symbolic, similar to the instance when Jeremias broke the potter’s vessel (chap. 19) or when Ezechiel shaved off his hair and beard with a sharpened sword (chap. 5), or to any of the other paradoxical acts with symbolic significance performed by the ancient prophets. In this case, the crux of the symbol lay in the contrast between the abundance of useless foliage and the lack of useful fruit, a contrast which justified the curse pronounced on the “guilty” tree. Those who —like the Apostles present — knew the nature of Jesus’ ministry and had listened to his discussions with the Pharisees and his invectives against their hypocrisy, would have had no trouble understanding the reference. The true culprit was the chosen people Israel, then luxuriant with Pharisaic foliage but for a long time now obstinately void of moral fruit and hence meriting the curse of eternal barrenness. And if at first there could have been any doubt in the Apostles minds as to the meaning of the symbol, it was soon dispelled by the parables of rebuke (§512) which Jesus spoke the next day and addressed specifically to the Israel of his time.

As for what happened after the curse, Matthew tells us briefly (21:19) that the tree withered immediately, and he records next Jesus’ admonition to the Apostles in this regard. Mark gives us a more precise sequence, recounting that on the next morning — Tuesday — when they were coming back the same way again from Bethany to Jerusalem, the Apostles noticed that the tree had withered, and he assigns Jesus’ admonition to that day. As they passed the place, then, Peter was ingenuous enough to exclaim: Rabbi, behold, the fig tree that thou didst curse is withered up!” (*Mark* 11:21.) Jesus answered without making any reference to the symbolic meaning of his act, but merely

admonished the Apostles again to have faith and they would be able to move mountains (note [166](#)).

## CHAPTER XXIII: Passion Week—Tuesday and Wednesday

### THE AUTHORITY OF JESUS; THE PARABLE OF THE TWO SONS

512. THAT Tuesday morning Jesus went to the Temple where the people were eagerly awaiting him (§510), and he began to teach; but very soon along came the chief priests, the Scribes and Ancients of the people, that is, the representatives of the various groups in the Sanhedrin (§58), so that this represented a muster of all the forces of opposition. On the one side stood Jesus, on the other the Jewish leaders, and between them was the populace which protected Jesus. For the time being, the two opposing forces were poised in the balance, but once the obstacle between —the favor of the people —was removed, the balance would be broken and the clash precipitated.

The leaders that morning were seeking precisely to remove that obstacle, and so in the presence of the crowd, they asked Jesus: “By what authority dost thou do these things?” and, “Who gave thee this authority to do these things?” (*Mark* 11:28.) Their tone was that of cross examination, and they really treated Jesus as if he had already been brought to trial before their particular court. But at the same time the question was intended to discredit him before the people. The leaders probably hoped that Jesus would speak disparagingly of Moses or his Law, or something similar, and thereby irritate the popular sensibilities. But this time, too, Jesus accepted the challenge, and on the enemy’s own ground, choosing a stratagem very common with the doctors of the Law, namely, answering with a question as if to establish a point admitted by both sides: “But Jesus answered and said to them: I also will ask you one question, and answer me; then I will tell you by what authority I do these things. Was the baptism of John from heaven, or from men? Answer me.” The question was most embarrassing, especially there in front of the multitude, because of the very attitude the Jewish leaders had taken toward John the Baptist (§268, §292). The Evangelist describes their embarrassment thus: “But they began to argue among themselves, saying: If we say ‘From heaven,’ he will say, ‘Why then did you not believe in him?’ But if we say ‘From me?’” [But they do not say it because] they feared the people; for all regarded John as really a prophet. And they answered and said: ‘We do not know.’ And Jesus answering, said to them: ‘Neither do I tell you by what authority I do these things.’” The duel was over, and it certainly had not been

won by those who had chosen the weapons. The Sanhedrists had hoped to force the people to their side and thus have Jesus, abandoned by the multitude, at their mercy. Instead, it was the multitude which had once more protected Jesus, and he had again associated his own mission with that of John the Baptist. It is no wonder that the Sanhedrists did not accept Jesus' mission when they had rejected that of his precursor.

To substantiate his victory and clarify further the relationship between his mission and that of the Baptist, Jesus told a parable. A man had two sons, who worked for him in his vineyard. One day, he said to the first: Son, go and work today in my vineyard. And the son answered: Yes, I'll go. But in fact, he did not go at all. Later the father gave the same bidding to his second son, who answered: I will not go. But then he repented his answer and went as he was bid.<sup>210</sup> And Jesus concluded: "Which of the two did the father's will?" And they answered: The second. And Jesus applied the parable to the present circumstances: "Amen I say to you, the publicans and harlots are entering the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of justice, and you did not believe him. But the publicans and harlots believed him; whereas you, seeing it, did not even repent afterwards, that you might believe him" (*Matt.* 21:31-32). Hence the son who obeyed with words and then rebelled in fact represented the irreproachable Scribes and Pharisees. On the other hand, the discards of the chosen people — the publicans and the harlots — had sinned unquestionably but they had found their way back again by accepting the mission of John the Baptist, and so they had imitated the son who at first rebelled but then became obedient.

Between the two, the one who had done wrong but then "changed his mind" and did good is to be preferred to the one who never made up his mind to be good although constantly protesting his readiness to do so.

## THE PARABLE OF THE VINE DRESSERS

513. The above parable had been a condemnation and rebuke for those who then considered themselves the most illustrious representatives and guides of the chosen people; but Jesus adds another, also of rebuke, which sums up the whole history of Israel in its relation to the economy of human salvation foreordained by God. The veiled significance of this new parable is exactly what Jesus had symbolized a few hours before when he cursed the fig tree so that it withered. The similitude is the same used seven centuries before for the same purpose by the prophet Isaias, so that Jesus is once more



linking his mission to those of the ancient prophets and at the same time the parable is much more easily interpreted.

In his famous canticle, Isaiah (5:1 ff.) described a vineyard on which the master had showered the most affectionate care. He had chosen fertile ground, picked out all the stones and planted only the choicest vines; and then he fenced it in, built a tower within and set a winepress in it. But despite all his attention the vineyard perversely brought forth hard sour little wild grapes instead of sweet and fragrant clusters. And the prophet explained that the ungrateful vine was the nation of Israel and its owner was the Lord Yahweh Sabaoth, who, exasperated by its sterility, would beat down the fence, abandon the vineyard to devastation, and let the briars and the thorns grow up to choke it.

Jesus takes the same similitude, amplifying it with allusions to what had taken place in the seven centuries from Isaiah's day to his.

"There was a man, a householder, who planted a vineyard, and put a hedge about it, and dug a wine vat in it, and built a tower; then he let it out to vine-dressers, and went abroad. But when the fruit season drew near, he sent his servants to the vine-dressers to receive his fruits. And the vine-dressers seized his servants, and beat one, killed another, and stoned another. Again, he sent another party of servants more numerous than the first; and they did the same to these. Finally, he sent his son to them, saying: 'They will respect my son.'

"But the vine-dressers, on seeing the son, said among themselves: 'This is the heir; come, let us kill him, and we shall have his inheritance.' So, they seized him, cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. When therefore, the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those vine-dressers? — They said to him: 'He will utterly destroy those evil men, and will let out the vineyard to other vine-dressers, who will render to him the fruits in their seasons.'<sup>211</sup>

"Jesus said to them: 'Did you never read in the Scriptures,  
"The stone which the builders rejected, has become the corner stone;  
By the Lord this has been done, and it is wonderful in our eyes"?  
[Ps. 118:22-23, Hebrew.]

Therefore, I say to you, that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and will be given to a people yielding its fruits'" (*Matt.* 21:33-43).<sup>212</sup>



It was hardly necessary to have the Pharisees' proficiency in the Holy Scriptures and their knowledge of the religious history of their nation to perceive immediately that the vineyard was Israel, the owner was God, and the servants abused or killed were the prophets, whose violent deaths form a continuous obituary down through the pages of Scripture. But Jesus concludes with another allusion, this time to the future, saying that the very son of the householder, whom he had sent last into the vineyard was beaten and killed. Clearly the son was the speaker himself, and so he had in the parable implicitly proclaimed himself the Son of God and accused in advance those guilty of the crime soon to be committed. It was all too plain and too specific to leave room for any misunderstanding. And the result tallied perfectly with the respective dispositions of his listeners: "And when the chief priests and Pharisees had heard his parables, they knew that he was speaking about them. And though they sought to lay hands on him, they feared the people, because they regarded him as a prophet."

## TRIBUTE TO CAESAR

514. Once again, therefore, the favor of the people had been a protection for Jesus and a serious obstacle for the Jewish leaders. So, the latter, simmering to end once and for all a conflict so intense and much too prolonged, decided to remove that exasperating obstacle by compromising Jesus in such a way that all the love of the people would not be able to help him a bit.

Having taken counsel on what they should do next (*Matt.* 22:15), they sent some of their disciples to Jesus along with a few Herodians (§45) to propose a special question to him in public and in such manner that the crowd could not help but hear. The presence of the Herodians in itself suggested that it was to be a political question, a subject Jesus had always avoided. The messengers approached him exuding ostentatious respect, as if there was no connection whatever between them and his previous inquisitors, and they said to him unctuously: "Master, we know that thou art truthful, and that thou teachest the way of God in truth and that thou carest naught for any man; for thou dost not regard the person of men. Tell, us, therefore, what dost thou think: Is it lawful to give tribute to Caesar, or not?" (*Matt.* 22:16-17.) The question, as the Evangelist warns us, was nothing but a trap. If Jesus answered that it was lawful, he would draw down upon his head the wrathful hatred of the people, for the Messiah and national hero could never declare it lawful to recognize a

foreign political authority and to pay it any tribute whatever. If he answered that it was unlawful, that would be sufficient cause for denouncing him to the Roman procurator as a rebel and instigator of revolt, especially since the great rebellion of Judas the Galilean thirty years before had been occasioned by the Roman census which was strictly associated with the payment of tribute (§43). The expert Pharisees considered the horns of the dilemma quite perfect and inescapable and were certain that Jesus would be stuck fast on one or the other. They probably expected that he would declare the payment of the tribute unlawful and in that case his immediate denunciation by the Herodian witnesses would have greatly impressed the Roman procurator.

But all their expectations were disappointed, for Jesus handed the dilemma right back to his questioners: “Why do you test me, you hypocrites? Show me the coin of the tribute.” So, they brought him a Roman denarius of silver, worth a little more than twenty cents in our money. It was the coin commonly used in payment of taxes and it was minted outside of Palestine because it was of precious metal and bore the image of a human being, whereas the coins minted in Jewish territory were of bronze only and bore no image in obedience to the well-known Jewish precept (§23). If the denarius brought to Jesus was the one issued under the then reigning Tiberius — as seems probable — its face bore the image of the emperor crowned and around the edge ran the inscription *Ti.(berius) Caesar Divi Aug.(usti) F.(ilius) Augustus*.

Jesus’ request to see a coin of the tribute, almost as if he had never seen one before, was strange enough, but even stranger was his question when he held it in his hand: “Whose are this image and the inscription?” Didn’t he know? Any little urchin in Palestine could have told him that the image and the inscription belonged to the emperor up there in Rome who commanded the whole world and even Jerusalem, unfortunately. Surprised, they answered: “Caesar’s.” But his ignorance was feigned like that of Socrates, whose famous method was to make the person he was questioning state a given truth. When they answered that the image and the name were Caesar’s, Jesus had what he wanted, and he concluded: “Render, therefore, to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” The conclusion derived with inescapable logic from the Pharisees’ own answer. Was the coin Caesar’s? Well then, let them render it to Caesar, for the simple fact that they accepted and used the coin showed that they also accepted the sovereignty of the one who had issued it.<sup>213</sup> Hence the question was solved

without Jesus' entering at all the political field he so carefully avoided, and only on the basis of the confession that the coin was Caesar's.

Nevertheless, the question was not solved, according to Jesus, by defining only the obligation toward Caesar. The goal of his mission was the kingdom of God, not that of one Caesar or another; and when men had rendered to their respective Caesars what belonged to them, they had performed only part, and not the most important part, of their duty. Hence Jesus adds the injunction to render also to God, not only to make his answer complete but also to emphasize the first injunction to render to Caesar. Jesus knows none of the Caesars of this world personally; he does not know whether they are called Augustus or Tiberius, Herod Antipas or Pontius Pilate. He knows only that they are invested with an authority which must be respected. Now, why are men subject to Caesar? Precisely because they are subject to God.

Man's duties toward Caesar form only one plane in the great picture in which Jesus contemplates the kingdom of God. Whoever belongs to the kingdom of God must, by virtue of this membership, fulfill his duties toward his Caesar; but as soon as he has done so, let him rise to higher planes and soar through the imperishable dominions of his heavenly Father.

## THE SADDUCEES AND THE RESURRECTION

515. The treacherous question on the tribute completely routed the ones who had asked it; "hearing this they marveled, and leaving him went off" (*Matt. 22:22*).

Their rivals, the Sadducees, were gratified by this defeat and immediately presented themselves to try a new engagement on their own account. This was to concern the question of the resurrection of the body, which they stubbornly denied (§34) and which was the object of old controversies between them and the Pharisees. So, they came to Jesus and presented, not the abstract question of the resurrection, but a concrete case, one of those "cases" which were the delight of the Jewish schools. First, they quoted the law of the "levirate," in which Moses prescribed that if a Hebrew died without issue, his brother was to marry the widow in order to provide an heir for the deceased (*Deut. 25:5*). Then they presented their "case." There were seven brothers, the first of whom died without leaving any children, and so the second married his widow. But he also died without leaving children, and so the third brother married the widow. This continued until she had married the seventh and last, and after his death she died too. Now —the Sadducees

inquired — whose wife would that woman be when she had risen with all seven of them together? All seven had equal right to her.

It was a typical academic case, but there were others much more abstruse and labored, as, for example, this one recorded in the Talmud. There were thirteen brothers, twelve of whom died without heirs. Their twelve widows summoned the sole surviving brother before the Rabbi (Judah I, who died at the beginning of the third century) to force him to marry them according to the law of the levirate, but the brother declared he did not have sufficient means to support the twelve aspirants to his hearth. Thereupon with one accord they declared that each of them in turn would support the whole family for one month, and so they would all be taken care of for the year. Their future husband, however, pointed out that according to the Hebrew calendar there were sometimes thirteen months in the year. Every third year, in fact, a thirteenth month was intercalated to make the official lunar year correspond with the solar year. Then the generous Rabbi answered that he would provide the maintenance for the extra month. And that was the way the matter was settled. After three years, the twelve remarried widows arrived at the home of the Rabbi with their thirty-six babies, and he took care of them for that month.<sup>214</sup>

516. The Sadducees who presented their "case" to Jesus were not concerned with financial support but with the matter of the resurrection itself. According to them, their case proved the resurrection impossible: if the woman rose again, she would have to be the wife of all seven resurrected husbands at once, and since this was clearly an absurdity and an indecency as well, it proved resurrection impossible. If Jesus tried to defend the doctrine of resurrection, he would become entangled in a thicket of nonsense and foolishness and lose all credit with the crowd.

Their reasoning presupposed a very gross and materialistic concept of the resurrection, which was the very reason why the Sadducees rejected it though it was commonly but not universally accepted among the Pharisees. The resurrection was pictured as an awakening from sleep, in which the risen one would be physically just as he was in life. Hence, he would eat, drink, sleep, beget children, etc.; in fact, it seemed sensible that all these functions should enjoy an increased and more vigorous activity, and so about fifty years after Jesus the prominent Rabban Gamaliel declared that in the future life women would bear children every day as hens lay eggs.<sup>215</sup>

Jesus brushes aside all these puerile imaginings, and answers: "You err because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God. For at the resurrection, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage, but are as angels of God in heaven." The risen will be the same men as before, but their condition will be changed; they will be as the angels in heaven. And Jesus continued: "But as to the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying:

'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? [Exod. 3:6]

He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

The passage quoted is part of the Torah, the only portion of the Holy Scriptures which the Sadducees accepted (§31). This seems to be the reason why — as St. Jerome pointed out — he ignored other Scriptural passages which are much clearer testimonies of the belief in the resurrection and based his argument on this, which the Sadducees could not reject as they could the others. In any case, Jesus' reasoning proceeds according to the methods of the rabbinical schools and takes for granted the conceptual heritage of Hebraism: The God of the Hebrew patriarchs is not the God of the dead but of the living; hence those patriarchs are still living after the death of their bodies, and therefore the resurrection is attested by the Holy Scriptures.

## THE GREAT COMMANDMENT; THE MESSIAS, SON OF DAVID

517. The Pharisees and Sadducees continued to take turns throughout that day, which must have been a very busy one for Jesus. The answer the Sadducees received delighted a certain Scribe present at the discussion, and so he came forward to propose a question to Jesus, which was quite in keeping with the rabbinic method: Which is the first commandment of all? (cf. *Mark* 12:28), or as Matthew records it (22:36): "Which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

According to the rabbis the written Law, or Torah, contained six hundred and thirteen precepts (§30), two hundred and forty-eight of which were commandments while three hundred and sixty-five were prohibitions. Both commands and prohibitions were divided into two groups, the "light" and the "heavy" according to their respective importance. Now, there must have been some kind of hierarchy among all these commandments; among the "heavy" precepts there must have been one more important than all the rest. And that is what this particular Scribe wanted to know.

Jesus' answer is the same he had given the doctor of the Law to whom he spoke the parable of the Good Samaritan. He recited the beginning of the *Shema*' (§438). "The first commandment of all is, 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is one God; and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind, and with thy whole strength.' This is the first commandment. And the second is like it: 'Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." Really the Scribe had asked for only one commandment, the greatest of them all. Jesus gave him the commandment of the love of God, but almost as if this were not complete by itself—at least where men's actions are concerned—he added the other to love one's neighbor. These two interwoven precepts are, for Jesus, the "greatest" commandment.

He had previously expressed the same idea in the Sermon on the Mount (§327, §332).

The Scribe heartily approved the answer and added, for his part, that this twofold love of God and neighbor was worth more than all the holocausts and sacrifices in the Temple. In reward for his reply, Jesus said to him: "Thou art not far from the kingdom of God." All he lacked was belief in the mission of Jesus, like that which Peter and John and so many others had. Whether he ever found it we do not know.

When this discussion was ended, we are told that "no one after that ventured to ask him questions" (*Mark* 12:34).

It was Jesus himself who resumed the battle. In the Temple itself he approached a group of Pharisees and set before them a question concerning the Messiah: From what blood was he to descend? Whose son was he to be?

In complete agreement with all Hebrew tradition, they answered him: David's.

Jesus then observed that in the Holy Scriptures David himself, whose name is in the inscription over the Psalm (109 [110]) speaks thus:

"The Lord said to my Lord:  
Sit thou at my right hand.  
Until I make thy enemies as thy footstool."

From this passage Jesus argues: If David, therefore, calls him Lord, how is he his son?"

The strength of the argument lay in two points admitted also by the Pharisees: first, that it is David speaking in this Psalm as the inscription

indicates, and secondly, that the Psalm concerns the future Messiah, as we should gather from its wide use in this sense in the New Testament (where it is quoted more than fifteen times), which use presupposes that the opposition agrees on this point.

If the future Messiah was to be David's descendant, why does David call him "Lord"? According to Jesus, this proved the Messiah was more than merely the "son of David" and possessed qualities which made him "greater than Jonas and greater than Solomon" (§446) and greater also than David, but Jesus wanted the Pharisees themselves to state the explanation of this apparent inconsistency. And they could not answer him. Later, from the second century on, the rabbis settled the question by declaring the Psalm did not refer to the Messiah but to some other personage, usually believed to be Abraham, sometimes David himself (!), and, according to the solitary testimony of Justin (*Dial. cum Tryph.*, 33 and 83), King Ezechias.

The change was obviously determined by anti-Christian polemics.<sup>216</sup>

## THE "ELENCHOS" AGAINST THE SCRIBES AND PHARISEES; THE WIDOW'S MITE

518. In ancient Greek terminology, the *elenchos* was that part of a forensic oration which set forth the charges against one's opponent together with their respective proofs. It was, therefore, a rebuke which demonstrated another's dishonor, and in earlier times (in Homer) the term *elenchos* had meant "rebuke" and "dishonor" both.

That stormy Tuesday, most of which Jesus spent battling with the Scribes and Pharisees, could not fail to produce its *elenchos*, which summed up and completed all the charges he had previously expressed against his adversaries. All three Synoptics, in fact, assign such a list of reproaches to this particular day but with the usual differences: Mark (12:38-40) is very brief; so is Luke (20:46-47), who, however, recorded a long series of accusations on the occasion of the banquet offered Jesus by the Pharisees (§447). On the other hand, Matthew's account (chap. 23) is very long, and it includes almost all of Luke's list with some additions besides. It is probable that Matthew used the same procedure here that he did with the Sermon on the Mount (§317), recording here certain statements Jesus had made in another context. This opinion is also suggested by the literary arrangement of the *elenchos*, which is divided into three parts (23:1-12; 23:13-32; 23:33-39), while the second part is subdivided into seven laments, "Woe to you....!" (§125). Matthew's account



on the whole seems preferable to Luke's, and Jesus must have spoken the main part of the discourse here at the end of his life, just as the other two Synoptics seem to suggest.

Matthew's version follows; for the parts already discussed, the reader is referred to our previous remarks in their regard.

"The Scribes and Pharisees have sat on the chair of Moses. All things, therefore, that they command you, observe and do. But do not act according to their works; for they talk but do nothing. And they bind together heavy and oppressive burdens, and lay them on men's shoulders; but not with one finger of their own do they choose to move them. In fact, all their works they do in order to be seen by men; for they widen their phylacteries, and enlarge their tassels, and love the first places at suppers and the front places in the synagogues, and greetings in the market place, and to be called by men 'Rabbi.' But do not you be called 'Rabbi; for one is your Master, and all you are brothers. And call no one on earth your Father; for one is your Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters (*kaqhghtai*); for one only is your Master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant. And whoever exalts himself shall be humbled, and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted." In this first part of the discourse, Jesus sketches the characteristic features of the Pharisees, and so it contains some echoes of his previous discussions with them. And since he is speaking here to the crowd gathered in the Temple, he immediately exhorts them not to imitate them, but to do exactly the opposite. The Pharisees' vanity found expression in the "phylacteries" (*tephillin*, more rarely *totaphoth*) among other things, little boxes containing rolled-up strips of parchment on which were written passages from the holy Books (*Exod.* 13:1-10; 13:11-16; *Deut.* 6:4-9; 11:13-21). While praying, the Israelite wore (and still wears) these strips bound around his forehead and his left arm with the intention of fulfilling to the letter the precept in *Deuteronomy* 6:8 (cf. *Exod.* 13:9). The more vainglorious provided themselves with broader and more showy strips to attract attention, just as they exaggerated the "tassels" on their cloaks (*sisiiyyoth*), which also had a religious significance and were worn by Jesus too (§349).

519. The second part of the discourse forms the true *elenchos*:

"But woe to you. Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you shut the kingdom of heaven against men. For you yourselves do not enter in, nor do you let those entering pass in."<sup>217</sup>



"Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you traverse sea and land to make one convert; and when he has become one, you make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves.

"Woe to you, blind guides, who say, 'Whoever swears by the temple, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gold of the temple, he is bound.' You blind fools! for which is greater, the gold, or the temple which sanctifies the gold? [You say also] 'And whoever swears by the altar, it is nothing; but whoever swears by the gift that is upon it, he is bound.' Blind ones! for which is greater, the gift, or the altar which sanctifies the gift? Therefore, he who swears by the altar swears by it, and by all things that are on it; and he who swears by the temple swears by it, and by him who dwells in it. And he who swears by heaven swears by the throne of God, and by him who sits upon it.<sup>218</sup>

'Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you pay tithes on mint and anise and cummin, and have left undone the weightier matters of the Law, right judgment and mercy and faith. These things you ought to have done, while not leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat but swallow the camel!

"Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you clean the outside of the cup and the dish, but within they are full of robbery and uncleanness. Thou blind Pharisee! clean first the inside of the cup and of the dish, that the outside too may be clean.

"Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you are like whited sepulchers, which outwardly appear to men beautiful, but within are full of dead mens bones and of all uncleanness. So, you also outwardly appear just to men, but within you are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

"Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! you who build the sepulchers of the prophets, and adorn the tombs of the just, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been their accomplices in the blood of the prophets.' Thus, you are witnesses against yourselves that you are the sons of those who killed the prophets. You also fill up the measure of your fathers."

Here are the charges, and the statement of them was in itself equivalent to proof because all Jesus' listeners knew from experience that the things he said were every one of them true. Forty years later, after the catastrophe of 70, things changed somewhat. The Pharisees remained the sole and undisputed

guides of the remnants of the nation and they multiplied norms and prescriptions to suit their fancy, but they renounced entirely the anxious proselytism mentioned here, some of the results of which among the Greeks were noted above (§508).

520. The statement that the Pharisees have filled up “the measure” of their fathers is followed by a sorrowful description of the consequences, just as in a forensic oration the penalty followed the proof of the crime. It is the third part of the discourse:

“Serpents, brood of vipers, how are you to escape the judgment of hell? Therefore, behold, I send you prophets, and wise men, and scribes; and some of them you will put to death, and crucify, and some you will scourge in your synagogues (§64), and persecute from town to town; that upon you may come all the just blood that has been shed on the earth, from the blood of Abel the just unto the blood of Zacharias the son of Barachias, whom you killed between the temple and the altar. Amen I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.

“Jerusalem, Jerusalem! thou who killest the prophets, and stonest those who are sent to thee! How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen gathers her young under her wings, but thou wouldst not! Behold, your house is left to you desolate. For I say to you, you shall not see me henceforth until you shall say, ‘Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!’”

This last part is not so much a threat as a genuine lament. Jesus deplors the fact that his repeated attempts to save the city and the nation have all been frustrated, and that the whole structure gradually built up by God for the salvation of Israel is to be gradually demolished by the perversity of men. What happened in the days of the Law when the prophets of Yahweh were stoned for their pains will happen again in the time of the Messiah, whose messengers will meet a similar fate. But in this way the whole weight of even the most ancient crimes will fall upon those who commit the last one, because they lay bare the deepest foundations of God’s edifice, and filling up the measure draw full vengeance down upon themselves. This is a salutary threat, therefore, one last anguished cry of warning that the blind guides of the chosen nation may stay their steps on the very brink of the abyss.

Jesus mentions only two of the ancient crimes by name, the murder of Abel and of Zacharias, probably because one is narrated at the beginning of the

first book of the Hebrew Bible, *Genesis* (4:8), and the other toward the end of the last book, that of *Paralipomenon* (2 *Par.* 24:20- 22).

There is an old difficulty in the patronymic “son of Barachias,” used here with Zacharias, who in *Paralipomenon* is called the “son of Joiada”; the prophet Zacharias (*Zach.* 1:1, 7), on the other hand, who is an entirely different person, appears as the “son of Barachias.” We must note, however, that the patronymic is lacking in the parallel passage in *Luke* (11:51) and also in the highly authoritative Sinaitic codex of *Matthew*. This could suggest that the “Son of Barachias” is an ancient gloss which crept into the Greek text but which was not in the original Semitic *Matthew* (§121) unless there are other reasons for the difference which today escape us.<sup>219</sup>

The two Synoptics, which alone record Jesus’ apostrophe to Jerusalem, thereby show that his repeated attempts to save the city and consequently his repeated journeys to the capital are familiar to their authors although these journeys are narrated by John and not by the Synoptics. Hence the Synoptic tradition implicitly recognizes that of John although it does not use it (§165).

521. But all Jesus’ attempts end with this last anguished and threatening appeal. When the citizens of the Holy City have repulsed him the last time, when their last crime has been consummated, then their house will be left to them desolate, and he whom they rejected will withhold his help from them. Nor will they ever see him again except in the far- distant future when the erring nation has repented its error and goes in search of the rejected:

“A sound is heard over the bare hills, the tearful plea of the children of Israel: because they have wandered from their way, they have forgotten the Lord their God.”

They will be days when “They shall say no more ‘O ark of the covenant of the Lord’ neither shall it come to their minds nor shall they think of it, nor shall it be missed, nor built again.”

An invitation will go forth to the wayward: “Return, you rebellious children, and I will heal your rebellions!”

And they will answer: “Behold we come to thee: for thou art the Lord our God! . . . Truly, in the Lord our God is the salvation of Israel!”

(*Jer.* 3:16-23 [Hebrew].)

Jesus recalls the vision of the ancient prophet, but against the background of a time that is entirely new and still more remote, the time of the last parousia. Then Israel, reconciled with the rejected Messiah, will be able to see

him again because she will go to meet him with the words of acclaim addressed to him in his brief triumph two days before: “Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!” (§504.)

The far-off future when his countrymen will recover from their blindness and “thus all Israel ... be saved” (*Rom.* 11:25-26) is also contemplated a few years later by the Pharisee Paul of Tarsus, become the “servant of Christ Jesus.”

After the elenchos against the Scribes and Pharisees, we are permitted to watch a humble but very noble little scene, which is in direct contrast to the spiritual world of the Scribes and Pharisees. It is described by Luke (21:1-4), but is even more lively in Mark (12:41-44), while Matthew unexpectedly omits it altogether. Perhaps it derives from the catechesis of Peter and reached Luke through Mark.

522. That Tuesday was almost over. When Jesus had ended his sorrowful plaint against his adversaries, he walked through the inner parts of the Temple as far as the women’s court, and there he sat down opposite the adjoining hall of the treasury (§47). At the entrance to the latter stood thirteen chests for the offerings, called “trumpets” from the shape of the elongated opening through which the money was dropped. The offerings were very abundant during great feasts like this of the Pasch because many pilgrims took advantage of the occasion to pay the prescribed tribute to the Temple (§406), and all the faithful in general made spontaneous offerings besides. Hence several priests stood near the chests, checking the payment of the tribute and watching over things generally.

Seated opposite, Jesus watched the crowd. Many rich folk came and poured in handfuls of coins with great ostentation, confident that this won them great esteem not only among men but also with God. And in their midst, unnoticed and ignored, a poor little widow came dragging herself along to drop into one of the chests “two mites, which make a quadrans” (§133), or not even half a cent. Then Jesus “called his disciples together, and said to them: Amen I say to you, this poor widow has put in more than all those who have been putting money into the treasury. For they all have put in out of their abundance; but she out of her want has put in all that she had — all that she had to live on” (*Mark* 12:43-44). And with this observation the Master of the spirit again contradicted the masters of externals who were his adversaries.

(Figure 66, Figure 67, Figure 68)

## THE ESCHATOLOGICAL DISCOURSE

523. The day was drawing toward sunset, and Jesus started to leave the Temple to spend the night outside the city as he did all that week (§510). Having crossed the Court of the Gentiles, he made his way beside the substructures of the Temple area which rose along the valley of the Cedron and presented a truly powerful and magnificent spectacle. As they looked at them the disciples were naturally reminded of Jesus' last words to the Scribes and Pharisees, which had rung so heavy with gloomy menace: Behold, your house is left to you desolate." The first and best-loved house of every good Israelite was the house of Yahweh, the Temple of the Holy City, unique in the whole world. That Temple had necessarily to be eternal as their common faith required and the grandiose majesty of its buildings seemed to prove. What did Jesus mean, then, when he said that that house would be left desolate? Was this prediction somehow associated with the other painful prophecies the Master had made in the past?

One of the disciples decided to sound out Jesus' thought, and so he approached him casually as the party wound along beside the revetments beneath the Temple and began to praise the vast edifice with great enthusiasm and in terms reminiscent of the long descriptions in Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XV, 380-425; *Wars of the Jews*, V, 184-226). Nor was the praise exaggerated, after all, for when he speaks of the Temple as viewed from the Cedron side, Josephus tells us: "The lower temple precincts, where their foundation was lowest, had to be supported by walls three hundred cubits [about 150 yd.] high and in some places even higher; nevertheless, the entire depth of the foundations did not appear, because they [the builders] filled in most of the hollows in their desire to level the lanes of the city. In the building [of the foundations] there were [used] stones forty cubits [about 20 yd.] in length. . . . The structures at the top were indeed worthy of such foundations. In fact, the porticoes were all double and supported by columns twenty- five cubits [nearly 40 ft.] tall, which were monoliths of pure white marble, topped with cedar. Their natural magnificence, their polish and arrangement made them a wonderful sight to behold . . . (*Wars of the Jews*, V, 188-191).

But the disciples' enthusiastic exclamations did not dispel Jesus' thoughtfulness. Only after a while did he lift his head, and with a brief glance at the structures so praised, he said gravely: "Dost thou see all these great

buildings? There will not be left one stone upon another that will not be thrown down. And he relapsed once more into thoughtful silence."

The disciples were stunned. The master's melancholy spread over them as the company continued its way without another word across the Cedron and up the opposite slope of the Mount of Olives. When they reached the top, Jesus sat down facing the Temple (*Mark* 13:3) and contemplated it silently. He was like a pilot who painfully watches from the shore his beloved ship, which he has sailed for long years but has had to abandon because at any moment it will sink to the bottom of the sea forever.

The dismayed disciples took advantage of the stop to mention the subject again and to ask the Master for some explanation of his dreadful prophecy. "Peter and James and John and Andrew asked him privately," and Jesus' answer is commonly known as the "eschatological discourse."

524. It appears only in the Synoptics (*Matt.* 24; *Mark* 13; *Luke* 21: 5-36) but with the usual discrepancies such as occur in other instances as well. Luke besides has anticipated some of it in chapter 17 (§§474 ff.), while Matthew seems to have done the same thing though to a lesser degree (10:17-23). Clearly, then, we meet here again the individual editing of the respective Evangelists and the modern reader must keep this in mind in order to interpret the discourse correctly.

But there is also another important fact to remember. The three editions of the discourse in the several Synoptics derive from the respective catecheses which they represent (§§110 ff.) and therefore reflect the "mind of the Church." Now the Church in the present instance was in an extremely delicate position, pervaded as it was by the perplexity and the worrisome doubts which many points in the discourse had aroused in the minds of the first Christians, not excluding the Evangelists themselves. If we compare the effect of the discourse on a modern reader with its effect on the faithful of the first Christian generation, we are forced to admit that it is much easier to interpret it correctly today than it was then. Time is often an excellent coefficient for correct exegesis, and the modern reader, with twenty centuries of history to help him, has no difficulty understanding at least some points of the discourse, whereas those first Christians had no such precious assistance.

The discourse treats of two great events, both to take place in a more or less distant future and somehow associated with each other. Inasmuch as they belonged to the future, they were both shrouded in mystery for anyone who

heard the discourse from Jesus or the Apostles. A little later, but still within the first Christian generation, the first of these events actually took place and one part of the mystery was solved, but the rest of it was enveloped in still more distressing and even terrifying obscurity. If the first prediction had been so promptly fulfilled and it seemed so intimately connected with the second, then would not the latter come to pass soon also? Was not the first event the immediate precursor of the second? On these questions the first Christians reflected with trepidation for many years.

Today we also recognize that the first of those two events occurred during the first Christian generation, but we no longer have the same anxieties regarding the immediate fulfillment of the second. Twenty centuries of history have served to underline the true meaning of Jesus' words, which set between the two a measureless interval of time. Since the first prediction and the interval are now perfectly clear the entire mystery today is concentrated on the second event, about which the modern reader is no less ignorant than the first Christians, though not so anxious.

A careful comparison of the three versions of the discourse and also of individual parallel passages makes it seem very probable that the oldest and least edited is the one preserved for us by Mark, or Peter's catechesis (§§128 ff.). Taking this as our guide, though not unmindful of our other testimonies, we may sum up the content of the discourse as follows.

525. The question the four disciples asked Jesus on the top of the mountain had been expressed thus: "Tell us, when are these things to happen, and what will be the sign when all these things will begin to [be accomplished — *sunteleisqai*?" (*Mark* 13:4.) The expression "these things" in the first instance refers to the destruction of the Temple, about which Jesus has predicted that not a stone will be left upon a stone; but the second time it is certainly used in a much broader sense to mean the complete universal catastrophe in which "all these things," namely, the present "age" or world, will come to an end, as the expression "be accomplished" suggests, it being the conventional way of referring to the end of the world (§628). The parallel passage in *Matthew* (24:3) leaves no room for doubt on this point: "Tell us, when are these things to happen, and what will be the sign of thy coming [ *parousia*] and of the end [*sunteleiaz*] of the world?" When the disciples heard Jesus prophesy the destruction of the Temple, therefore, they thought immediately of his various promises that the "kingdom of God" would "come in power" (§401) and that "in the regeneration" the Son of Man would "sit on the throne of his glory"



(§486), to say nothing of the several allusions in the parables; and they naturally associated all these things, thinking of the destruction of the Temple and of the parousia or end of the "world" as simultaneous events or at least as following one right after the other. They wanted Jesus, however, to answer both questions, namely, when the Temple was to be destroyed and when the end of the world would take place, and also to describe the signs which were to precede the one event and the other.

He begins, in fact, by warning his disciples against treachery and fraud, and so the first part of his answer describes the signs which will precede the destruction of the Temple (*Mark* 13:5-23). Many lying preachers will come forward and parade as the Messiah, drawing many after them into error, and there will be wars, seditions, earthquakes, and famine in various places, but all this is not yet the end — it is only the "beginning of sorrows" (arch wdinwn). The great tribulation (qliyiz) will fall directly on the disciples of Jesus, who will be denounced to sanhedrins, synagogues, and governors, who will be beaten and imprisoned, betrayed by their closest relatives, and universally hated because of their faith. But despite all this and during this very period, "the gospel must first be preached to all the nations." Then the "great tribulation" will move toward its close: the abomination of desolation prophesied by Daniel (9:27) will stand in the Temple and Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies. Then the disciples who have remained faithful to Jesus must straightway flee for their lives. For these will be "days of vengeance, that all things that are written [in the Holy Scriptures] may be fulfilled" (*Luke* 21:22), and there "will be tribulations, such as have not been from the beginning of the creation which God created until now, or will be" (cf. *Dan.* 12:1), although those days will be shortened that the chosen may escape (*Mark* 13:19-20).

It is to be noted that up to this point, the discourse has made no mention of time but only of the signs of the "great tribulation." That this refers to the destruction of the Temple and Jerusalem is clearly indicated by the wording and it is further confirmed by the highly significant fact that when Josephus sets himself to describe the same event, he uses very similar expressions: "In reality, the calamities of all the centuries seem less to me in comparison with those of the Jews" (*Wars of the Jews*, I, 12). And he describes the war between Rome and Judea as "the greatest not only of those of our time but almost of those we have heard spoken of which have broken out between city and city or between nation and nation" (*ibid.*, I, 1). Nor is there any difficulty in the statement that at the destruction of the Temple "the gospel must first



be preached to all the nations.” St. Paul spoke of this as an accomplished fact even before Jerusalem was destroyed (§401). Now, the destruction of Jerusalem took place forty years after the discourse, or in a period which the Jews reckoned as a “generation.” And Jesus, when he has finished describing the signs, adds: “Amen I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things have been accomplished” (*Mark* 13:30).

526. Now if we check these things against secular history, we find that toward the end of this foreseen period of forty years there passed a time which a Roman historian, who was well acquainted with his subject, described as “filled with calamities, black with battles, torn by sedition, cruel even in its very peace. Four princes were cut down by the sword [i.e., Nero, Galba, Otto, and Vitellius]. Three civil wars, more foreign wars, and a number which were both at once” — and the fist continues in detail, adding “besides innumerable disasters in human affairs, prodigies in heaven and on earth, and warnings of thunderbolts and signs of things to come,” to conclude with desolate pessimism that “our safety does not concern the gods, only revenge” (Tac., *Historia*, I, 2 ... 3).<sup>220</sup> Josephus, writing particularly of Palestine, gives us our information about the internal conflict and especially the resurgence of political messianism which we have mentioned several times. The end of all this came with the catastrophe of 70 when Temple, capital, and nation perished together. As for Jesus’ disciples during this “great tribulation,” they suffered those persecutions within and outside of Palestine which are attested both by the Acts and other New Testament writings and also by the Roman historians, and which were directed against them by their own countrymen and kinsmen as well as by foreigners and Gentiles. But those who survived the lying tongues of the false prophets and the violence of their persecutors, when they saw the Temple of Jerusalem desecrated by the bloody Zealots (*Wars of the Jews*, IV, 151 ff.; 305 ff.; 381 ff.), obeyed the admonition in the eschatological discourse and fled from the city to Pella in Transjordan, as we are told by Eusebius (*Hist. eccl.*, III, 5, 3).<sup>221</sup>

527. Up to this point Jesus’ answer has referred only to the first part of the disciples’ question; it has described the signs which will precede the destruction of the Temple, and it comes to a clear and definite close with the admonition: “be on your guard, therefore; behold, I have told you all things beforehand” (*Mark* 13:23). Now he must answer the second half of the question by describing the signs of the end of the world.

This second part (*Mark* 13:24ff.) begins with the words: "But in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, etc." Here the expression "in those days," is the usual formula, frequent in both the Old and the New Testaments, for introducing a new subject but without reference to any specific time; it means, at the most, "in a certain time . . . , in its time . . . , in a given period."<sup>222</sup> In this undetermined period, which will come after the "great tribulation," the end of the world and the parousia will take place together, and they are described here in terms derived for the most part from the Old Testament and common to apocalyptic literature (§§84 ff.) as well: the sun and the moon will be darkened, the stars will fall, the powers of heaven will be shaken, and then the Son of Man will appear coming on the clouds with power and glory, and he will send his angels to the four winds to gather his elect. This will be the end of the present "world" and the beginning of the future "world." In all three Synoptics the signs of the "great tribulation" are described at greater length than those of the parousia.

The time when this parousia will occur is indicated right after the statement regarding the time of the "great tribulation." But while the latter indication is clear and specific — during this "generation" — the other is completely negative: "But of that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only" (*Mark* 13:32).

In the fourth and fifth centuries during the violent Arian and Christological controversies, this passage was widely used and abused to measure the knowledge of the divine Son in comparison with that of the Father and to attribute to him a certain lack in that respect. But the very difficulty in the expression used, seeming as it does to assert lack of knowledge on the part of the Son, is one more reason for considering it the precise phrase spoken by Jesus, transmitted to us in its most exact and authentic form. This same difficulty is probably the reason why Luke omits the whole phrase from his Gospel and why the reference to the Son in the corresponding passage in Matthew (24:36) disappeared from various Greek codices and from the Vulgate to spare their respective readers an unpleasant surprise. But now that the Arian and Christological debates are over, it is generally agreed that the phrase is to be interpreted as *a fin de non recevoir* on Jesus' part; that is, he was unwilling to be questioned on this point because the answer did not enter within the compass of his ministry. Jesus had already answered the sons of Zebedee that it was not his duty but that of his Father to assign the seats in his glorious messianic kingdom (§496). On the present occasion "he said he did

not know that day because it was not rightly within his mission that we should learn this through him, while it was within his mission to keep that time hidden; for as a teacher he knew both how to teach what was useful and how to avoid teaching what was disadvantageous" (St. Augustine, *Enarration. in Psalm. XXXVI; sermo*, I, 1). In our day, the eschatological school (§§209 BE.) has pounced upon the difficulty to declare that Jesus was certain the parousia would take place within the present "generation," though he confessed he did not know the precise "day" or the "hour" (§529).

528. Presented in this manner, the eschatological discourse is as clear as its subject matter permits. The first part of it deals with the signs of the great tribulation," that is, with the events which preceded and accompanied the destruction of Jerusalem. The second part speaks of the signs of the parousia and the end of the world. Then the time of the respective events is indicated: the great tribulation is assigned to the present "generation," while the parousia is shrouded in a mysterious silence.

But the difficulty is that the mention of the time of each event does not follow directly after the description of its signs, but both are mentioned together at the end. What is the reason for this arrangement, which seems unnatural and ambiguous? Evident here again is die editorial activity of the Evangelists and the influence of the special circumstances in which the primitive catechesis of the Church developed (§524).

This arrangement, which seems both artificial and ambiguous to us today, was however a very prudent one when the Synoptics were being written, namely, when not only was nothing known about the time of the parousia but not even did they know the precise time of the "great tribulation." Jerusalem was still safe and prosperous and there was no earthly reason for suspecting that in a few years it would be reduced to a heap of ashes. Nor was the relationship between the "great tribulation and the parousia very clear, since they seemed in some way associated at least conceptually. Would the first be perhaps the immediate preparation for the second; would the coming of the glorious Messiah be the direct reward for those who had passed the great trial? Many Christians did in fact consider the parousia imminent; and while Jesus' reply did not necessarily imply this, neither did it clearly exclude the possibility. The Son of Man could appear suddenly at any moment, like a thief in the night. But even if there was to be an interval of time between the "great tribulation" and the parousia, who could say whether it was to be brief or moderate or long or very long?

There was no certainty about any of these things before the tragic year 70. Today, schooled by twenty centuries of history, we know all about the “great tribulation,” which reached its culmination in 70, and the interval following it, the length of which is incalculable; but the time of the parousia is as impenetrable a mystery as ever. For these reasons, the Synoptic Evangelists, given the obscurity which enveloped the discourse, divided it according to its subject. They recorded first the descriptions of the signs and then the references to the respective times in which they should take place and left it to their readers to make the necessary associations, since individual communities received particular teaching on this whole vibrant subject of the parousia from their directors, as we learn incidentally of the Thessalonians from Paul (2 Thess. 2:5) and of the communities of Asia Minor from Peter (2 *Pet.* 3:1 ff.). Hence the readers of the Gospels could and perhaps had to turn for explanation to such authentic interpreters, because the written catechesis never pretended to take the place of the oral, but rather depended upon it in various ways (§107).

529. The modern school of eschatology deduces its chief arguments from this discourse, but only by confusing the data and allusions it contains and attributing both chronological references — the “generation” and the “hour” and the “day” — to the one event, namely, the parousia. We have seen how such a theory contradicts the historical testimonies that have come down to us from that period (§212), and so a word here will be sufficient on the matter of the “day” and the “hour.”

The afore-mentioned scholars are forced to interpret these words literally; that is, the “day,” for them, means twenty-four hours and the “hour” means sixty minutes. Hence Jesus supposedly confessed that he did not know in what cycle of twenty-four hours or in what set of sixty minutes the universal cataclysm was going to take place, although he was sure it would occur during his “generation.” Now is all this sensible? Is it sensible that a supposed “visionary,” all a quiver with the expectation that within a short time the whole world is going to crash to pieces, should regret that he does not know the precise moment in which the conflagration is to start?<sup>223</sup> Genuine visionaries, precisely because they are such, do not reckon time so carefully, for they are completely absorbed in the vision, which to them is the only important thing. A visionary of this type is like a man standing, powerless to flee, on a mine with the fuse set. The absolute certainty that the explosion is imminent completely obliterates his uncertainty about the exact moment it is going to

hit him. But Jesus reckons the time carefully, and he clearly distinguishes between one time reference and the other with relation to the signs he has just described. Here, however, is the entire passage; anyone can see this relationship for himself:

“Amen I say to you, this generation will not pass away till all these things have been accomplished. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

“But of that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father only” (*Mark* 13:30-32; cf. *Matt.* 24:34-36).

### THE PARABLE OF THE TEN VIRGINS; THE LAST JUDGMENT

530. Since the day of the parousia is not known, those who await the final consummation of the kingdom of God must be constantly ready, because at any time that day may arrive, that hour come. The uncertainty carries with it the danger of lazy neglectfulness, against which we must labor with unceasing vigilance. This is the lesson of the parable of the ten virgins, recorded for us only by Matthew (25:1-13) and included by him in the eschatological discourse.

The parable is based on Jewish wedding customs, already described (§281). Ten maidens have been invited to the wedding of a friend and are to be in her procession the evening of the *nissu'in* (§231); they have come from home, each bearing a terracotta lamp, not so much to light the way to the bride's house as to add their bit of illumination to the general gaiety of the feast when the groom arrives. It is expected, however, that since this is a fashionable wedding, they will have to wait quite a while for the groom, for he, too, must receive an interminable procession of callers. Hence, five of the maidens, being wise and prudent, take along a small jar of oil to keep their little lamps well-supplied. But the other five are careless, with never a thought for the later hours; so, they bring only their lamps, forgetting completely that they can stay lit only for a relatively short time.

Things turn out as the prudent virgins expected. The groom is detained at home and is a long, long time in coming. In the bride's house, meanwhile, the gay spirits of the assembled company gradually wilt. The girls, at first so vivacious and restless, grow quiet, listless, and resigned. The chatter subsides and some begin to look bored. One or two yawn and withdraw to a corner to fight against their sleepiness; the hours pass slowly one by one and still no one comes. “Then as the bridegroom was long in coming, they all became

drowsy and slept. And at midnight a cry arose: Behold, the bridegroom is coming, go forth to meet him! Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise: 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out!' The wise answered, saying: 'Lest there may not be enough for us and for you, go rather to those who sell, and buy [some] for yourselves.'

"Now while they were away buying, the bridegroom came; and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Finally, there came also the other virgins, and said: 'Sir, sir, open the door for us!' But he answered and said: 'Amen I say to you, I do not know you.'" Their repulse spontaneously suggests the moral: "Watch, therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour!"

It is true that some things in the parable are not faithful to fact, as for example, the suggestion that the foolish maidens go and buy oil at midnight just as if the shops were open at that hour. But such license is entirely permissible in a sustained comparison, in which the attention is concentrated on one main point to which all else is subordinate. Here the purpose of the comparison is twofold: to picture man's ignorance of the day and the hour, emphasized in the conclusion of the parable, and also the perils that beset the waiting and the danger of being unprepared. When the waiting is prolonged, it becomes treacherous, for the preparation so well begun is gradually neglected and the reality of the "coming" is forgotten. To have been prepared only at the first hour counts for nothing unless one is also prepared at the very last moment, at the moment of the "coming" itself.

In the Greek papyri the term used both for the "coming" and the "presence" of a king is often "parousia."

531. Similarly it is only Matthew (25:31-46) who paints for us the great picture of the close of the present "world" and the official inauguration of the future "world," the panorama of the Last Judgment. This same theme had been treated by the ancient prophets but in another light and with a different purpose. Here the description aims chiefly to underline the moral relationship between the present "world" and the future, namely, the ethical repercussions of the present life in the life to come. The Last Judgment had been pictured in the past as the triumph of the Hebrew nation over pagan nations, or of a good and pious group over another which was wicked and impious; but here it assumes a moral character and touches every individual

of the whole human race with no distinctions whatever. This moral character is, besides, crystallized in charity, which is the distinctive feature of the kingdom of God and the passport of admission into it (§550); the Last Judgment is the triumph of charity.

“But when the Son of Man shall come in his majesty, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory; and before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and he will set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

“Then the king will say to those on his right hand: ‘Come, blessed of my Father, take possession of the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me to drink; I was a stranger and you took me in; naked and you covered me; sick and you visited me; I was in prison and you came to me.’ — Then the just will answer him, saying: ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry, and feed thee; or thirsty, and give thee drink? And when did we see thee a stranger, and take thee in; or naked, and clothe thee? Or when did we see thee sick, or in prison, and come to thee?’ — And answering the king will say to them: ‘Amen I say to you, as long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me.’

“Then he will say to those on his left hand: ‘Depart from me, accursed ones, into the everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry, and you did not give me to eat; I was thirsty and you gave me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take me in; naked, and you did not clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit me.’ — Then they also will answer and say: ‘Lord, when did we see thee hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to thee?’ — Then he will answer them, saying: ‘Amen I say to you, as long as you did not do it for one of these least ones, you did not do it for me.’ — And these will go into everlasting punishment, but the just into everlasting life” (cf. *Dan.* 12:2).

## WEDNESDAY —THE BETRAYAL OF JUDAS

532. Finally, Wednesday came, the next to the last day before the Pasch.

For the chief priests and the Pharisees, the time was growing uncomfortably short; they must make up their minds what to do. Despite their repeated deliberations of the previous days, they had accomplished nothing because Jesus was still protected by the love the populace bore him and so he went

about Jerusalem with impunity and even ventured to preach in the Temple. Was there no way, then, to make him disappear secretly, before the people realized what had happened? Certainly, there was no time to lose; the matter must be settled once and for all before the Pasch to avoid consequences which might prove very serious. The Roman procurator contemplated feasts in general and the Pasch in particular, because of the tremendous influx of excited crowds, with as much equanimity as he would an earthquake; then more than ever he kept both eyes wide open and doubled all measures of vigilance for fear some insignificant spark might touch off an explosion. Hence on such occasions — as Josephus incidentally tells us (*Wars of the Jews*, II, 224) — the Roman cohort garrisoned in Jerusalem was stationed along the Temple portico, “for during the feasts, they always keep armed watch so that the crowd may not provoke sedition.” What could not happen, then, with that Galilean Rabbi loose in the city and the Temple, surrounded by groups of enthusiasts who believed him the Messiah? At the first buzz of disturbance, the equestrian Pontius Pilate would unleash his soldiers on the throngs of pilgrims and begin in earnest to destroy the nation and the holy place as they feared (§494). It was absolutely necessary to exorcise the danger and make sure that everything was over by the Pasch. But how?

Another council was held that Wednesday to discuss the problem. “Then the chief priests and the elders of the people gathered together in the court of the high priest, who was called Caiphas, and they took counsel together how they might seize Jesus by stealth and put him to death. But they said: “Not on the feast, or there might be a riot among the people”” (*Matt.* 26:3-5). Hence no one present failed to agree that Jesus must be killed, but a few more cautious of them pointed out the danger of arresting him during the feast when so many pilgrims, either Galilean or otherwise devoted to him, could rise up in his protection. On the other hand, it would not be at all expedient to postpone the arrest until after the Pasch because Jesus could in the meanwhile leave the city with the pilgrims returning home and thus escape capture just as he had done after the resurrection of Lazarus. Hence, they must act quickly, before the Pasch and with stealth. That was what these cautious counselors advised.

But this was precisely the whole difficulty. There were only two days left before the Pasch, and Jesus spent the whole day among the people; how could they take him in such a manner and with such dispatch that the arrest would not be known until after it was over?



Help came from the most unexpected quarter of all. “Then one of the Twelve, called Judas Iscariot, went to the chief priests, and said to them: What are you willing to give me, and I will deliver him to you?’ — But they counted him out thirty pieces of silver. And from then on he [Judas] was watching for an opportunity to betray him.” So says Matthew (26:14-16), and the other two Synoptics agree; the latter do not mention the specific sum of money but they add the very understandable information that the chief priests were “glad” about Judas’ proposal. With his collaboration it would now be a very easy matter to arrest Jesus quickly and secretly.

533. But what could have been the reasons which impelled Judas to betray Jesus?

The early catechesis has given us no other motive but the love of money. When the Evangelists pictured Judas as a thief and the cheating steward of their common funds (§502), they were really preparing us for the little scene in which Judas goes to the chief priests and asks: “What are you willing to give me . . .?” Yet even apart from the Gospels, when Peter speaks of the traitor, now a suicide, he mentions no other profit from the betrayal but a field purchased with “the price of his iniquity” (Acts 1:16-19). Hence, we are certain about this one motive of money, but it does not exclude the possibility of other motives with which the early catechesis was not concerned, and here the way lies open to reasonable conjecture.

Even apart from the flights of fancy made over this supremely tragic field by romancing playwrights and historians, there still remains Judas’ unexpected behavior only two days later. When Jesus had been condemned, the traitor suddenly repented of having sold the blood of the Just for a price; and having brought the money back to the chief priests, he went out and hanged himself (§574). Now, this is not the behavior of an ordinary greedy man or miser. The typical miser, a man who loves nothing but money, would have been satisfied with his gain whatever had been the subsequent fate of Jesus, and he would never have thought of giving back the money, much less of hanging himself. Avaricious and greedy Judas certainly was, but he was something else besides. There exist in him at least two loves. One is the love of gold which drives him to betray Jesus. But besides this there is another love which is sometimes stronger, because it prevails after the betrayal and drives the traitor to return the money, to abjure the whole betrayal, to feel sorrow for his victim, and finally to kill himself in despair.

However much we think about it, it is not possible to find any other object for this second love but Jesus himself. If Judas had not felt for Jesus a love so great that it sometimes prevailed over his greed, he would not have restored the money nor would he have abjured his treachery. But if he loved Jesus, why did he betray him? Undoubtedly because, though his love was great, it was not unequivocal; it was not the generous trustful radiant love of a Peter or a John. Its flame was still murky and streaked with shadow. What this shadow was we do not know, and it remains for us the mystery of supreme iniquity.

Did Judas perhaps know that he had been denounced to Jesus as a thief and could he not stand being disgraced before him? But Peter, too, denied Jesus and felt himself disgraced in his eyes, yet he did not despair.

Did Judas perhaps perceive from Jesus' messianic correctives, more shrewdly than the other Apostles, that his kingdom would bring no worldly glory or power to his future courtiers, and so, true to his greedy nature, provided for his own interests against the bankruptcy which lay ahead? This is quite possible, but it is not enough to explain why Judas, who abandoned Jesus when he betrayed him, should feel so bound to him as to repent and kill himself.

Or was his love of gold, perhaps, fortified by the anxiety to see Jesus soon at the head of his political messianic kingdom; did he betray him in the certainty of watching him work prodigy upon prodigy against his adversaries and thus forcing him to inaugurate at once that kingdom which was entirely too long in coming? In that case, however, the traitor should not have killed himself before the death of Jesus but afterward, because he could not be sure just when the Messiah would resort to miracles, especially since at the time of the actual betrayal Judas saw the guards fall to the ground in terror in Gethsemani (§559).

We could easily pile theory on theory but without shedding any definite light at all on the mystery of supreme iniquity.

534. This iniquity, besides, lay not only in selling Jesus but above all in despairing of his forgiveness. Judas had seen Jesus pardon usurers and prostitutes; he had heard from his lips the parables of mercy, including that of the Prodigal Son; he had heard him command Peter to forgive seventy times seven times; but after all that he despaired of pardon for himself and hanged himself. Peter did not despair but burst into tears. This despair in itself shows that Judas felt a very great esteem for the Just whom he betrayed, which

measured for him the abysmal atrocity of the crime he committed. But his esteem was incomplete and hence insulting because, faced with the responsibility for his betrayal, Judas stopped halfway and wrongfully considered Jesus incapable of pardoning his treachery. Jesus was offended far more by Judas' despair of forgiveness than he was by his betrayal. This was the supreme outrage against Jesus, the supreme iniquity of Judas.

The chief priests fixed the price of the betrayal at "thirty pieces of silver." Matthew alone gives us the amount, and with his usual carefulness about indicating the fulfillment of the messianic prophecies, he sees here the accomplishment of a prediction of Zacharias (§575). But neither here nor later (27:3-10) does Matthew name the coins; all he says is "thirty pieces of silver" (triakonta arguria). There is no doubt that the unnamed coin was the shekel (§249) or stater (§406), equivalent to four drachmas or four *denarii* (§465). It was not the Roman denarius (§514) but a coin worth four times more; technically speaking, therefore, the suggestion of thirty *denarii* [which is latent in the Holy Thursday liturgy] is false because the sum of thirty shekels was equivalent to one hundred and twenty *denarii*. Their value today would be about twenty-five and a half gold dollars.

The Hebrew Law stated (*Exod.* 21:32) that if an ox gored and killed a slave, its owner was to pay the slave's master thirty shekels immediately as damages. Hence the average value of a slave must have been reckoned as thirty shekels. It may be that this precept of the Law suggested to the chief priests the price they fixed with Judas; thus, they achieved a double purpose for they displayed their faithful observance of the letter of the Law and at the same time treated Jesus as an ordinary slave.

Luke, who brought his account of the temptation of Jesus to a close with the statement that the "devil . . . departed from him until a favorable time" (§276) begins his story of the betrayal by saying that "Satan entered into Judas, surnamed Iscariot," who thereupon went and made his bargain with the chief priests. For the disciple of Paul, then, the Passion of Jesus is the "favorable time" and in some way represents a renewal of the temptations to which Satan subjected Jesus at the beginning of his public life. Now that Jesus' life is drawing to an end, Satan launches his last and most powerful attack against him and subjects him to the supreme trial, after which he will enter upon his glory. "O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his Glory?" (*Luke* 24:25-26 - §630.)



## CHAPTER XXIV: Passion Week—Thursday

### THE PREPARATIONS FOR THE LAST SUPPER

535. THURSDAY dawned, the “first day of the Unleavened Bread [Azymes] when it was customary for them to sacrifice the passover” (*Mark* 14:12). Hence the group with Jesus (§495) also had to prepare for the solemn ritual of the Pasch since Jesus would be obliged to remain that night in Jerusalem and forego his retreat of the previous nights in Bethany on the Mount of Olives. So, his disciples said to him: “Where wilt thou that we go and prepare for thee to eat the passover?” Jesus then sent Peter and John (*Luke* 22:8), saying: “Go into the city, and there will meet you a man carrying a pitcher of water; follow him. And wherever he enters, say to the master of the house: ‘The Master says, “Where is my guest chamber, that I may eat the passover there with my disciples? And he will show you a large upper room (anagaion) furnished; there make ready for us”’ (*Mark* 14:13-15).

The sign given the two Apostles was unusual enough since it was the women who ordinarily drew and carried water. As they entered the city, undoubtedly through the gate above the pool of Siloe (§428) and opposite the Mount of Olives, they did in effect meet the man with the pitcher, whom they followed to a house where the master placed at their disposal the room Jesus had mentioned. There is no doubt that this master was a person who loved Jesus and he had probably received him into his home on other occasions. Who was this unnamed disciple? Rather than the cautious Nicodemus (§288, §420) or Joseph of Arimathea (§615), we think naturally of the father or some relative of Mark, whose house after Jesus’ death became the habitual meeting place for the Christians of Jerusalem (§127). If we could prove that the mysterious youth who fled naked from the soldiers in Gethsemani was really Mark (§561), we should have another reason for believing that the master of the house was his relative, especially since the account of the preparation for the Pasch is more detailed in Mark’s Gospel than in Matthew’s.

It is very possible that the Evangelists conceal the name of this disciple for the same prudent reason which caused the Synoptics to omit the entire account of the resurrection of Lazarus (§493). For reasons of prudence also, Jesus sent Peter and John to prepare the supper and not Judas, the steward who would normally have performed that service. The traitor was busy contriving his betrayal, and this was not to be further facilitated by a

premature announcement of the place where Jesus and the Apostles were to gather for the last time.

The theory that the Last Supper took place in Mark's house is not a new one, and it has in its favor a respectable tradition as well. Toward the year 530, the archdeacon Theodosius, describing a visit to Jerusalem, speaks of the church of Sancta Sion, universally regarded as the site of the Last Supper, and confidently asserts: "This was the home of St. Mark, the Evangelist" (*De situ Terrae Sanctae*, p. 141), a statement which must have been based on an early tradition. In the same century, in fact, the Cyprian monk Alexander says there was a tradition, ancient in his day, that the house where the Last Supper was held was that of Mary, the mother of Mark, where the Master was accustomed to stay whenever he came to Jerusalem, and that Mark himself was the man with the pitcher (*Laudatio S. Barnabae apost.*, I, 13; in *Acta Sanctorum, Junii*, II, ed. 1867, p. 434; cf. *Patrol., Graec.*, 87, 4091-4092).<sup>224</sup>

And this is where tradition, as early as the fourth century, set the modern Cenacle, at the southwestern corner of the Upper City.

The preparations were completed during the day and the supper took place that same evening. But here we run into the famous chronological difficulty regarding the dates of the Last Supper and of the day after, on which Jesus died. The problem is to determine on what days not of the week but of the month these two events occurred. (

Figure 69)

## THE CHRONOLOGICAL PROBLEM

536. There is no doubt whatever about the days of the week, because both the Synoptics and John set the Last Supper on Thursday and Jesus' death on the next day, Friday.

The difficulty lies in the fact that according to the Synoptics, the Thursday of the Last Supper was the fourteenth *Nisan* and consequently Jesus died on the fifteenth, while according to John it would seem this particular Thursday was the thirteenth *Nisan* and Friday the fourteenth. The Synoptics set the Last Supper on the day 'when it was customary for them to sacrifice the passover' (*Mark* 14:12; cf. *Luke* 22:7), and this is the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb which, according to precept, was offered on the afternoon of the fourteenth *Nisan* (§74). The Last Supper, therefore, would be the meal at which Jesus ate the Paschal lamb, on the day prescribed. He died on the next day, which would

then be the fifteenth *Nisan*, the day of the Hebrew Pasch. John, on the other hand, says that Jesus died on the “Preparation Day for the Passover” (19:14), the day before the Pasch, before the Jews sacrificed the lamb or ate the Passover meal. In fact, “they . . . did not enter the praetorium, that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover” (*John* 18:28), and were successful in having Jesus condemned and executed that same day. According to this, Jesus died on the fourteenth *Nisan* and the Last Supper, held on the preceding evening, was not the legal Passover meal.

The following table shows the difference between the Synoptics and John on this point.

<i>Nisan</i>	<i>Synoptics</i>	<i>John</i>
13		Thu: Last Supper
14	Thu: Last Supper	Fri: death of Jesus
15	Fri: death of Jesus	

537. But certain elusive references in the Synoptics themselves suggest further and important considerations.

According to their sequence, Jesus was arrested during the night between the fourteenth and the fifteenth *Nisan*, and the various phases of his trial, ending in his condemnation and execution, began early on the morning of the fifteenth *Nisan* and lasted until the afternoon of the same day. Now here we are confronted with a very obvious and serious difficulty, namely, the supremely festive character of that particular night and day. That was the night on which the innumerable crowds that had flocked to Jerusalem from every village and town ate the Paschal lamb with solemn ceremonial (§75), and on this next day, which was the Pasch (the fifteenth *Nisan*) all manual labor was strictly forbidden (*Exod.* 12:16; *Lev.* 23:7) as rigidly as on the Sabbath. Hence it is inconceivable that Jesus’ adversaries, however violent their hatred of him, should neglect the Paschal supper on that night and violate the holyday rest on the next day to accomplish all that was necessary to bring him to trial and condemn and execute him. The meticulous

scrupulosity with which the Sabbath rest was observed would not have permitted several of the acts which were performed in these few hours. For example, it would not have been lawful to carry weapons and other objects (*Matt.* 26:47) on that night as the men did who came to arrest Jesus, or to light a fire right in the house of the chief priest (*Luke* 22:55); nor would it have been possible for a man like Simon the Cyrene, on the most holy day of the Pasch, to be “coming from the country,” where he had obviously been working (*Mark* 15:21), or for anyone to buy a shroud as Joseph of Arimathea did (*Mark* 15:46), or even for the pious women to prepare spices and ointments (*Luke* 23:56). All these acts are violations of the holyday rest, and taken all together they would indicate that many of the Jews — if not all — did not observe that night and day as holy, that they had not eaten the Paschal lamb on Thursday evening as Jesus had, and that they did not celebrate the Pasch on Friday. This conclusion is all the more important because it derives from information given us only by the Synoptics.

In addition, Jesus dies on the afternoon of Friday, which according to the Synoptics seems to be day of the Pasch (the fifteenth *Nisan*). As soon as he has died, Joseph of Arimathea hurries to bury him the same afternoon, before sunset when the prescribed rest of the next day, the Sabbath, will begin (*Mark* 15:42 ff.). Similarly, the pious women prepare the spices and ointments for the precious body that same afternoon, but when evening comes, “on the Sabbath they rested, in accordance with the commandment” (*Luke* 23:56). All this would be quite regular were only the weekly Sabbath rest concerned; but if that Friday on which Jesus died, now drawing toward sunset, was also the day of the Pasch, then it was bound by the no less solemn obligation of holyday rest. Then why was there all that hurrying about on Friday afternoon despite the more rigid rest imposed by the solemnity of the Pasch? This together with the other information given us by the Synoptics suggests that Joseph of Arimathea and the pious women did not celebrate the Pasch on that Friday either, and therefore the Pasch for them was not the fifteenth *Nisan*.

In reality, the discrepancy between the Synoptics and John is irremediable if we limit ourselves to the data they present: according to the Synoptics, Jesus seems to have died on the fifteenth *Nisan*; according to John, he died on the fourteenth.

538. There have been numerous attempts to compose the difference, but many of them have not had the least shadow of foundation in reality. Such, for instance, is the theory that in that particular year the Jews postponed the



Pasch a day — to the sixteenth *Nisan* — in order to have sufficient time to bring Jesus to trial and execute him, motivated solely by the great hatred they bore him, whereas Jesus ate the Paschal lamb on the day prescribed. This hypothesis, proposed in ancient times by Eusebius of Caesarea (*De sollemnitae paschali*, 12) and again by modern scholars, unfortunately contradicts reality for it disregards the extreme tenacity of Jesus' adversaries regarding their traditions. They would not have budged an inch even in their hatred for him —to say nothing of the absurdity of supposing that the Pasch, solely out of hatred for Jesus, could be postponed by decree within a few hours and the change imposed on huge crowds that did not even know him by name as well as on people who loved him, like Joseph of Arimathea and the pious women.

Another solution which solves nothing is the theory that John, when he says the Jews "themselves did not enter the praetorium, that they might not be defiled, but might eat the Passover," is referring to the other sacrifices offered during the octave of the Pasch but not to the sacrifice of the lamb, which the Jews ate on the same evening Jesus did. But quite apart from the fact that this does not explain away the violation of the Paschal rest, it is mistaken to begin with because John uses the typical rabbinic expression, "eat the Passover," which always refers to the Paschal lamb.<sup>225</sup>

Very popular among those modern scholars who find nothing but allegories in the fourth Gospel is the theory that the time sequence in the Synoptics is historical, but the sequence in John is something he fixed up to suit his dogmatic-allegorical purposes. According to them Jesus really died on the fifteenth *Nisan*, the day of the Hebrew Pasch; but the author of the fourth Gospel made him die on the fourteenth, the day of the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb, simply to illustrate that Jesus is the symbolic Paschal lamb of the New Testament and has definitively taken the place of the sacrificial victim of the Hebrew Pasch in accordance with the dogma of St. Paul: "Christ, our Passover, has been sacrificed" (1 *Cor.* 5:7). But for anyone not easily blinded by appearances, this theory is no less a contradiction of reality than the others. It ignores, with misleading indifference, the very important deductions we must make from the very Synoptics which the followers of this theory judge historical. If Jesus died on the fifteenth *Nisan* and if that day was the Pasch, how did it happen that many Jews failed to observe the holyday rest, as we learn incidentally but undeniably from the Synoptics? Are the Synoptics perhaps also allegorical in some other way? Or could it be that the supposedly

allegorical chronology in the fourth Gospel is no less historical than that in the Synoptics? The one positive argument this theory advances — that for John the death of Jesus coincided with the sacrifice of the Paschal lamb — is more specious than sound; examined more closely it becomes an objection against the theory rather than an argument in its favor. If Jesus died, as the Synoptics suggest, on the fifteenth *Nisan*, and celebrated the Passover on the evening of the fourteenth, John would have every reason to keep this sequence for his allegory, not to change it. For, according to this sequence, Jesus instituted the Eucharist just when the Jews were eating the Passover, and the Eucharist is precisely the only permanent rite which has supplanted the various sacrificial rites of Judaism. Hence John, who is rightly recognized even by the opposition as the Evangelist of Christ, the "Bread of Life" (note 149), could have serenely followed the chronology in the Synoptics to the complete satisfaction of all his dogmatic-allegorical propensities. Instead, as is his wont, John has partially retouched that chronology, clarifying what was only vaguely suggested in the Synoptics themselves. And if this is the case, is he not speaking as the especially beloved eyewitness rather than as the allegorist of the hypothesis?

539. Recent and profitable studies on ancient rabbinic documents have opened up a new path, which is perhaps the true one, through this old and highly intricate question. As we have noted before, the methods for fixing the calendar in Jesus' day were as uncertain as they were empirical, and the calendar itself was, from our point of view, incredibly elastic (§180). Now the discrepancy between the Synoptics and John may have risen from just this elasticity. If the Friday on which Jesus died was both the fourteenth and the fifteenth — that is, if some Jews reckoned it the fourteenth and others the fifteenth — then the whole difficulty could be happily settled; that is, the Synoptics would be following the Jews who considered that Friday the fifteenth, while John would be dating his account from the others, who considered it the fourteenth.

We find, in fact, that at the time of Jesus there was a serious controversy between Sadducees and Pharisees about the date of Pentecost and consequently of the Pasch as well, since the two feasts were interrelated. The partisans of the family of Boethus (§33), which was so influential in the sacerdotal and Sadducean class, maintained that Pentecost should always be celebrated on a Sunday; and since the fifty days interval between the Pasch and Pentecost (§76) was reckoned from the day in the Paschal octave on which the first sheaves of barley were offered in the Temple, they also

maintained that this offering must always be made on the Sunday of the said octave. The Pharisees, on the other hand, declared that Pentecost could be celebrated on any day of the week, and therefore the wheat was always to be offered on the day after the Pasch — that is, the sixteenth *Nisan* — no matter what day of the week it was.

Because of this difference of opinion, the Boethians and in general the Sadducees used to rearrange their calendar, especially when the Pasch (fifteenth *Nisan*) fell on Friday or Sunday. If it fell on Friday, they pushed the calendar forward and made that Friday the day of the sacrifice of the lamb and the Paschal dinner (the fourteenth), celebrated the Pasch on Saturday, the Sabbath (the fifteenth), and made the offering of wheat on Sunday (the sixteenth). If the Pasch fell on Sunday, they pushed the calendar back a day so that the wheat offering would still be made on Sunday (the sixteenth), while they celebrated the Pasch on the day before or Saturday (the fifteenth) and sacrificed the lamb on Friday (the fourteenth). It was, as we have seen (§180), an easy matter to doctor the calendar, simply by taking advantage of the empirical method used to fix it and resorting to some little subterfuge.<sup>226</sup>

The Pharisees, however, did not consent to this arrangement of the Sadducees, and since it did not matter to them on what day of the week they celebrated Pentecost, they sacrificed the lamb, celebrated the Pasch, and offered the wheat on whatever days these rites naturally fell.

Hence there was a schism. The great majority of the people, dominated by the Pharisees, were guided by them also in the matter of celebrating the aforesaid rites, while the upper classes were more loyal to the Boethians and the Sadducees; and each group adhered to its own chronology without paying any attention to the other. There must have been some in each faction, however, who for convenience' sake adopted the calendar arrangement of the other side, and still others who did not belong to either one in particular, and so chose whichever of the two sets of dates suited them best that year.

540. This information tallies strikingly with what we know of Jesus' death, which occurred in a year when the Pasch fell regularly on Friday. Hence the Sadducees, true to their principle, pushed the calendar back a day so that the offering of the wheat would fall on Sunday. The Pharisees, on the other hand, followed the regular calendar and made their wheat offering on that Sabbath. The people were divided between the two.

The first two columns in the table on page 568 show the differences between the Sadducees and Pharisees regarding the dates of the Paschal festivities, and the last two the respective positions of the Evangelists (cf. also the table in §536):

Note that John's sequence coincides with the Sadducean calendar, while that in the Synoptics agrees with the Pharisees' dates. The Last Supper was obviously the meal at which the Paschal lamb was eaten according to precept, and it was held on Thursday, the day on which the Pharisees as well as the great majority of the people ate the Passover; for them it was the fourteenth *Nisan*, and the next day, Friday, was the fifteenth and the Pasch. But the majority in the Sanhedrin, which condemned Jesus, were Sadducees (§58), and they considered that Thursday the thirteenth *Nisan*; consequently, they postponed the eating of the Passover to Friday and the Pasch to Saturday. This would also explain why on the Friday of Jesus' death so many persons were not observing the holyday repose despite the fact that the Pasch fell on that day. It was the Pasch for the Pharisees, but not for many others who for one reason or another were following the Sadducean calendar. In conclusion, the Synoptics base their account on the calendar Jesus followed along with the Pharisees, although they contain clear evidence that others were not following it. John's narrative follows the calendar of the Sadducean Sanhedrists, the ones who officially condemned Jesus, but he takes it for granted that everyone knew the calendar Jesus followed was different.

The Month of Nisan		The Day of the Week	Synoptics	John
Sadducees	Pharisees			
12	13	Wednesday		
13	14 The Paschal Meal	Thursday	The 14 <i>Nisan</i> The Last Supper	The 13 <i>Nissan</i> The Last Supper
14 The Paschal Meal	15 The Pasch	Friday	The 15 <i>Nisan</i> The Pasch The Death of Jesus	The 14 <i>Nisan</i> The Paschal Meal of the "Jews"

				The Death of Jesus
15 The Pasch	16 Offering of Sheaves	Saturday (Sabbath)		The 15 <i>Nisan</i> The Pasch of the "Jews"
16 Offering of the Sheaves		Sunday		

Is this explanation of the old problem absolutely certain? No, for there are still a number of obscure points to be cleared up which it would be superfluous to list here. Nevertheless, it may be said to be the best founded, historically, especially because it takes into consideration the elasticity of the Jewish calendar of the time. This is a historical reality of prime importance; it entered not a little into the famous controversies which arose in the early days of Christianity regarding the celebration of the Christian Easter, and today it explains the differences in the dates for celebrating certain Moslem customs among Arabs of adjacent regions, who also base their calendar on the direct observation of the moon.

## THE BETRAYER

541. That something extraordinary took place at the Last Supper is told us by John in the veiled and succinct manner peculiar to him, but easily comprehensible to his listeners who were used to it: "Jesus> knowing that his hour had come, to pass out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, loved them [even] to the end" (eiz teloz 13:1). These words are like a second little prologue to the Passion of Jesus: The Master, who has always loved his own, now shows that his love is "[even] to the end," in the sense of not only to the end of his life, but in the much deeper meaning of to the furthest possible limits of love itself. Is the spiritual Evangelist perhaps alluding here to the institution of the Eucharist which he is the only one not to record? This is quite possible (§545).

The disciple of Paul also suggests this love when he tells how, at the beginning of the Supper, Jesus looked at his disciples gathered about him and

exclaimed: “I have greatly desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer; for I say to you that I will eat of it no more, until it has been fulfilled in the kingdom of God” (*Luke* 22:15-16). Here again is the concept that the Messiah must suffer before entering upon his glory, which will be the triumph of the kingdom of God now symbolized by an eternal banquet.

The usual ceremony of the Paschal meal (§75) was undoubtedly observed at the Last Supper, with the four cups of ritual wine, the unleavened bread, the wild herbs, and the roast lamb, although not all of these are mentioned by the Evangelists. Jesus acted as head of the family. Hence, he blessed the first cup of wine, adding: “Take this and share it among you; for I say to you that I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God comes” (*Luke* 22:17-18).

The meal was now begun, but not all the guests were entirely content. They would not have been typical of their people and their time if several of them had not expressed dissatisfaction with their places at table and the desire to, occupy a post of greater honor (§457). These good men all had a very fine opinion of themselves, and “there arose also a dispute among them, which of them was reputed to be the greatest” (*Luke* 22:24). The dispute was not a new one, but a vague hint in *John* (13:2-5) might imply that this time it was occasioned by the pretensions of Judas Iscariot. Perhaps it was the traitor who provoked the jealous argument among the Apostles by claiming one of the seats of honor, after the manner of traitors, who in their anxiety to dissimulate claim special privileges and attention.

Jesus must have treated the humiliating scene as he had treated similar discussions among the Apostles in the past (§408, §496), but this time he chose to illustrate his words with action (*John* 13:4 ff.). Seeing that despite all his exhortations to humility, there was still no end to the grumbling and muttering of these poor blockheads, he rose from his divan, laid aside his garments, girded himself with a towel, took a basin of water and began to wash the feet of the disciples. The lowest slaves usually performed this office and they could accomplish it easily since the guests reclined with their feet away from the table (§341). When they saw the Master stoop to so menial a service, the Apostles were struck dumb and passively accepted it as a humiliation; not even Judas dared to protest.

Only Peter, who was probably the first Jesus approached, protested saying: Lord, do you wash my feet? —And Jesus said to him: You do not know now

what I am doing, but afterward, you will know. — But Peter did not give in: You will never wash my feet! — And Jesus replied: If I do not wash you, you shall have no part with me. At this, the impulsive Peter went to the other extreme and exclaimed: Lord, wash not only my feet, but also my hands and my head! — Then Jesus concluded: He who has bathed needs only to wash (his feet) and he is clean all over; and you are clean but not all of you.

Did Judas start at these words? Perhaps not; the traitor was probably satisfied that his crime was still hidden from his colleagues. But the matter did not end there.

542. When he had finished washing their feet, Jesus put on his garments again and resumed his place at table. He, of course, had the seat of honor, and the dispute that had just risen had been inspired by the desire to have the places next to him. Since the table was U shaped and the divans were arranged around its outer edge it is reasonable to suppose that Jesus occupied the divan at the center of the curve. From what the Evangelists say, it would also seem that the divans nearest him were occupied by Peter, John, and Judas. Now if we picture each of the diners reclining with his head toward the table so that he leaned on his left elbow, Peter must have been behind Jesus (i.e., to the left of him) and therefore in the second place of honor. In front of Jesus, or to his right, reclined John, who would thus be able to lay his head on Jesus' breast, and to John's right was Judas, so that Jesus could without difficulty hand him a piece of bread. Their respective positions might be diagrammed as we have done in [Figure 70](#).

The meal was resumed, but all was not yet quite serene among the company; the Apostles had been disturbed by Jesus' statement that they were not all clean and they wanted to know what he meant. Jesus, too, wanted to speak of this again, not so much for the reasonable curiosity of those who were clean as for the unrequested purification of the one who was not. He must try once more to rescue that unhappy soul, to offer him one last means to save himself. So, when they had begun to eat again, Jesus, still speaking in general, quoted a passage from the Psalms (40 [41] 10): "He who eats bread with me has lifted up his heel against me" (*John* 13:18; cf. *Mark* 14:18). And after he had said this "he was troubled in spirit," and added without naming anyone: "Amen, amen, I say to you, one of you will betray me."

This produced a general consternation. How could he speak of betrayal on that night which was so holy and so eloquent of affection? How could a traitor

be hidden among those twelve men who had dedicated themselves body and soul to the Master? And all of them with impetuous vehemence and not without a touch of genuine resentment began to ask at once: Is it I, Lord? And again, without mentioning any name, Jesus described the traitor: "It is one of the Twelve, who dips with me in the dish! (*Mark* 14:20.) All were, in fact, dipping their bread and the wild herbs in the Paschal sauce (*haroseth*; §75), and there was perhaps one such dish of sauce to every three persons; that in which Jesus dipped probably served John and Judas too. The Apostles took this statement in a general sense too, as if it meant the same as "one of the Twelve and indicated in general whoever dipped in any one of the sauce dishes on the table, whereas Jesus probably referred to the one he himself was using. But there was one of them who did understand, and it was to him that Jesus addressed his next words, which were to be his last anguished cry of exhortation, his last warning of the abyss that stretched beneath him: The Son of Man indeed goes his way, as it is written of him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It were better for that man if he had not been born!"

543. At this point Judas could no longer keep still; his silence amid the anxious trepidation of the rest would in itself have denounced him. Calm and measured, but not without a slight trembling of his voice, came his question, like all the others: "Is it I, Rabbi?" Most of those present probably did not notice Judas' words particularly and Jesus made his last effort to save him. The traitor was reclining not far from his victim and their heads especially were rather close. It may be that John, who reclined between them, had raised himself on his elbow to give his attention to something else, and Jesus took the opportunity to say to Judas softly: "Thou hast said it." It was the Hebrew way (*ken dibbarta*, cf. *Exod.* 10:29) of saying yes. There was nothing further to be done. The traitor knew he was recognized and the choice now lay with him: he could either complete his discovered betrayal, or he could implore forgiveness of the Master he still venerated (§533).

Jesus' answer to Judas probably escaped the others with the possible exception of John. And they were still very anxious to know something more definite about the betrayal and the traitor, especially the warmhearted Peter. He did not venture to question Jesus directly, perhaps for fear of a stern answer such as he had received on other occasions, so he prudently enlisted John's assistance. Jesus was facing John and the latter could be said to be "reclining at Jesus' bosom" (ἦν ἀνακείμενος ... ἐν τῷ κόλπῳ τοῦ Ἰησοῦ, *John*



13:23); where Peter was, at Jesus' back, the Master could not observe him directly. Taking advantage of his position, Peter made signs (neuei) to John to ask Jesus who the traitor was he had just mentioned. The maneuver was very simple, because Peter could lift himself up on his elbow and attract John's attention, making motions to him above Jesus' head. The young Evangelist immediately understood what Peter wanted, and in his turn accomplished a little maneuver prompted by his confident love and familiarity with the Master. He twisted about so that he leaned on his right elbow instead, which brought him closer to Jesus' divan, and trustfully laid his head against the Master's breast (avapeswn...epi to sthqpz tou 'lhsou), looking up at him like a child expecting some favor from its father. Then he asked him softly: "Lord, who is it?"

Jesus satisfied his youthful and beloved friend while offering at the same time still another last courtesy to that other unhappy friend slipping toward the abyss. Among ancient Orientals — as also among the modern<sup>227</sup> — it was a gesture of courtesy to offer a fellow diner a fine morsel nicely prepared for him; for instance, one would break a piece of bread from the loaf, roll it up, dip it in the common sauce dish, and then offer it to the guest by holding it near his mouth. At John's request, therefore, Jesus announced: "It is he for whom I shall dip the bread, and give it to him." And breaking off a piece of bread, he dipped it and gave it to Judas.

The traitor had not yet been exposed, except in secret to the trusted John; this gesture of the Master was still another opportunity to repent. But Judas was impassible, and he ate the morsel without saying anything, showing that he had made his final choice. "And after the morsel" — comments our witness, now aware of what was happening — "Satan entered into him."

But now Judas himself could stand no more, and he got up to leave. "And Jesus said to him: 'What thou dost, do quickly.' But none of those at the table understood why he said this to him. For some thought that because Judas held the purse, Jesus had said to him: 'Buy the things we need for the feast'; — or that he should give something to the poor. When, therefore, he had received the morsel, he went out quickly. Now it was night."

And the traitor, going forth, plunged into his twofold night.<sup>228</sup>

## THE INSTITUTION OF THE EUCHARIST

544. The Paschal banquet must have been almost over by now; perhaps the second cup of ritual wine was almost finished, and the third was about to be poured (§75).

All of a sudden Jesus did an unaccustomed thing, not mentioned in the precepts for the Paschal dinner. He took one of the flat round loaves of unleavened bread, and having said the blessing over it, he broke it in pieces which he distributed to the Apostles, saying: "Take and eat; this is my body, which is being given for you; do this in (eiz thn) remembrance of me."<sup>229</sup>

A little while later, probably when the third cup of ritual wine was poured, he took a chalice of wine mixed with water, and having given thanks, he made them all drink of it, saying: "All of you drink this. This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is being shed for many. Do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me."

The Synoptics do not tell us just what impression these two acts made on the Apostles personally, but that does not really matter. Much more important is the permanent impression and effect they left on all the first Christian society, which was, from every point of view, the most reliable interpreter of these two acts of Jesus and of the words which accompanied them. And here, for a check on the historicity of our data, we have two excellent vantage points some distance apart.

About twenty-five years after the Last Supper, Paul wrote to the Christians of Corinth the letter (*I Cor.* 11:23-29) in which he described the Eucharist as a habitual and permanent rite, in which the faithful who partook of it ate the real Body and drank the real Blood of Jesus, and which derived directly from Jesus' twofold act of consecration at the Last Supper and his death for the redemption of men. There is no doubt that Paul had also given this teaching to the other communities he catechized just as he had to the faithful of Corinth (*ibid.*, 11:23), and that it agreed in its entirety with the catechesis of the other Apostles. In short, this was the way in which the earliest catechesis and the earliest liturgy interpreted and repeated the two offerings of Jesus at the Last Supper.

Forty years after the Epistle of Paul we find our second vantage point in the fourth Gospel, the only Gospel which does not narrate the institution of the Eucharist. We have observed that this silence is in some ways more eloquent than the actual account would have been (§§378- 383), but here we might consider still another aspect of the question. Even supposing (but not granted)

that the author of the fourth Gospel were not the Apostle John but an unknown mystic solitary, he would very probably have known Paul's letter and he would certainly have been acquainted with the Synoptics and the Eucharistic liturgy, which was established by the end of the fifth century in every Christian community. Hence he is a silent but no less effective witness of the faith of his times, for though he does not mention the institution of the Eucharist he places special emphasis on its spiritual effects in the discourse on the Bread of Life (§§378 ff.), and this, after all, is admitted today even by radical scholars (note [149](#)). In short, the author of the fourth Gospel is in full agreement with the catecheses of Paul and of the Synoptics, which he confirms partly through his silent acceptance and partly by his careful emphasis.

545. As for the Apostles' immediate reaction to Jesus' words, we must remember their impression would not be so new nor so strange as we might think at first; rather, these words would in some way solve an old riddle which had long been tossing about in their minds.

Not only had they never forgotten the earlier discourse on the Bread of Life, but from time to time they must also have thought of that mysterious promise which was still unfulfilled: "Amen, amen, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man, and drink his blood, you shall not have life in you. ... For my flesh is food indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He who eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, abides in me and I in him.... He who eats me, he also shall live because of me. This is the bread that has come down from heaven, etc." These were Jesus' statements a few months before at Capharnaum, but until the Last Supper he had shown the disciples no way of obeying this commandment which was so essential to their "having life" in them. How was he to "soften" so "hard" a saying (§382)? How was he to make this apparently cannibalistic nourishment a human and a spiritual thing? Many of Jesus' disciples had been scandalized by the "hardness" of his words and deserted him; but the Twelve had remained faithful because the Master had "the words of everlasting life." Nevertheless, in the many months that had passed, his words had not yet been verified and the Twelve must have suspected more than once that the Master had forgotten his promise, or wondered how he would ever keep it.

And then that night, the Master unexpectedly distributes bread and wine, saying: "This is my body." "This is my blood." The old enigma was solved, the old promise fulfilled. The true meaning of Jesus' actions and words was

wonderfully clear in the light of the discourse on the Bread of Life. The apparent bread and the apparent wine then being offered them were in reality the Body and Blood of the Master.

And in view of John's reflective and pithy style, it seems altogether possible that when he says Jesus had loved his own "[even] to the end," this very phrase is an allusion to the institution of the Eucharist which he has not recounted (§541).

546. So important an act on Jesus' part, performed under such solemn circumstances and become besides the foundation of the Church's entire religious life since the first generation of Christians, could not fail to attract the very particular attention of the radical scholars.

Did Jesus really perform this twofold act and make these statements at the Last Supper?

Is what the Synoptics and Paul relate in this regard truly historical, or does it contain only a kernel of truth, later simplified and changed in the process of elaboration it underwent at the hands of the first Christians?

Did Jesus really intend to establish a permanent and unchanging rite to be repeated afterward by his disciples, or did he perform merely a symbolic act which had value only as performed by him in those particular circumstances, but without bidding his disciples to repeat it afterward?

These and other related questions have not only been proposed with regard to the Eucharist itself but they concern Jesus' entire activity, which will be evaluated according to the way in which these questions are answered. If we accept the account of the Synoptics and Paul as it stands, we must acknowledge that Jesus considered his death a redemption ("my body, which is being given for you; . . . my blood, which is being shed for many"). We must also admit that he intended to found a particular religion with its own distinctive rite which would perennially recall the redemptive death of its Founder ("do this ... in remembrance of me"). Now these and similar logical consequences more or less fully give the lie to the interpretations of Jesus' personality and activity offered by contemporary theories, from those of the Liberal School to the Eschatologists. The honey-tongued preacher of the universal fatherhood of God imagined by the Liberals (§§204 ff.) was certainly not thinking of his death as a true sacrifice of redemption for all mankind; and much less could the visionary discovered by the Eschatologists worry about establishing a particular religion with a completely distinctive rite which would

survive the catastrophe of the present "world" (§ §209 ff.). So, to save the theories, it was necessary to prove that Jesus never instituted the Eucharist; and to do this it was necessary to subject the Synoptic narratives and Paul's testimony to the most careful scrutiny. Now, we know that the careful scrutinies of the radical scholars invariably discover that the passages which do not dovetail with their preconceived notions are interpolations, but in this case perhaps better than in any other problem of gospel criticism, we clearly see the ironclad logic that makes it necessary, if we deny any part of such a passage, to deny and reject it all. (See Figure 71)

547. The critics began, therefore, by denying that Jesus commanded his Apostles to repeat his act thereby making it a permanent rite. Since Matthew and Mark do not give the words, "do this ... in remembrance of me," they concluded that these words were an addition introduced later by Paul and Luke and therefore to be rejected.

There was still a great deal left, however, as, for instance, the statements that the Body of Jesus "is being given for you," that the chalice of his Blood is the "new covenant" and "is being shed for many"— in short, the whole concept of the Redemption wrought by Christ's death. But these, too, were gradually rejected by the same process; it was decreed that they were all added later under the influence of Paul's theological elaborations. It is true that the Matthew-Mark testimonies also speak of the Blood of Christ as the "blood of the new covenant" which "is being shed for many unto the forgiveness of sins." But what did that prove? Nothing. These were also to be rejected as interpolations due to Paul's influence. All that remained as original and genuine, therefore, were the words: "This is my body; this is my blood," which Jesus spoke when he distributed the bread and wine. Hence, they were a reference to the messianic banquet, of which the bread and wine were the symbol, but they were in no way connected with his imminent death.

Yet even after these amputations of the text, there were still some serious doubts left. Were the two statements spared really original and genuine? The critics thought this over again and finally decided that they could not be spared after all. The excuse for this further mutilation was that in the accumulations of ancient codices, all substantially uniform, there was one — the highly disputed codex Beza — supported by very few other ancient versions, in which Luke's account is reduced to the following: "And having taken bread, he gave thanks and broke (it) and gave it to them saying: This is

my body.” All the rest is omitted, including the distribution of the wine and the words which accompanied it.<sup>230</sup> This — said the critics — was the original account. Jesus passed the disciples only the bread; there was no parallel presentation of bread = body, wine = blood, and hence there was no thought of Jesus’ imminent death and naturally no injunction to repeat the rite in the future.

All that was left for consideration now was the bread and the way in which it was offered the Apostles. But this sole surviving stump did not quite suit the critics either, if only because it was too slender and insignificant. In short, just what did Jesus intend when he offered the bread as his body? Had he not eaten bread with his disciples hundreds of times before? Or did their meal together on that occasion have a special significance as a meal of *haberuth*, of “association” (§39)? But in that case the special meaning would derive from Jesus’ imminent death, and that brings us right back to the rejected relationship between the Last Supper and the crucifixion. No; all the trimming so far accomplished on the text had failed to produce any solid result; to find firmer and more spacious historic ground, it was necessary to go back to the liturgy of the early Church and see what the first Christians meant to do in performing the Eucharistic rite and attributing it to Jesus.

In the first place, was the rite of Jewish or of foreign origin? The critics rummaged through late Judaism but with no satisfactory results. They used the comparative religion method (§214), and turned first to totemism and theophagy; then they more carefully studied the rites of Isis and Osiris, and the blood ritual in the cults of Sabatius and Dionysius, while the Eleusinian mysteries and the banquets of Mithra were investigated with still greater attention. Certainly, a great deal of rare information was uncovered and many important observations made concerning pagan rites; but when it came to the real crux of the question, namely, their relationship to the Eucharistic rite of early Christianity, the critics mistook fireflies for lanterns and were ready to declare a mosquito the same as an eagle because both have wings and fly and feed on blood.

Moreover, all these learned studies seemed like so many excursions into fantasy far from the solid ground of historical reality; before thinking of Isis and Osiris and other Oriental influences, there was St. Paul to be reckoned with. It was first necessary to determine whether or not he left sufficient time for such influences to filter through Christianity.

548. St. Paul wrote his letter to the Corinthians in the year 57, but he says himself that he had personally instructed the Corinthians on the Eucharist before that (§544), namely, when he had founded their community. That was in 51. But even this year is too late for the study of our problem because by that time Paul already possessed a well-defined teaching on the Eucharist which was certainly in complete accord with the early catechesis and the teachings of the other communities. In other words, he already possessed this teaching before 50, less than twenty years after the Last Supper. And we must still subtract a few more years. It is in 34 that Paul, till then an uncompromising Pharisee, becomes one of Christ's persecuted disciples; for some time, then, he naturally remains in the background, leading either an utterly retired life or a semipublic one in Arabia, Damascus, and Tarsus. It is only on his first great missionary journey that he becomes a leading figure in early Christianity, but that journey does not begin until 44 or 45 and it ends in 49. And this brings us to the afore-mentioned period when Paul was teaching a well-defined doctrine concerning the Eucharist. Now we should have to crowd too many, too improbable facts into this decade between 34 and 44, approximately, in order to be able to accept the theory of the radicals.

In the first place, we should have to believe that Paul, who only yesterday as a Pharisee was the relentless enemy of idolatry, today as the disciple of Christ goes precisely to idolatry to borrow the fundamental liturgical rite of Christianity; that he has enough influence right after his conversion to be able to spread that rite through Christian churches of widely different antecedents; and finally, that he succeeds so rapidly in its diffusion that before the year 50 he has made it the one common fundamental Christian rite. This can hardly be called history; it is sheer fantasy inspired by prejudice and not by any documentary material. St. Paul's pages on the Eucharist are such a documentary evidence and they should put an end to all these fanciful excursions. When rightly viewed in the light of Paul's activity immediately after his conversion, the epistle indicates that the Apostle received his Eucharistic doctrine from the church in Jerusalem, to which he steadily looked for guidance and which he visited several times in the course of the decade mentioned above. And it was within the church of Jerusalem that the Last Supper had taken place.

The force of this elementary reasoning was felt even among the radical scholars, at least among the most logical and honest of them. And so, there was nothing left to do but take the last step in the process of denial and resort

to the usual method. So, they took this step, too, and declared Paul's letter a later addition. His account of the Eucharist was decreed false and interpolated for the single but decisive reason that it does not tally with the preconceived theory (§219).

Any objective scholar can pronounce judgment for himself on the scientific character of these proceedings.

## PETER'S DENIAL PREDICTED

549. The Supper had ended with the recitation of the second part of the *Hallel* (cf. *hymno dicto*, *Matt.* 26:30 and *Mark* 14:26) and the drinking of the fourth cup of ritual wine, but the company still lingered a while in the supper room as was the custom on the night of the Pasch (§75). It was then, according to Luke (22:31 ff.) and John (13:36 ff.), that Jesus predicted the Apostles would scatter and Peter would deny him, although from *Matthew* and *Mark* we should conclude that he said these things after they had left the room.

At a certain point, then, Jesus said to his Apostles sadly: "You will all be scandalized this night because of me; for it is written,

"I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.' [cf. *Zach.*, 13:7.]

But after I have risen, I will go before you into Galilee." It was another of those dark forebodings which so disturbed the Apostles. Their impatience was immediately written in their faces, and the impulsive Peter expressed his especially. But Jesus did not change his tone; in fact, turning right to Peter he added: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has desired to have you, that he may sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for thee, that thy faith may not fail; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again *epistreyaz*), strengthen thy brethren." The good Peter did not like these words at all; he loved Jesus with all his heart and whatever Satan might attempt he would never be guilty of any shameful or cowardly act against the Master from which he would have to "turn again."

Peter's reaction is colored with a little resentment, too. The Evangelists record detached phrases of his ensuing dialogue with Jesus, in which he said, among other things: "Even though all shall be scandalized because of thee, I will never be scandalized!" — "Lord, with thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death!" Certainly no one would have thought of questioning Peter's



sincerity, and yet Jesus calmly and patiently gave him the following answer, recorded by Mark (14:30), who must have heard Peter repeat it hundreds of times in his preaching: "Amen I say to thee, today, this very night, before a cock crows twice, thou wilt deny me thrice." This was too much for Peter, and he burst into a torrent of protests and affirmations. Mark, perhaps out of desire to use his spiritual father gently, says only that Peter "went on speaking more vehemently" (ekperisswz), repeating that though he should have to die with the Master he would never deny him. And all the Apostles were saying more or less the same thing.

But Jesus did not seem to have much confidence, not in their sincerity, but in the steadfastness of their promises. He continued to exhort them so that they would continue to trust him, just as they had in the past, through the bitter and difficult struggle which was about to begin (*Luke 22:35-37*). At this, the belligerent impetuosity of the Apostles flared up the more. If the time had come to struggle and fight, they were all ready. They would either conquer at the Masters side or they would all fall weapon in hand! There were two swords in the room, perhaps by chance, and they showed them to Jesus, saying: "Lord, behold, here are two swords!" And with infinite patience, perhaps smiling sadly a little, Jesus answered: "Enough!"

How many things were spoken in that "Enough!" To the very last moment the Apostles did not get over their slow-wittedness and Jesus' long-suffering and generous patience never once grew short.

## JESUS' LAST DISCOURSES

550. John is the only one who records the discourses which follow, true to his predilections and almost as if to compensate for his omission of the institution of the Eucharist.

Their style and concept make it impossible ever to summarize or classify them. They burst impetuously from a feeling in no way channeled or confined, which pours itself out as a veritable volcano of love; the white-hot lava gushes forth now slowly, now by leaps and bounds, now advancing, now subsiding, to cover hill and vale until it transforms all that it covers into a flaming lake.

Love for the Father in heaven: love for the disciples on earth. The Father, to whom Jesus will return within a few hours: the disciples whom he must leave in a few hours.

But though this last discourse is so sublime, it never loses sight of earthly human reality; rather it closely follows it at certain points on purpose to transmute it into a supraterrrestrial, supernatural reality.

The complete outpouring of love was checked for yet a moment by the presence of Judas, but when “he had gone out, Jesus said: ‘Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and will glorify him at once.’

“‘Little children, yet a little while I am with you. You will seek me, and, as I said to the Jews, “Where I go you cannot come” (§419), so to you also I say it now. A new commandment I give you, that you love one another: that as I have loved you, you also love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.’”

Thus does Jesus give his disciples their identification papers.

In both Jewish and Graeco-Roman antiquity, the several religious, cultural, or other associations had some distinctive feature which marked their activity and served almost as a means of identification for their members; sometimes, too, they used a motto or aphorism which in some way reflected this special characteristic. The distinctive feature which is to mark the disciples of Jesus must be, not the knowledge of “tradition” as it was for the Pharisees, nor the knowledge of numbers as it was for the Pythagoreans, nor any knowledge or practice characteristic of other associations; it was to be the knowledge and the practice of love. Hence, he called his precept a “new commandment,” for in truth no founder of any society before him had ever thought of giving it to his followers as their distinctive badge.

Rome had brought to the civilization of the time her creations of force and law, before that Greece had given men beauty and wisdom, and in that same era the various Oriental religions were spreading their diverse mystical influences through the Graeco-Roman world; but no one had yet introduced love as a social force, because ‘love,’ in its broadest sense — which is charity — had not yet been “invented.”

The very novelty of this element made a tremendous impression on the people of that time. A well-known passage of Tertullian records the exclamations of the pagans as they contemplated the Christians: “‘See how they love one another!’ (they [the pagans], in fact, only hate one another). ‘How ready they are to die for one another’ (they, in fact, are even more ready to kill one another)’” (*Apology*, 39). From then on human society must reckon

with this new force, invented and introduced by Jesus, and true human progress will be measured according to the completeness with which the law of love or charity is really obeyed.

551. And after answering briefly questions of Peter, Thomas, and Philip, Jesus continued: "Amen, amen, I say to you, he who believes in me, the works that I do he also shall do, and greater than these he shall do, because I am going to the Father. And whatever you ask in my name, that I will do, in order that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask me anything in my name, I will do it.

"If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will ask the Father and he will give you another Advocate (*paraklhtoz*) to dwell with you forever, the Spirit of truth whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you shall know him, because he will dwell with you and be in you.

"I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you. Yet a little while and the world no longer sees me. But you see me, for I live and you shall live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. He who has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. But he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him."

The poor Apostles must have felt somewhat lost as they listened, groping their way among these concepts as through some luminous mist. Another question, this time from Jude (Thaddeus) deflects the discourse for a moment, and then Jesus resumes: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you; not as the world gives [it] do I give [it] to you. Do not let your heart be troubled, or be afraid. You have heard me say to you, 'I go away and I am coming to you.' If you loved me, you would indeed rejoice that I am going to the Father, for the Father is greater than I.<sup>231</sup> And now I have told you before it comes to pass, that when it has come to pass you may believe. I will no longer speak much with you, for the prince of the world is coming, and in me he has nothing. But he comes that the world may know that I love the Father, and that I do as the Father has commanded me. Arise, let us go from here."

It is very likely that they did not immediately obey Jesus' request to leave the Cenacle, for their actual departure from the city is recorded much later, only at the end of these discourses (*John* 18:1). Hence, this was more like a general reminder that they must soon leave the warm still intimacy of this

room, where Jesus met with those he loved for the last time before his death. And as often happens at moments of parting, there followed another affectionate delay while Jesus continued to talk to them, perhaps in answer to questions from one or another of the Apostles. Meanwhile the beloved disciple gathered up each word and printed it deep in his vigilant memory; and later, as the spiritual Evangelist, he retold them every one (§§167 ff., and 290).

552. And so right after his suggestion that they leave, Jesus continues: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vine-dresser ... I am the vine; you are the branches. He who abides in me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for without me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in me, he shall be cast outside as the branch and wither; and they shall gather them up and cast them into the fire, and they shall burn. If you abide in me, and if my words abide in you, ask whatever you will and it shall be done to you. In this is my Father glorified, that you may bear very much fruit, and become my disciples.

"As the Father has loved me, I also have loved you. Abide in my love. If you keep my commandments you will abide in my love, as I also have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be made full.

"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love than this no one has, that one lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do the things I command you. No longer do I call you servants, because the servant does not know what his master does. But I have called you friends, because all things that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you....

"These things I command you, that you may love one another. If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before you. If you were of the world, the world would love what is its own. But because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you....

"These things I have spoken to you that you may not be scandalized. They will expel you from the synagogues (§430). Yes, the hour is coming for everyone who kills you to think that he is offering worship to God. And these things they will do because they have not known the Father nor me. But these things I have spoken to you, that when the time for them has come you may remember that I told you. These things, however, I did not tell you from the

beginning, because I was with you. And now I am going to him who sent me....”

Again, the Apostles ask questions, and then Jesus concludes his discourse, saying: “These things I have spoken to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have affliction. But take courage, I have overcome the world.”

553. Here the spiritual Evangelist immediately adds Jesus’ own words to his heavenly Father which scholars commonly describe as his “priestly prayer” (*John* 17:1-26). Jesus prays first for himself, that the Father will glorify him (17:1-5); then for the Apostles, that they may be protected in their future mission (17:6-19), and finally for all those who shall believe in him (17:20-26). It is the longest prayer spoken by Jesus which is recorded for us in the Gospels. We owe the preservation of this invaluable treasure, omitted by the Synoptics, to John’s nicety of perception, for he quite rightly considered it a kind of summary of all Jesus’ activity on earth, almost like a last flower of flame leaping upward from the pinnacle of his life. Above its blazing radiance there is the heaven of the Father alone.

“These things Jesus spoke; and raising his eyes to heaven, he said: ‘Father, the hour has come! Glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee, even as thou hast given him power over all flesh, in order that to all thou hast given him he may give everlasting life. Now this is everlasting life, that they may know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou hast sent, Jesus Christ. I have glorified thee on earth; I have accomplished the work that thou hast given me to do. And now do thou, Father, glorify me with thyself, with the glory that I had with thee before the world existed.

“‘I have manifested thy name to the men whom thou hast given me out of the world. They were thine, and thou hast given them to me, and they have kept thy word. Now they have learnt that whatever thou hast given me is from thee; because the words that thou hast given me I have given to them. And they have received them, and have known of a truth that I came forth from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

“‘I pray for them; not for the world do I pray, but for those whom thou hast given me, because they are thine; and all things that are mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them. And I am no longer in the world — but (kai) these are in the world — and I am coming to thee. Holy Father, keep in thy name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one even as

we are. While I was with them, I kept them in thy name. Those whom thou hast given me I guarded; and not one of them perished except the son of perdition, in order that the Scripture might be fulfilled. But now I am coming to thee; and these things I speak in the world, in order that they may have my joy made full in themselves. I have given them thy word; and the world has hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. I do not pray that thou take them out of the world, but that thou keep them from evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. The word is truth. Even as thou hast sent me into the world, so I also have sent them into the world. And for them I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth.

“Yet not for these only do I pray, but for those also who through their word are to believe in me, that all may be one, even as thou, Father, in me and I in thee; that they also may be one in us, that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. And the glory that thou hast given me, I have given to them, that they may be one (en), even as we are one (en): I in them and thou in me; that they may be perfected in unity (eiz en) and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and that thou hast loved them even as thou hast loved me.

“Father, I will that where I am, they also whom thou hast given me may be with me; in order that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me, because thou hast loved me before the creation of the world. Just Father, the world has not known thee, but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. And I have made known to them thy name, and will make it known, in order that the love with which thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.”

## CHAPTER XXV: Passion Week—Friday

### GETHSEMANI

554. RIGHT after he has recorded the last words of Jesus' prayer, John says: "After saying these things, Jesus went forth with his disciples beyond the torrent of Cedron, where there was a garden into which he and his disciples entered. Now Judas, who betrayed him, also knew the place, since Jesus had often met there together with his disciples" (*John* 18:1-2). That the chosen garden was "beyond the torrent of Cedron" is enough to establish it in the vicinity of the Mount of Olives and this is confirmed by the Synoptics, which give us its name as well, Gethsemani. The name (*gath shemani* [*m*], "oil press") suggests an olive grove containing a press and perhaps surrounded by a wall, all of which coincides with the name of the Mount as well. A tradition, established as early as the fourth century, sets Gethsemani a little beyond the Cedron on the modern road from Jerusalem to Bethany, where today there are olive trees of extraordinary size which are centuries old.<sup>232</sup>

It was just a comfortable walk from the Cenacle to Gethsemani. In the crisp spring nighttime, clear and bright with the moon at the full, Jesus and the Apostles descended from the Upper City to the Tyropean, probably down the ancient street of steps which has recently been discovered, crossed the Siloe quarter (§428) and left the city by the Fountain Gate. Then they began to climb again, in a northerly direction, crossed the Cedron, and reached Gethsemani. The garden probably belonged to some disciple or admirer of Jesus and that is why he used it so freely. Who knows but what its proprietor was the same man who owned the Cenacle? That would more easily explain how the young man clad only in a sheet happened to be present in the garden, if this youth was really Mark (§561), but we can only add theory to theory in this regard. Like other small groves of its kind, Gethsemani must have had a little cabin near the gate that was used as a shelter for the gardener or as a storehouse, and further on there was probably a grotto in the side of the mountain in which (as is still the custom today), was set the oil press which gave its name to the place.

On that night of the Pasch the whole region was deserted, since almost everyone stayed at home with his family. And the solitude matched the mood of the little company, for Jesus seemed sad along the way, and so the Apostles were silent and thoughtful. When they reached the garden, Jesus bade his

disciples make themselves as comfortable as they could for the night. For Orientals this was an easy matter, accustomed as they were to sleep outdoors wrapped in their cloaks, especially since this time there were shelter and dry leaves to be had in the cabin or the grotto. And as he left them, Jesus said: Stay here, while I go yonder and pray. Pray that you may not enter into temptation! — Then he took with him the three who had witnessed his transfiguration, his favorite Apostles, Peter, James, and John (§403).

555. As they drew away from the rest, these witnesses of his former glory immediately understood that they were now to watch a far different manifestation, for all of a sudden Jesus “began to be saddened and exceedingly troubled.” And turning to the three, who perhaps tried in vain to comfort him, he exclaimed: “My soul is sad, even unto death! Wait here and watch with me!”

Even their company, however, gave him no solace. In the immeasurable anguish which overwhelmed him, he yet sought to stay alone to pray.

His face livid, his knees trembling, and his arms stretched out for some support, he made a supreme effort and “withdrew from them about a stone’s throw,” and at length exhausted he “fell on his face, and prayed.” This was not the usual position for prayer, because the Jews prayed standing; this was the crumpling to earth of one who no longer has the strength to stand and prays prostrate in the dust.

Meanwhile, the three Apostles, also in great distress, watched him as he lay there, groaning. He was about forty paces away (“a stone’s throw”) and in the bright moonlight they could distinctly see and hear everything. And he groaned: “Abba, Father, all things are possible to thee. Remove this cup from me; yet not what I will but what thou wilt.” The “cup” or “chalice” was a frequent metaphor in rabbinic writings to indicate the lot that fell to a person; the lot which Jesus foresees here is the supreme trial which the Messiah must undergo to reach his triumph (§400, §475, 495); it is the decisive hour in which the grain of wheat fallen into the earth will break up and die to release a new life (§508).

But what a difference between the Sunday before and this night! Then, in the Temple, Jesus had promptly and resolutely rejected the mere thought of hesitation in the trial (§508); now, as it is about to begin, he not only hesitates, he prays expressly to the heavenly Father that it be spared him. Yet his prayer



is subject to the supreme will of the Father; the will of man is subordinated to the will of God.

At no other moment in his life does Jesus seem so truly human. In place of the Roman Pontius Pilate, all of humanity might at that hour have presented Jesus on the balcony of the universe, proclaiming: *Ecce homo!* At that hour, more clearly perhaps than afterward, we can gauge the measureless anguish which overwhelmed Jesus' spirit during his Passion. And the earthly proclamation *Ecce Homo!* would have been answered perhaps by a heavenly voice proclaiming *Ecce Deus!*

556. He must have repeated the prayer to the Father over and over again with the tortured fervor of extreme need, like one who has only one thing to ask. "And there appeared to him an angel from heaven to strengthen him." Luke (22:43), who is not one of the three witnesses of the Passion but must have heard it from them, is the only one who records this information. And he is also the only one who, psychologist and physician that he is, gives us the details of what next took place: "And falling into an agony he prayed the more earnestly. And his sweat became as drops (qromboi) of blood running down upon the ground."

For the Greeks "agony" was what took place in the "agon," that is, the struggle between charioteers or athletes competing for the prize. Their struggle demanded a most painful effort, an exhausting violence of limb and spirit, so that no one approached it without a sense of inward fear and anxious trepidation. Later, in fact, "agony" came to mean fear or trepidation in general, but especially that of the supreme struggle against death. Such was the case with Jesus. "And falling into an agony he prayed the more earnestly." He had resorted to prayer in a special way in all the most solemn moments of his life, and it becomes now his only refuge in this last hour. The "agony" is prolonged and the marks of the struggle appear on his body: he sweats, and his sweat becomes "as drops of blood running down upon the ground."

In the clear moonlight and only "a stone's throw" away, our three witnesses could have noticed this effect easily enough, and in any case, there was every opportunity to confirm their impression when Jesus came to them, his face lined with thin crimson traces of the "drops of blood."

There is a physiological phenomenon known to doctors as "hematidrosis," or "bloody sweat." Aristotle had observed it and uses this very same term: "some sweat with a 'bloody sweat' (aimatwdh idrwta)" (*Hist. animal.*, III, 19).

Physiologists are free to study Jesus' sweat from the scientific point of view, but they must not lose sight of the unique circumstances in which he suffered it. With this information which he is the only one to record, the physiologist Luke seems implicitly to invite such study.

But this same information, which makes the reality of Jesus' human nature so evident, was the source of scandal to some of the early Christians who read the Gospel of the physician Luke. They decided that though he related a fact, it would be better if it were not repeated because it seemed to confirm the calumnies circulated by the enemies of Christianity. Celsus' attacks against the person of Jesus (§195) were probably responsible for their anxiety. And because of this unfounded fear, the story of the bloody sweat together with the mention of the comforting angel began to disappear from the codices of the third Gospel. Today it is wanting in various uncial codices — the very authoritative Vatican codex among them — in some minuscule codices and in other documents, and its omission was noted as early as the fourth century by Hilarion and Jerome. When there were no longer any attacks against the Christians to keep these unnecessary worries alive, however, the ticklish passage was no longer suppressed. In any case, the testimonies in its favor — both codices and early writers beginning with Justin (*Dial. cum Tryph.*, 103) and Irenaeus (*Adv. haer.*, III, 22, 2) — are so numerous and important as to leave no doubt about the authenticity of the passage.

557. The agony lasted a long time; it must have been now past midnight. The three Apostles, at first painfully distressed by what they saw, sank gradually into a kind of numbness induced by sorrow and fatigue, and finally they went to sleep altogether.

At a certain point in the infinite spiritual anguish he was suffering, Jesus felt also the desolation of human loneliness, and he again sought the company of his three beloved friends; perhaps he expected only an affectionate word or gesture, something that would make him feel less alone on the earth. But when he reached them, he found them all sound asleep, including Peter who a little while before had poured forth torrents of words to protest his faithfulness (§549). Then Jesus said to him: "Simon, dost thou sleep? Couldst thou not watch one hour? Watch and pray, that you may not enter into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And this was all the comfort Jesus had from the three he loved best.

The spasm of suffering continued, and once more he turned from men to God. And again, he made the one same request to his heavenly Father, and the three he had just awakened were able to hear him: “My Father, if this cup cannot pass away unless I drink it, thy will be done!”

Time passed; the night was monotonously still, and after a little while the three Apostles despite all their efforts were again overcome by sleep. “And he came again and found them sleeping, for their eyes were heavy. And they did not know what answer to make to him” (*Mark 14:40*). It is easy to recognize in this last phrase the confession of Mark’s informant, Peter.

“And leaving them he went back again, and prayed a third time, saying the same words over” (*Matt. 26:44*). How long Jesus prayed this third time we do not know; perhaps not very long. Then he went back to the three sleeping men and this time in a different tone, he said to them: “Sleep on now, and take your rest! It is enough; the hour has come. Behold, the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Rise, let us go. Behold, he who will betray me is at hand.” The first words, “sleep on now and take your rest,” are obviously not to be taken literally as a bidding to do just that and it is also very unlikely that they were a question. It seems more reasonable to interpret them, as a kind of affectionate irony, as if he said: Yes, yes, this is a good time to sleep! Do you not see that the traitor is here?

They could, in fact, hear the noise of the crowd coming up the road from Jerusalem, and in the distance the glancing light of torches and lanterns came breaking through the nighttime.

Jesus led his three sleepy witnesses back to where the other eight Apostles lay, undoubtedly in the deepest slumber, and he waked them all. Then he waited, speaking meanwhile a few words of exhortation to them.

## THE ARREST

558. “And while he was yet speaking, behold Judas, one of the Twelve, came and with him a great crowd with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests and elders of the people.” Thus, the Synoptics, while John adds a detail or two regarding the “great crowd.” It was composed for the most part of Temple attendants (cf. *Luke 22:52*), but there was also a cohort (*speira*) with its tribune (*ciliarcoz*) (*John 18:3, 12*). The soldiers were certainly there by order of the Roman procurator (§619). Then what had happened?

It is not too hazardous to reconstruct the events immediately preceding the arrest in this way. When Judas left the Cenacle (§543) he went straight to the leaders of the Jews, who were waiting for him and who had meanwhile completed their preparations and mustered all their material and moral support: first they had told their attendants to be ready for a short but difficult assignment; and then they had gone to the Roman procurator or the tribune, and having pictured that Galilean Jesus as a political agitator surrounded by other troublemakers who were his countrymen and all of them ready to promote riots and tumults in the capital, they had obtained an armed escort without any difficulty. This could not have been the whole cohort (about six hundred men) stationed in Jerusalem, but only a very small detachment to which John gives the name of the whole. In any case, the presence of Roman soldiers was of great psychological value, especially since the tribune who commanded them had also come along.

All these people gathered right after nightfall and there remained only to find Jesus and arrest him. Where should they look for him in order to take him quietly and without risk of causing a riot among the people? No one could help them better here than Judas, who had been paid especially for his share in this part of the program. John tells us that Gethsemani was well known to the traitor "since Jesus had often met there together with his disciples" (§554), and he was also quite sure that after the Paschal dinner Jesus could not have gone all the way to Bethany because it was too far. Hence, he must be in Gethsemani or its vicinity.

In completing his arrangements with the chief priests, Judas fixed a special sign by which they were to recognize Jesus: "Whomever I kiss, that is he! Lay hold of him!" In ancient times in the Orient, it was customary for disciples to kiss the hands of their teachers as a mark of respect, while friends, as equals, kissed each other on the cheek. There was still some shred of decency in the sign Judas chose; he did not quite have the face to point his master and friend out to the guards openly shouting, "There he is," which is what anyone who really hated Jesus would have done, for the shout in itself would have given some vent to the hatred. The sign he chose was an attempt to save appearances. But here again we are faced with the strange riddle of Judas. He knew that the Master was already aware of his betrayal. Had he not heard the compassionate, "Thou hast said it!" from Jesus' own lips a few hours before (§543)? If any such disconcerting thoughts did come to Judas' mind, he probably bolstered his courage by concentrating on the thirty shekels and

looking back now and then at the reassuring support of the Roman soldiers behind him. This pretense of decency was also in a way a survival of his love for Jesus, which at that moment was completely stifled by his love for gold. Only a few hours later the love for gold will lose all its strength and Judas will recant his treachery, but his love for Jesus will not be pure enough or strong enough to make him seek forgiveness (§534).

559. Everything proceeded according to plan. Jesus was still speaking with his Apostles, just awakened, when Judas entered the garden with the guards following a short distance behind him. He walked toward the Twelve, peering through the darkness for Jesus. Then he went up to him, laid a hand on his shoulder and kissed his cheek, saying: "Hail, Rabbi!" Jesus looked steadily at him and said in a low voice: "Friend, for what purpose hast thou come?" And then, after a moment, "Judas, dost thou betray the Son of Man with a kiss?" But he received no answer; Judas had carried out his pact with the men behind him.

As soon as they saw the sign, the guards came forward pell-mell and Jesus moved away from the Apostles to go to meet them. "Whom do you seek?" he asked. They answered: "Jesus of Nazareth." And Jesus said: "I am he." At these words those closest him drew back and fell flat on the ground. We read of famous personages in antiquity, like Marius and Mark Antony, that their very presence or the sound of their voices was sufficient to strike terror into men sent to murder them, but the latter were only individual assassins and the circumstances were quite different. It may very well be that in this instance, the guards suddenly felt the full force of Jesus' personality and were utterly dismayed. Perhaps they thought of the tragic death which fell upon the soldiers sent to capture Elias (4 [2] *Kings* 1:10 ff.) or other ancient prophets. In any case it is obvious that John, who is the only one to relate this episode, intends to picture it as miraculous, thereby emphasizing the perfect freedom with which Jesus accepted his arrest. Then they stumbled to their feet again and repeated that they were seeking Jesus of Nazareth, and he answered once more: "I have told you that I am he. If, therefore, you seek me, let these go their way." With tactful awareness Jesus refers to the Apostles as "these," thus covering the fact that they were his special disciples in order to protect them from violence or abuse. This time, the guards "seized him and held him."

Those who executed the arrest must have been the Temple attendants since it was the servant of the high priest who was the first to suffer the consequences and since as soon as he was arrested Jesus was taken

immediately not to the procurator but to the high priest. The soldiers of the Roman cohort probably did no more than stand by ready to intervene if there should be a serious scuffle.

560. Jesus' tactful concern to protect his Apostles first, and then the sight of their beloved Master so humiliated and in the hands of such people, revived the pugnacious proposals they had made with unquestionable sincerity a few hours before in the Cenacle (§549).

So, they pushed through the crowd to Jesus and said to him: "Lord, shall we strike with the sword?" But Peter would not have been Peter if he had waited for an answer; without further ado, "having a sword, he drew it and struck the servant of the high priest and cut off his right ear. Now the servant's name was Malchus."<sup>233</sup> *John* (18:10) is the only one who mentions Peter and Malchus by name; the Synoptics record the incident without naming either, probably through prudence prompted by the times in which they wrote (cf. §493, §535).

Jesus intervened immediately and said to Peter: "Put back thy sword into its place, for all those who take the sword will perish by the sword. Or dost thou suppose that I cannot entreat my Father, and he will even now furnish me with more than twelve legions of angels? How then are the Scriptures to be fulfilled, that thus it may happen?" And having put Peter in his place, Jesus also healed the wounded man's ear with a simple touch of his hand. The cure is recorded only by the physician Luke (22:51). Then Jesus turned to the crowd, among whom were "chief priests and captains of the temple (§58) and elders" and he said to them: "As against a robber you have come out, with swords and clubs. When I was daily with you in the Temple, you did not stretch forth your hands against me. But this is your hour, and the power of darkness" (*Luke* 22:52-53).

561. The prisoner was bound and they began to lead him away. Between their first sleepiness and then their sudden and impulsive anger, the Apostles had not yet fully grasped what was happening; now they began to understand. The Master was actually arrested; he was being led away like an ordinary criminal. Now, perhaps better than on any of the occasions when Jesus had spoken of these things, did they begin to have some notion of what he meant by the bitter trial, the supreme suffering through which he had said so many times he must pass before entering upon his glory.

Between the heartbreaking sight before them and these grief-boding memories, the eleven weak little men were crushed with hopeless bewilderment. They completely forgot the distant future glory of the Messiah; they were aware only of the clinking of the chains, the glinting swords, the humiliation of their Master. And in their overwhelming sense of loss and terror, they took to their heels and fled, every last one of them, and Jesus left Gethsemani accompanied only by his captors. Not a friend was near him.

Or better, one friend still lingered, although not very nearby. It is here we meet the episode of the young man clad only in a linen cloth. As we have seen, it is possible that this young man was the Evangelist Mark (§134). If he was the son or other relative of the owner of the Cenacle (§554), we may suppose that when the Last Supper was over, he followed Jesus and his friends to Gethsemani through friendly interest and that he stayed there a while with the eight Apostles who took shelter in the little hut or grotto, eventually falling asleep himself. The detail that he had only "a linen cloth wrapped about his naked body" (*peribebhlhmenoz sindona epi gumnou*) is very important: the "sindon" was worn to bed only by wealthy persons (cf. Herodotus, II, 95; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, VI, 40, 7), while ordinary people like the Apostles slept in their clothes. Probably then the youth was accustomed to spending the night in the little hut in Gethsemani, where he may have kept a pallet and the other comforts a well-to-do person would have when he went to bed.

If these suppositions are true, then the whole scene becomes very clear. Suddenly awakened by the loud talking of the guards, the screams of the wounded servant, and the outcries of the Apostles, the young man jumped from his pallet just as he was. He watched the last part of Jesus' arrest and he saw the Apostles all flee. Then either because he felt safe since he was still on his own property, or because youth is naturally more enterprising and he had besides a real affection for the prisoner, he began to follow the soldiery as they moved off. After a while the guards noticed the young man trailing them in that strange garb, and seized him on suspicion. But they seized only his linen cloth, because he nimbly slipped out from under it and fled away naked as he was.<sup>234</sup>

And so, Jesus was abandoned by this last friend too, a lad without any clothes.

## THE RELIGIOUS TRIAL BEFORE THE SANHEDRIN

562. It was probably by now about two hours past midnight. The guards led their prisoner back over the same road he had come a few hours before with his Apostles, and having crossed the Cedron, climbed up the western hill of the city where stood the house of the high priest Annas. There the armed escort parted company. The prisoner and the guards of the Sanhedrin remained in the house, while the soldiers from the Roman cohort withdrew to their quarters in the Antonia.

What happened next is narrated differently by the four Evangelists. The accounts of Matthew and Mark are substantially the same; Luke's story, the last Synoptic in point of time, is notably different; and finally, John, as usual, supplies details and completes the three preceding accounts, taking it for granted that they are all well known. Matthew and Mark mention Jesus' appearance before the Sanhedrin at night and again in the early morning, while Luke speaks only of the trial before the Sanhedrin in the morning. John, for his part, distinguishes between Jesus' appearance before Annas, the ex-high priest, about which the Synoptics say nothing, and his subsequent appearance before Caiphas, the high priest then in office, but he does not mention any questioning before the Sanhedrin at all.

To reconcile these discrepancies, it is enough to remember what we have repeatedly insisted upon thus far, namely, that the Synoptics are frequently unconcerned about the completeness and the time sequence of their accounts, whereas John makes it a point to avoid repeating what the Synoptics have already related although he tacitly relies on their narrative with the intention of completing it. Thus, for example, since the Synoptics did not even mention Annas, John starts off his account by making it clear that Jesus was brought first before him (§164) and afterward before Caiphas, the high priest mentioned in the Synoptics.

It is very likely that Annas and Caiphas, given their relationship, lived in separate apartments in the same house. One very old tradition, which goes back at least to the fourth century, sets Caiphas' home on the western hill of the city some twenty or thirty yards north of the traditional site of the Last Supper (§535). If Jesus was led first to Annas, the reason probably was that the latter, no longer in office but still very powerful (§52), had suggested the way to take the Galilean Rabbi prisoner. Hence out of respect for this assistance and for his extraordinary influence, his son-in-law Caiphas had given orders that the prisoner be brought first to him.



At this point, then, the trial of Jesus begins. It has two phases, conducted in two different places on the basis of two separate sets of arguments. The first part of the trial is religious: Jesus is charged with a crime against religion and appears before the national-religious court of the Sanhedrin where he is pronounced guilty of death. But this sentence is only theoretically valid because, as we know (§59), the Sanhedrin could carry out no death sentences without the specific and explicit approval of the Roman authority. To make their decision effective, therefore, the Sanhedrists appeal to the Roman procurator and this opens the second part of the trial, which takes place before the civil tribunal of the procurator. The judges in the first trial here present themselves as accusers, and their charges are mostly political and only to a lesser degree religious.

563. The religious trial began with the questions Annas asked Jesus. This was not an official interrogation, however. Rather it was an attempt to fix the charge, or it may reflect no more than merely the questioners desire to satisfy his personal curiosity while waiting for the official judges and witnesses to be summoned and make their appearance at that late hour of the night.

Annas questioned Jesus about his disciples and his teaching,<sup>235</sup> and Jesus answered: "I have spoken openly to the world; I have always taught in the synagogue and in the Temple, where all the Jews gather, and in secret I have said nothing. Why dost thou question me? Question those who have heard what I spoke to them; behold, these know what I have said" (*John* 18:20-21). The accused had answered according to his right; among all peoples, including the Hebrew (*Ketuboth*, II, 9; cf. *John* 5:31; 8:13), the accused could not testify in his own regard. The only valid testimony was that of other, trustworthy people and Jesus' answer refers his questioner to just such witnesses. He has not founded any secret societies, nor has he taught any mysterious knowledge guarded with jealous secrecy. He has spoken in public places to all who came to him. Hence these can all bear witness to his teaching. Four centuries earlier, Socrates had defended himself in a similar way before his Athenian judges; he, too, had always spoken openly, and if any witness said that he had heard things which no one else had, he was lying (*Apologia*, 21).

At Jesus' unimpeachable answer, Annas must have made some gesture of annoyance, because he had certainly hoped the accused would say something in his reply that would furnish grounds for the official accusation to be made against him. Annas' angry gesture was noticed by an overzealous servant, who

thought it opportune to translate into action the unspoken impulse of the questioner. This servant was standing near Jesus, and he struck him, exclaiming in a scandalized tone: “‘Is that the way thou dost answer the high priest?’ — Jesus answered him: ‘If I have spoken ill, bear witness to the evil; but if well, why dost thou strike me?’” (*John* 19:22-23).

This blow concludes all we know of Annas’ questioning, which probably did not last long in any case. Since the accused was so completely controlled and since Annas perhaps did not want to become personally involved in the trial, he immediately sent Jesus bound to the high priest then in office, his son-in-law Caiphas. The distance from one home to the other was very brief, since, if our supposition is correct (§562), it probably meant only crossing the courtyard or atrium into which the various apartments of the house opened.

564. Various members of the Sanhedrin had in the meantime been gathering in the house of Caiphas, and when there were a sufficient number of them, they subjected Jesus to some sort of questioning, preliminary to the official procedure against him. The Sanhedrin met in its real capacity as a court only later, however, toward morning, as if to complete and act upon the findings of their nocturnal investigation. Matthew and Mark seem to assign their accounts of the questioning to the night session; Luke, chronologically more accurate, records it at the morning meeting and there is no doubt his order is the one to be preferred.

We listed in the introduction the extremely careful and minute prescriptions in the Talmud regulating the procedure of trials and especially those which might end in a death sentence (§60); but we also noted that all that wise and ample legislation was almost too wise to be observed in actual practice. It was put in writing only from the second century on, and objective historians today regard it as abstract theory, an ideal picture of the perfect administration of justice, rather than a genuine rule book of court procedure. We do not need to go to the Utopias of Plato or Thomas More or even beyond Israel itself and the broad and detailed legislation of Ezechiel (chap. 40-48) regarding the future Temple, to find another typical example of such ideal theories and programs. Modern scholars, and Jews among them, have rightly observed that the Talmudic legislation governing trial procedure seems intended to make a death sentence impossible. It is also certain that since it was fixed in writing when the Jewish nation had lost all political autonomy and was represented only by the Pharisees (§87), it could be reworked and elaborated regardless of contemporary circumstances and arbitrarily assigned to the past as a product

of “tradition.” That this legislation was invented entirely at the time when it was written down as a code is not at all likely; but the rules in force while the Jews still had political autonomy and before this legislation was codified must have been very few and scanty indeed, and certainly far different from the specific and detailed precision they took on when written down. In Jesus’ time, the only rules were those of custom and it is impossible today to establish either their number or their nature; we can suppose that in general they corresponded only slightly to those later formulated into a code.

Hence there is no point in comparing — as some have done — the procedure at Jesus’ trial with the Talmudic prescriptions in this regard to see just how far the latter were observed; in fact, we do not know whether many of them were in existence then. There was, of course, the sacred and ancient norm (*Num.* 35:30; *Deut.* 17:6; 19:15) that no one could be condemned except on the testimony of others [not on his own], and never on the evidence of one witness alone — there had to be at least two or three. But we cannot be sure that the rule written down later that criminal trials could not be conducted at a night session, or the other precept that the death sentence could not be pronounced on the same day as the trial were yet in existence at this time. It is certain that at Jesus’ trial, none of these three canons was observed.

565. This night inquiry, then, prepared the principal material for the morning session, which was held “as soon as day broke” (*Luke* 22:66), that is, as soon as the sky began to lighten but before the full dawn (§576). It must have been about five o’clock in the morning according to our time. Probably those who had been present at the night questioning were either Jesus’ most bitter adversaries or the members who habitually frequented the high priest’s house. At the morning session, however, members of all three groups of the Sanhedrin were present (*Luke* 22:66; cf. §58).

In observance of the sacred and ancient norm mentioned above, they began by examining “many . . . witnesses,” who, however, were “false”; but either because these witnesses had been primed too hastily and not specifically enough, or because in their reference to Jesus’ former discourses and actions they confused very different particulars, “their evidence did not agree” (*Mark* 14:56). With such depositions, the trial did not progress an inch nor did they save even the appearance of legality. For though there did not exist at the time the later written rule that the witness had to specify the day, the hour, the place, and other minute circumstances of the alleged crime

(§60), nevertheless it was evidently required that the testimony should not contradict itself. And contradict itself this testimony certainly did.

Finally, however, two witnesses appeared who did seem to have the same story. Besides, they fulfilled the minimum legal requirement since there were two of them. They charged that Jesus had pronounced the following words: "I am able to destroy the temple of God, and to rebuild it after three days" (*Matt.* 26:61); or as Mark (14:58) records it: "I will destroy this temple built by hands, and after three days I will build another, not built by hands." But upon further questioning, these two witnesses did not completely agree either; above all, their testimony was not true either to the spirit or to the letter of Jesus' words.

Their evidence obviously referred to what Jesus had said two years before when he drove the merchants from the Temple (§278); but, as we have seen, his words on that occasion were figurative and referred to his own body, not to the Temple of Jerusalem. Besides, even if his statement were taken as a reference to the Temple, Jesus had not proposed to destroy it himself but had challenged his adversaries to do so ("Destroy this temple . . ."), and, therefore, he would be at the most the rebuilder of the Temple destroyed by the Jews. But to rebuild the Temple could carry with it titles of praise, not furnish the basis for denunciations. One of the very few claims to merit which Herod the Great had earned for himself a half century before in the eyes of the Jews was precisely the fact that he had rebuilt the Temple, gradually destroying the old one in the process, and had made it more magnificent than ever before (§46). The witnesses and the judges certainly did not believe Jesus could do what Herod the Great had done; the most they could conclude, therefore, was that the accused was a hopelessly conceited fool, a dreamer, and a braggart. It would be difficult to convict him of impiety and blasphemy on this evidence alone.

566. Given the lack of other charges, however, this double testimony about the Temple was too handy for the judges to let go of it. It could be useful at least to prove that Jesus had prophesied the destruction of the Temple or had maintained that it was possible.

Now, when it came to the great pile of stone and beams which formed the material temple, the Jews of the time of Jesus completely lost their heads, just as the Jews of the time of Jeremias had done six centuries before. The ancient prophet was judged worthy of death because he had foretold as upon

inspiration from God that the Temple would be destroyed (*Jer. 7:4 ff.; 26:6 ff.*); and his writings, which related this prophecy together with its punctual fulfillment and the impious treatment accorded him, were venerated as holy by those now seated in judgment upon Jesus. Apparently, the only lesson they drew from them was to repeat in worse degree the treatment their ancestors had given the prophet of the God of Israel.

Realizing, in fact, that this last bit of evidence was about to evaporate into thin air, the high priest decided to take things into his own hands. Rising to his feet, Caiphas ostensibly tried to elicit from Jesus an answer in his own defense against the charges made by these two witnesses, but in reality, he was hoping to involve him in discussion and force him to some confession. So, he said to him: "Dost thou make no answer to the things that these men prefer against thee?" But the answer he wanted was not forthcoming; Jesus remained absolutely silent.

Then the high priest assumed an inspired and solemn tone and tried again: "I adjure thee by the living God that thou tell us whether thou art the Christ [Messiah], the Son of God." One would have thought that the high priest, consumed with desire for the truth, was awaiting just one word of assurance in order to surrender completely, that immediately upon hearing it he would throw himself reverently at the feet of Jesus and recognize him as the Messiah of Israel.

It is to be carefully noted that Caiphas charged Jesus to declare if he was "the Christ, the Son of God." There are really two parts to the question. Jesus may affirm or deny that he is "the Christ," or Messiah, and he may affirm or deny that he is "the Son of God." Caiphas probably used the two terms more or less synonymously, but he himself and the other members of the Sanhedrin show later that they could make a precise distinction in meaning between the two epithets, and they give the term, "the Son of God," a different and much more sublime significance than the title "Messiah."

567. The moment was in truth a solemn and a breathless one. All Jesus' activity, his entire mission seemed to resolve into the answer he would give the high priest. His questioner wore the highest authority in Israel; the accused throughout his life had almost constantly hidden the fact that he was the Messiah for reasons of careful prudence, confiding it only recently and only to chosen persons who were prepared for it.

But now the reasons for caution no longer existed. Dangerous as it was, the time had come to declare his identity openly to all of Israel represented there before him by the high priest and the Sanhedrin.

But the answer Jesus had ready could not fail to scandalize those to whom he would speak it because of their particular spiritual dispositions. Besides it would first be necessary to clarify certain principles on which they might equivocate. So, he prudently warned them: "If I tell you, you will not believe me; and if I question you, you will not answer me" (*Luke 22:67-68*).

The warning momentarily disappointed the eager hopes of the entire assembly; and they all began to exhort the accused to speak, all repeating the high priest's question at once in the hope of provoking the confession they wanted. Then Jesus turned to the high priest and answered: "Thou hast said it," which meant "I am what you have said" (§543). After this brief declaration he turned to all those present and stated: "Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you shall see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power and coming upon the clouds of heaven." This was a quotation of two famous messianic texts (*Dan. 7:9, 13; Ps. 109 [110] 1*) and it was intended to establish the meaning of his statement by linking it with the holy Hebrew Scriptures, while at the same time it appealed to the future proof of that declaration, namely, the glorious return of the Messiah "upon the clouds of heaven," as foretold by the Scriptures.

568. As soon as they heard Jesus' words, all the Sanhedrists rose toward him in great excitement, vying with one another in demanding: "Art thou, then, the Son of God?" (*Luke 22:70.*)

They already had Jesus' confession that he considered himself the Messiah; but there could still be some doubt that he also considered himself the Son of God" in the essential meaning of that term. In reality, Jesus' reference to the two messianic texts made this point clear enough too, but the Sanhedrists were anxious to have a complete declaration from the accused himself and so they asked him formally: Are you then, besides the Messiah, also the Son of God? Nor was it possible for those' judges to ask a more exact and specific question.

Neither was it possible for Jesus to give them a more exact and specific answer; across the throbbing silence of the tribunal it rang: "You yourselves say that I am, which meant: "I am what you have said — the Son of God."

Now that he had obtained this unmistakable declaration, the high priest shrieked in horror: He has blasphemed! What further need have we of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard the blasphemy! What do you think?" And with one accord they shouted: "He is liable to death!"

To make his scandalized indignation all the more impressive the high priest had, with his exclamation, torn away the border of the upper part of his tunic as was customary at times of great mourning; but if the man had displayed his real feelings, his face would have shone with a deep and sincere joy. He really believed that he had succeeded in making Jesus blaspheme and so implicated him that the death sentence was inevitable.

569. But the high priest's question constituted a completely illegal procedure. Since they had been unable to prove anything against him with witnesses, they had tried to make the accused testify against himself (contrary to the rule later recorded in *Sanhedrin*, 9 b), and thereby surprise him in a supposed flagrant crime; hence, they now ignored all his alleged past crimes to concentrate entirely on the present one, and Jesus no longer figured as an accused answerable for former misdeeds but as an innocent man arrested in order that he might be provoked to blasphemy.

Besides, in declaring that he was the Messiah, Jesus had not blasphemed: in the first place because he had not used the name of God but had instead prudently substituted for the personal or descriptive name of God (Yahweh, or 'Elohim) the epithet "Power," as the rabbis used to do,<sup>236</sup> and in the second place, to claim that oneself or another was the Messiah of Israel did not in itself constitute a blasphemy. A century later right within the most orthodox rabbinism, the Great Rabbi Aqiba heralded as the Messiah the Bar Kokba who led the last and most disastrous rebellion of the Jews against Rome, and yet, notwithstanding this mistaken pronouncement, Rabbi Aqiba not only was not judged guilty of blasphemy, but he has remained always one of Judaism's shining lights throughout the Christian era. Hence even if Jesus' adversaries did not accept his claim that he was the Messiah, the most they could do was to condemn it as the empty boast of a fanatic or madman —so some of Rabbi Aqiba's contemporaries judged his proclamation — but it could in no way be considered a blasphemy against the Divinity.

Why then did the president shriek and the court assent that Jesus had blasphemed? Evidently because of Jesus' affirmative answer to their second question: "Art thou then the Son of God?" Here the term "Son of God"

obviously is not—in the questioner's intention—a synonym for Messiah; it represents a step further, a climax, and it carries a much higher significance. The questioners wanted to know if Jesus considered himself, in the true and essential meaning of the word, "the Son of God." And when Jesus answered yes, he was adjudged a blasphemer.

And so, the religious trial was ended and the sentence passed: Jesus was pronounced guilty of death for blasphemy. The trial had exceeded the high priest's wildest hopes. Seeing that there was no hope of accomplishing anything with witnesses, he had addressed himself directly to the accused and asked him if he was the Messiah, because once a confession was obtained on this point, the self-confessed culprit would have to prove his political innocence before the Roman procurator. But Jesus' confession was so full and so solemn that it had spontaneously led to the next question, whether the accused, besides being the Messiah, was also the "Son of God." This question, the most delicate and decisive of all, was also answered completely and affirmatively.

Hence, the examiner had won in both fields: in the national-political one, because the accused had confessed that he was the Messiah of Israel, and in the strictly religious one, because the prisoner had confessed that he was the true Son of God. This second answer settled the case before the Sanhedrin; the first was brought before the Roman procurator and was equally decisive.

All this took place—as we have said (§564)—at the morning session of the Sanhedrin, which was the final one and incorporated in its proceedings the findings of the night session. But other things had taken place or were taking place in the meantime, which we shall here discuss by themselves.

## THE INSULTS OFFERED JESUS; PETER'S DENIALS; THE END OF JUDAS ISCARIOT

570. When the night session was over and the fate of the accused practically decided, he was handed over to the custody of guards of the Sanhedrin until this council should meet in the morning.

The guards now had him entirely in their power and he was to all intents and purposes outside the law. They were tired and irritated because they had to stay up all night on his account, and they proceeded to compensate for their annoyance by subjecting him to their ingenious ridicule and their brutal and protracted horseplay. For perhaps two hours—from about three to five in



the morning (§562, §565)—the accused was entirely at the mercy of these guards, who were probably joined at first by the most rabid members of the Sanhedrin come to cheer them on and enjoy the sport. Jesus was led across the court between the apartments of Annas and Caiphas and down into some dark subterranean room. There his guards struck him, spat in his face, and showered outrage and insult of every kind upon him as one guilty of blasphemy and sacrilege.

Then they proceeded to more sober and better organized sport; they played a children's game, but in a cruel and atrocious way. They blindfolded the prisoner and then kept striking him viciously across the face, asking him to guess who had struck him. It was the game the Greek children called, in its various forms, *muinda paixein*, or *kollabixein*. Here the intended mockery is obvious, for Jesus, the prophet who had so often seen hidden things and read men's innermost thoughts, should have been able to name who had struck him. At every blow, in fact, they asked: "Prophecy to us, O Christ [Messiah]! who is it that struck thee?" And others "caught him with blows," as Mark's Roman idiom (§133) says. And the spitting and the curses and the jeers continued without pause or interruption.

As the guards' inventiveness began to exhaust itself somewhat and their interest gradually succumbed to weariness, one by one they left him sitting there, limp and crumpled as a rag, while they probably stretched out on the ground to sleep away the rest of their watch.

571. Shortly before this another incident had occurred in which the chief actors were not the enemies but the friends of Jesus.

We saw how the Apostles all abandoned him in Gethsemani except Judas. Where did they flee? Obviously, they did not run very far from the place of arrest but stopped when they saw there was no immediate danger of meeting the same fate as the Master. And with the sense of temporary security came a natural reaction against the utter cowardice they had just displayed. Then some, if not all of them, must have returned to Jerusalem singly or by twos and threes, following, cautious and alert, the roads taken by the guards and their prisoner a short time before.

Ahead of the rest, but still far behind the guards, went Peter with "another disciple" (*John* 18:15). Peter had probably remembered by this time his promise of a few hours before to remain faithful to Jesus even at the cost of his life; deeply chagrined now to realize that he had taken to his heels instead,

he had somewhat recovered his fighting spirit and was perhaps thinking up some way to find out what had happened to the prisoner. Carefully observing the movements of the guards from a distance, he noticed they had all entered the house of the high priest, and with the "other disciple" he marched resolutely up to the door.

And here there is a curious incident. That other disciple was known to the servants of the high priest and so he had no difficulty entering the house, but Peter, who was not known to them, was left faltering outside. But when the "other disciple" noticed Peter was no longer following him, he went back to the entrance and spoke to the portress and Peter was allowed to enter.

Who was this "other disciple," mentioned only in the fourth Gospel but without being named? It is extremely reasonable from every point of view to suppose, as so many ancient and modern scholars have done, that he is none other than John, who does not name himself here for the same reason that he constantly veils his identity throughout the rest of his Gospel. Nor is there anything surprising in the fact that he was known to the servants of the high priest. Whether there was some business relationship between the well-to-do family of John and the high priest, who by no means disdained business, or whether there were other reasons which now escape us, it is obvious that a superficial acquaintance between the young man and the high priest's servants was nothing exceptional, and this permitted the two disciples of the accused —not known as such, however — to enter the house.

To form an accurate picture of what happened next, we must remember the arrangement of a wealthy home in Jerusalem. Entrance was from the street through a main door with its porter's lodge. A vestibule, resembling a long corridor more or less, opened into a courtyard or atrium, shared by all the various apartments in the house. The rooms on the ground floor around the courtyard were generally set aside for servants and various menial tasks; those on the second floor were reserved for the master of the house and persons of distinction.

What happened was this: when Peter entered at John's intervention, the portress eyed the strange visitor with a petulant curiosity not uncommon among lady doorkeepers and all the more natural on that night charged with suspicion. Struck perhaps by his unfamiliar face and embarrassed manner, she said to him, half in earnest and half with inquisitive sarcasm: "Art thou also one of this man's disciples?" (*John* 18:17.) Taken by surprise, Peter managed

to say promptly and evenly: "I am not." Then the leader of the Apostles, almost as if to hurry away from his lie to some less dangerous place, plunged into the vestibule and made his way to the courtyard where he found a group of guards gathered around the fire. At the beginning of April in Jerusalem, cold nights are not at all rare mainly because of the altitude (about 2400 ft. above sea level; §5), so that on this particular night the guards had lit a fire (§537) to keep warm and to dispel the chilliness they felt from their errand across the valley of the Cedron.

Assuming a casual and indifferent air, Peter approached the fire and mingled with those about it. But the portress was still stalking her prey; more curious now than before, she followed Peter to the fire and repeated her suspicion in a loud voice so that all gathered there could hear it. Her question made some impression on them; they scrutinized the newcomer more intently there in the light of the fire and discovered that the portress' suspicion might really have some basis. And they all began to repeat her question, some to each other and some to Peter, some with sarcasm and some with certainty, all of them harping on the possibility that the unknown visitor was a disciple of the prisoner.

573. Peter realized that far from picking a less dangerous spot he had put his head in the lion's mouth. His only thought was to save himself. He pretended not to hear some of the questioners and to others he answered vigorously that he did not know Jesus at all. But there, in the light of the fire and under the fixed gaze of so many people, his protestations were embarrassed and faltering. It would be better to go and stand somewhere else. Then Peter, his thoughts in confusion and his conscience far from easy, started back toward the door. At that moment the shrill crowing of a cock pierced the dim morning stillness (*Mark 14:68*).

Meanwhile that pest of a woman had resumed her post beside the door and so there she was, under Peter's feet again. This odd fellow offered something of a pastime and she continued her sarcastic sallies, communicating her suspicions to the servants passing by. Peter wandered vaguely back and forth between the door and the courtyard, but cornered once more "again he denied with an oath: I do not know the man!" (*Matt. 26:72.*)

Time passed, and the people seemed to have forgotten Peter. He, meanwhile, kept peering through the shadows and listening attentively to see

if he could find out anything of what was happening to Jesus. But at a certain point, "about an hour" (*Luke 22:59*) after Peter's entrance into that ill-omened house, the suspicions were revived. A little group approached him and challenged him with positive conviction: "Surely thou art also one of them; for thou art a Galilean. Thy speech betrays thee!" (*Matt. 26:73; Mark 14:70.*)

The Galileans, in fact, spoke a dialect and their accent betrayed them the minute they opened their mouths, like the drawl of a Georgia farmer in Boston. An anecdote in the Talmud (*Erubin*, 53 b) suggests that a Galilean pronounced all the following words in the same way: *hamor* ("donkey"), *hamar* ("wine"), *'amar* ("wool"), *'immar* ("lamb").

This was a serious shock to Peter but worse was yet to come. For no sooner was he challenged on this score than another of those present, who had meanwhile been attentively scanning his features, leaped forward and shouted in his face: "Did I not see thee in the garden with him?" (*John 18:26.*) The person speaking with so much conviction was a relative of the man whose ear Peter had cut off a few hours before in Gethsemani (§560).

In the face of such devastating proof, Peter saw he was lost. Grasping instinctively for any means of escape whatever, he began to swear and curse that he had never in his life known any Jesus of Nazareth and that as a matter of fact this was the very first time he had ever heard such a person mentioned.

In the middle of this torrent of imprecations, the cock crowed a second time (*Mark 14:72*); at that very moment, Jesus, bound and surrounded by his jailers, crossed the courtyard where the fire was burning. The night meeting of the Sanhedrin had just ended and the accused was being led to the underground cell to wait for the morning session.

This time the crowing of the cock struck Peter like a hammer blow; suddenly forgetting his curious examiners, he lifted his gaze beyond them and saw Jesus passing through the court. And Jesus turned toward him one of those glances which always left Peter shriveled in his inmost being. The disciple remembered then what the Master had predicted a few hours before, that on that very night before the cock had crowed twice, he would have denied him three times.

And the poor but generous-souled Peter abandoned the place of his defeat and "went out and wept bitterly."<sup>237</sup>

574. When the morning meeting of the Sanhedrin was over, the news quickly spread that Jesus had been condemned to death. Perhaps the first person outside to learn of it was the man who had a supreme interest in the sentence, Judas Iscariot. This final consequence of his treachery produced in his soul the terrifying upheaval which we have already discussed (§533). The Master, whom in his own fashion he did love, had been condemned to death. Would he now be able to free himself? Would he resort to his miraculous power to break the net his enemies had woven about him? The traitor doubted that he would.

Perhaps he realized then for the first time that the results of his betrayal were far different from those he had foreseen; certainly, he realized for the first time the abysmal injustice he had committed. The love for Jesus at that moment obliterated every other love within him, even his powerful craving for money. But it was a turbid love incapable of rising to the hope of forgiveness. The thirty shekels he had received in the meantime and which his greed had expected to completely satisfy his spirit, now became an intolerable bitterness. They were like thirty hot coals. He could not keep them on his person any longer, for they seemed to confirm and rivet his betrayal to him. So, he ran to the chief priests and shouted: 'I have sinned in betraying innocent blood.' And he held out the purse full of shekels to them. The members of the Sanhedrin looked at him coldly; sure of themselves, they answered his cry with careless sarcasm: "What is that to us? See to it thyself!" The answer of these men who had hired his treachery rang in his ears like a cruel jest; he saw that no one was more caught in the meshes of his perfidy than himself, that he alone was his own real victim. For the Sanhedrists that betrayal must stand forever; it could in no way be recanted or remedied. Let the whole weight of it fall on the traitor; let him worry about getting out of his predicament. As for them, since they had dutifully paid the thirty shekels agreed upon, they had nothing more to do with the affair and they did not want to hear any more about it.

The traitor was seized with a mad fury. Every door was shut to him; the weight of the shekels was crushing him. He ran to the Temple nearby and going as close as he could to the inner sanctuary (eiz ton naon: *Matt.* 27:5) he began to throw handfuls of shekels wildly toward the "holy place" as if he were tearing his heart free of the vipers knotted around it. The coins clinked mockingly across the pavement, scattering everywhere in front of the holy place, and then lay there as if waiting for something.

But even when their derisive jingle had stopped, the traitor felt no relief whatever. Though his greed had been completely routed, his love for Jesus could see rising before it in tragic compensation only an insurmountable rock between him and the Master whom he had always loved. The abyss yawned on every side of him, and a darkness seized upon his mind; fleeing from the Temple he went immediately and hanged himself.

575. We have two accounts of Judas' death with interesting differences, which have a value of their own as confirmation of the fact that both narratives relate substantially the same occurrence. Matthew mentions only the hanging. Luke, quoting a discourse of Peter in the Acts (1:16-19) has preserved the tradition that Judas, "falling headlong" (prnhnz genomnoz), burst in the middle and all his bowels gushed forth. The two accounts apparently refer to different moments in the same event. First Judas hanged himself and then the rope or the branch from which he hung broke, perhaps at the convulsive jerking of his body, and he plunged headlong. It is not unreasonable to suppose that the tree was on the edge of some ravine, so that the fall produced the consequences described by Luke.

One tradition would identify the place of Judas' hanging with the field Haceldama, bought with his thirty shekels and situated in Gehenna (note [113](#)), the valley south of Jerusalem pointed out from the earliest times as a cursed place. From ancient times legend has made the incident its own, weaving innumerable embellishments around it and changing it in a thousand ways. From the fourth century it was stated that the tree to which Judas hanged himself was a fig tree (the tree whose leaves were worn by our first, sinning parents; *Gen.* 3:7) and this fig tree, after being set in quite a variety of places through the centuries, was still being pointed out a few years ago in Jerusalem.

Meanwhile the shekels were still lying in the Temple where the traitor had thrown them. The punctilious Sanhedrists consulted together to see what could be done with the money without violating the Law. According to the Law, in fact, (*Deut.* 23:19 Hebrew) the income from any malodorous transaction such as prostitution, murder, or the like could not be accepted as an offering to the Temple. So having gathered up the shekels, they observed: "It is not lawful to put them into the treasury [*qorban*; cf. §387] seeing that it is the price of blood." On the other hand, those thirty shekels represented a considerable sum it would be very foolish to waste. And so, good casuists that they were, they managed to find a compromise. Great crowds of pilgrims

poured into Jerusalem from the various regions of the Diaspora during the great Hebrew feasts and it often happened that some died while they were in the Holy City and the local authorities had to provide for their burial. Up to this time there had been no special cemetery for them, so the Sanhedrists decided that the thirty shekels might well buy a place commonly known as the “potter’s field” — perhaps because the ground was clay and there was a pottery workshop there — which could be set aside as a cemetery for these pilgrims. When the purchase was made, the “potter’s field” became commonly known as the “Field of Blood,” in memory either of the original use of the money which purchased it or the suicide which had made the purchase possible.<sup>238</sup> And Matthew records that the name, “Field of Blood,” in Aramaic *Haqel dema* or “Haceldama” (Acts 1:19), has stuck to it “even to this day.” A very old tradition places Haceldama in the valley of Gehenna opposite an ancient gate of the city which may be “the earthen gate” of Jeremias (19:2); most likely there were other cemeteries there also.

And Matthew, always careful to point out the fulfillment of the ancient prophecies, says that thus came true the prophecy of Zacharias (11:12-13), which he quotes as follows:

“And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of him who was priced, upon whom the children of Israel set a price; And they gave them for the potter’s field, as the Lord directed me.”

The quotation has kept scholars busy because Matthew attributes it to Jeremias while today we find it only in *Zacharias*, whereas the former contains only general allusions in this regard (*Jer.* 18:2-12; 19:1-15; 32:6-9). But this is probably to be explained by the fact that, at that time, the book of Jeremias had first place in the collection of prophetic writings, and so in citing “Jeremias” one might refer to any passage in that collection. We must also remember that the quotation does not adhere strictly to the letter of the text, so it would seem that the Evangelist intended to suggest various passages here rather than insist on any particular one.

## JESUS’ CIVIL TRIAL BEFORE PILATE AND HEROD

576. The sentence pronounced by the Sanhedrin could not be carried out without the explicit approval of the Roman procurator, so to achieve their goal the Sanhedrists now had somehow to surmount this obstacle.

The procurators approval might be obtained in two ways: either by inviting the Roman magistrate to trust the impartiality of the supreme tribunal of the Jews and accept its judgment, or by referring the accused to the procurators court as if to open a new trial.

This second was the method chosen by the Sanhedrists, and shrewdly so. For if they asked Pilate to approve a death sentence pronounced on purely religious grounds, he certainly would not confirm the Sanhedrin's judgment with his eyes closed but would investigate to see whether or not the charges were true and the procedure had been legal, or whether the religious pretexts merely served to hide personal rivalries and grudges. There was danger that the whole proceedings leading to the sentence would be re-examined and many things come to light which it was very necessary to keep hidden. No, the surest and easiest way to reopen the trial was to do so on different grounds. And if they were going to refer the prisoner to the tribunal of the procurator, then they must aim at the latter's vulnerable point and present the Galilean Rabbi as a dangerous political agitator who was stirring up rebellion against the authority of Rome. Once started on that road, there was not the least doubt that Pilate's disposition and the prevailing political conditions would sufficiently influence the new trial to bring about exactly what the Sanhedrists desired. So, with this in mind, as soon as the morning session was over, the Sanhedrin moved in a body to the praetorium of Pilate, taking Jesus with them.

The Evangelist who witnessed these things points out specifically that it was early morning (*John* 18:28); it must have been about six o'clock by our time (§565). The Romans were, in fact, early risers; they transacted their business from dawn until noon, reserving the afternoon and evening for their personal affairs and entertainment. Only later, when the empire was invaded by the sleepy barbarians did they lose the habit of early rising and postpone their business to late in the day. Jesus' accusers stopped, however, on the threshold of the praetorium, because it was a pagan dwelling and they could not enter it without being defiled, whereas they were anxious to remain ritually clean in order to celebrate the Pasch, which, according to their reckoning, fell on the evening of that day (§536). But where was the praetorium of Pilate?

577. For the Romans the *praetorium* was the place where the praetor discharged the duties of his office, and it might be a soldier's tent today, or a fortress tomorrow, or the palace of a defeated king the next day. The function of the praetorium had originally been of a military nature and it never lost its



austere military simplicity. It had two principal accessories, the "tribunal," and the curule chair. The "tribunal" (bhma) was a kind of semicircular platform, quite high and wide but easily transported and set up wherever necessary. The curule chair was the old conventional chair of the Roman magistrates; it was set in the center of the platform, and from it the praetor officially administered justice. The defendants and plaintiffs, the witnesses and advocates presented themselves before the "tribunal," and the praetor, when he had heard the whole case and consulted his advisers or assistants, seated on either side of him, pronounced sentence sitting in the curule chair. In Caesarea, where the procurator of Palestine ordinarily resided (§21), the praetorium was the palace of Herod the Great because that was his usual residence (cf. "the praetorium of Herod" in Caesarea, in Acts 23:35). When he went to Jerusalem, he usually stayed at Herod's palace there too, but that does not mean — theoretically — that he always made it his praetorium, because he might for special reasons stay elsewhere, as in the Antonia, for example, in order to keep an eye on the crowds packing the nearby Temple for the Pasch and the other great Hebrew feasts (§49). Now where was Pilate's praetorium during the Pasch when Jesus was brought to trial?

A precious hint is furnished by our eyewitness, John, when he says definitely that in order to pronounce the final sentence Pilate "sat down on the judgment-seat (epi bhmatōz), at a place called Lithostrotos, but in Hebrew, Gabbatha" (John 19:13). Hence, that day Pilate set up his praetorium in a place in Jerusalem that was commonly known by two different names: *Lithostrotos* is plainly a Greek name, and it means 'layer of stones,' or "pavement"; *Gabbatha* is an Aramaic word, meaning a "high place," a "height." Hence the two names did not translate each other but both designated the same place. Cases of this kind are easily explained by separate characteristics of the single place giving rise to different names, as "stadium," "field," and "park" may be used indiscriminately, and in effect as proper names, for almost any modern sports arena. To justify on an etymological basis the use of both names recorded by the Evangelist we must find a site in the ancient part of Jerusalem which was a "height," and on which there was a "pavement" of sufficient importance to give its name to the place.

578. To fulfill these requirements posed by the Evangelist, we must conclude that Pilate's praetorium that day was in the Antonia. Besides being a better headquarters for the increased vigilance required by these festival days so troublesome to the police, it was truly situated on a "height," that of

Bezatha (§384), which Josephus calls the “highest of all” the hills of Jerusalem (*Wars of the Jews*, V, 246). Hence it was natural to reserve the term “height” for it since it rose above all the other “heights” in the city, though the term itself was a generic one which took its specific meaning from its use.

But when the massive Antonia fortress was built, the eminence of the hill seemed to be swallowed up within its huge structure and so the new term, “pavement,” inspired by the new edifice, came to take the place of the old term, “height,” although in the beginning both names were used indiscriminately, the old native name being favored perhaps by the more conservative and the new foreign term commonly used by the more “modern.”

It now remains to be seen whether in the Antonia there did really exist this *Lithostrotos*, this “pavement” so important as to extend its name to the whole place. We can answer this only on the basis of ancient documents and recent archeological discoveries. From the detailed description of the Antonia in Josephus (§49) we gather that it was a four-sided enclosure fortified by a strong tower at each corner, but not a solid mass of buildings. In the center there was a huge courtyard open to the sky and surrounded by porticoes, barracks, and the heavy walls of the fortress (see **Error! Reference source not found.**). The courtyard was naturally in constant use, since anyone entering or leaving the fortress had to pass through it. There the soldiers of the garrison probably did some drilling, mustered for inspection or spent their leisure time throwing dice, playing one or other of their favorite games, and so forth. It is obvious, therefore, that the courtyard had to be provided with a substantial “pavement” to protect the ground. Now this “pavement” has been discovered and clearly recognized by the archeological research conducted there during the past few years. Approximate calculations made from the ruins indicate that the courtyard measured about 2700 square yards.<sup>239</sup> Besides ruins of the various buildings flanking the Antonia, large sections of the “pavement” have also been discovered and are very well preserved despite the successive changes the place has undergone. The “pavement” is of typically Roman construction such as was used by Herod the Great who built the Antonia. The slabs of stone, broad and solid, are sometimes as much as six feet long by four and a half feet wide and a foot and a half thick. Among the many traces they bear of the intensive use made of them through the centuries, the most interesting are the various diagrams or squares for Roman games obviously cut in them by the soldiers to while away their leisure hours.

It can be considered practically certain, therefore, both that this recently discovered pavement is the *Lithostrotos* of the Evangelist and that Pilate made this place, also called *Gabbatha*, his praetorium on that particular day.

579. Advised that the members of the Sanhedrin and a great crowd of people were outside the praetorium asking to speak to him about a certain accused named Jesus of Nazareth, Pilate went out to them and having glanced around at them all, asked by way of a start: "What accusation do you bring against this man?" They answered: "If he were not a criminal, we should not have handed him over to thee."

This answer was really no accusation at all. It was merely intended to capture Pilate's good will, implicitly inviting him to trust the accusers and accept the judgment pronounced on the defendant by the Sanhedrin. It as much as told the governor not to worry; they had the very same views he did regarding justice and equity, and they referred this man to his court only because he was a real criminal deserving of death.

Pilate interpreted their words for what they were worth. The seasoned Roman understood immediately that this was another of the many questions which hinged on the Jews' religious beliefs and in which he had absolutely no desire to become involved. Hence, he took refuge in the existing norms and answered: "Take him yourselves, and judge him according to your law." This obviously did not mean that the accusers could do what they wanted with the prisoner, including putting him to death: it was merely a suggestion that they apply the laws of their nation, exclusive, of course, of capital punishment. But this was the very crux of the matter, and the accusers indirectly called it to Pilate's attention: "It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death."

This answer revealed their true purpose and also indicated what had taken place that night. If the Sanhedrin appealed to Rome's representative, it was not for permission to impose a fine or a sentence of excommunication or the thirty-nine legal stripes (§61), all punishments which they could lawfully inflict without the procurator's approval. The accusers wanted permission to carry out the death sentence which the Sanhedrin had passed that night, but which they were still powerless to execute. Pilate, therefore, understood that the accusers wanted the prisoner put to death.

580. Thus Jesus' case was presented before the civil authority. But proofs were necessary to convince the new judge, who almost certainly had never heard of Jesus of Nazareth, and the accusers chose those calculated to make

the most telling impression on him. The Jews, then, said to him: "We have found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding the payment of taxes to Caesar, and saying that he is Christ [Messiah] a king" (*Luke* 23:2). This was a strictly political charge and as such took the place of the religious charges brought against Jesus before the Sanhedrin. Here before the Roman magistrate, Jesus is represented as a political revolutionary, and more specifically as an imitator of Judas the Galilean (§514) in his attempt to prevent the payment of tribute to Caesar as well as in his posing as a national leader with the title of political messianic king. It is obvious that the last part of the charge implied political royalty.

But Pilate was not so naive as to accept the glitter for the gold; he immediately sensed something quite different at the bottom of these charges. In any case, the accusers had chosen what was of its nature very delicate ground for him. To him, as Rome's representative, they had brought a man charged with conspiring against Rome, and although he immediately perceived that the charge was entirely unfounded, he was forced to accept and discuss it. If he did not, there was real danger that the disappointed plaintiffs would denounce him to Rome as being deliberately lax and negligent in his attitude toward political movements against the authority which he represented. Hence, as a man of law, he was determined to expose the duplicity of the accusers, but at the same time, as a Roman magistrate, he must figure as the vigilant guardian of the imperial authority. There was nothing to do but question the prisoner himself.

581. Pilate re-entered the praetorium, where the prisoner had been led in the meantime, while the accusers remained scrupulously outside, and he began his inquiry with the most critical question of all: "Art thou the king of the Jews?" The question in substance repeated the last charge brought against Jesus, but as Pilate used it the term "king of the Jews" was deliberately ambiguous. In reality it meant more or less: Are you the king of the Jews in any one of the supramundane and deiform meanings used so frequently in the writings of your nation; or are you king of the Jews in the sense in which Numa Pompilius was king of my Roman ancestors, and Herod the son of Antipater was king of your ancestors here in Palestine a half century ago? Are you king of an ideal and invisible world, or are you king of this material and visible world? Jesus answered Pilate: "Dost thou say this of thyself, or have others told [it] thee of me?"

It did not escape Pilate that this answer was intended to remove the ambiguity in his question. He was annoyed, and he replied somewhat scornfully: "Am I a Jew? Thy own people and the chief priests have delivered thee to me. What hast thou done?" Jesus' answer again distinguished between the two meanings in Pilate's original question: "My kingdom is not of this world. If my kingdom were of this world, my followers would have fought that I might not be delivered to the Jews. But, as it is, my kingdom is not from here." Somewhat surprised by this answer, Pilate determined to clarify one point at least, and replied: "Thou art then a king?" undoubtedly expecting Jesus to deny it.

But Jesus did not deny it, for he answered: "Thou sayest it, I am a king," which meant: I am truly a king as you say (cf. §543, §567). Nevertheless, he added an explanation which said what Pilate had perhaps expected: "This is why I was born, and why I have come into the world, to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears my voice."

Annoyed, Pilate interrupted roughly: "What is truth?"

582. This was not so much a question as an exclamation, especially since Pilate immediately rose to go out and parley with the Jews. These words merely indicated that the discussion was going beyond its limits into abstract ideas which did not interest the magistrate at all. So, he exclaimed carelessly: What do you mean, truth! In Rome Pilate had listened hundreds of times perhaps to the debates held in homes and market places by sophistic *graeculi* in sublime pursuit of ringing sesterces, and he had been woefully bored by their interminable disquisitions on truth and error. And so, on that morning he had not the remotest desire to hear another from this obscure Jew.

In any event, even this brief conversation with Jesus had convinced Pilate more than ever that he was completely innocent and that the whole denunciation had been prompted by the hatred the leaders of the nation bore him over one of their religious squabbles. And here two distinct elements in Pilate's character met and intensified each other: one was the sense of ins which, as a Roman magistrate, he certainly possessed and which required him to demand respect for the law; the other was the scornful irritation he felt for the leaders of Judaism, which was here being offered excellent opportunity in the name of the law to block their wishes with highly satisfying obstinacy. Both these sentiments clamored for acquittal.

Meanwhile, the confused mutterings of the crowd could be heard outside, and every now and again a unanimous outcry seemed to fling one or another of the accusations into the building. Before going out to them, Pilate tried, as it were, to get some help or suggestion from the prisoner himself in his own defense; and so he came back to him again and asked with curiosity: "Hast thou no answer to make? Behold how many things they accuse thee of" (*Mark* 15:4). But the prisoner who had just proclaimed himself the witness of the truth made no answer whatever.

583. Pilate was not a little surprised, but he still proposed to protect the silent defendant even without his help, and going out he declared to the Sanhedrists and the mob: "I find no guilt in this man." This should have ended the trial then and there.

The Sanhedrists, more than the mob, were highly indignant. They protested violently, all shouting at once the various charges against Jesus, emphasizing particularly the political one: "He is stirring up the people, teaching throughout all Judea, and beginning from Galilee even to this place" (*Luke* 23:5). These last words especially caught Pilate's attention because they seemed to offer a solution to the question. He asked if Jesus was a Galilean, and when they told him he belonged to the jurisdiction of the tetrarch Herod Antipas, he saw a way to use the fact to his own advantage.

Pilate was sure Jesus would appear just as innocent upon examination by Herod as he had in the questioning he had undergone in the praetorium. That would give him another argument with which to silence the accusers and humiliate them besides with complete legality. In addition, this case afforded him a very fine opportunity to better his relations with the tetrarch, which had been quite unfriendly of late probably because Herod spied on the Roman magistrates in the Orient for the Emperor Tiberius (§15, §26).<sup>240</sup> Hence he decided to send the tetrarch's subject to him for judgment ostensibly as a mark of deference. In reality, Jesus had been accused before the tribunal of the representative of Rome, and that was where he should have been judged no matter where he had been born; but Pilate, for these practical reasons, was quite willing to forego his jurisdiction in this particular case.

584. Herod Antipas was in Jerusalem for the Pasch at the time. When he learned the procurator was sending him the Galilean prisoner "he was exceedingly glad; for he had been a long time desirous to see him, because he had heard so much about him, and he was hoping to see some miracle done

by him.” We know, in fact, that Herod Antipas half believed Jesus to be John the Baptist risen again (§357), and the innate superstition of the man who had murdered the Precursor was heightened in this instance by memory of his victim.

Herod asked Jesus many questions, but without receiving one single answer from him. If the accused refused to speak, however, his accusers, who had zealously followed him here, were generously articulate. Before the Jewish king, they probably emphasized the more typically Jewish charges, such as Jesus’ alleged blasphemies, his violation of the Sabbath, his supposed threats against the Temple, and his declaration that he was equal with God. The prisoners silence was a great disappointment to Herod; nevertheless, his legal judgment was sounder than that of the plaintiffs and despite his disappointment he did not fail to see that all those charges were inspired by hatred and that the accused was innocent. He should have proclaimed him such immediately and set him free; but the tetrarch’s bloated arrogance had to have its little revenge for the frustration it had suffered.

Herod ordered the guards around him to array the uncommunicative prisoner in a "bright" (lampran) robe, one of those ornate garments worn by persons of distinction in the Orient on solemn occasions. Perhaps the tetrarch had one of his own robes, now worn a little and so not used any more, brought out to mock the prisoner, who was thus dressed as the king he declared himself to be. The very jest with which he chose to close his inquiry showed he considered the prisoner a stupid and ridiculous man, yes, but certainly not a dangerous one, and it implicitly rejected the charge that Jesus was subversive and guilty of sacrilege. Otherwise, he would have been punished with extreme severity, not made a laughingstock for the court.

Dressed in this fashion and accompanied by the sarcastic shouts of his accusers, who conscientiously trailed after him everywhere, Jesus was sent back to Pilate. Luke, who is the only one to record this episode, says that “Herod and Pilate became friends that very day; whereas previously they had been at enmity with each other” (*Luke 23:12*).<sup>241</sup>

585. When Jesus came back to him, Pilate saw that Herod did not want to get mixed up in the affair, and he began to be worried, for he realized it was a much more serious and complicated matter than it had at first seemed. He still held firmly to the prisoner’s innocence, but he decided to make some

concession to the accusers in the hope of settling the matter. The man of law was retreating before the politician.

So, he turned to the accusers and argued with them thus: "You have brought before me this man, as one who perverts the people; and behold, I upon examining him in your presence have found no guilt in this man as touching those things of which you accuse him. Neither has Herod; for he sent him back to us. And behold, nothing deserving of death has been committed by him." Up to this point, Pilate had spoken as a man of law inspired by his sense of *ius*. But the politician in him comes forward with this utterly unexpected conclusion: "I will therefore (oh) chastise him and release him." The "therefore" is a serious mistake in logic; if both Pilate and Herod had found "no guilt" — "nothing deserving of death" — in him, how could this "therefore" be justified? How could the promised chastisement be considered legal, especially when it was obviously no slight punishment but the terrible Roman *flagellatio*?

For the procurator, however, what was not permitted by the law was demanded by politics.

586. As soon as he had made this concession, Pilate proceeded to offer the accusers another palliative. During the Pasch it was the custom for the procurator to release some prisoner at the request of the multitude.<sup>242</sup>

Hence it seemed to Pilate that it would be both right and convenient this time to grant Jesus the favor, for justice would thus be saved (at least in part) and the accusers would be satisfied as well.

Now, there was in prison at the time a notorious malefactor called Barabbas ("son of the father"), a common enough name in the rabbinic writings. According to some of the codices — few in number, however, and without much authority — the man's whole name was "Jesus Barabbas," that is, "Jesus" was his real name and "Barabbas" a nickname. During a riot, which he probably started himself, Barabbas had killed a man, and he was besides a professional thief. He was now awaiting in prison the procurators sentence. Pilate thought that if he gave the accusers the choice between Jesus and Barabbas, they would certainly ask for Jesus because of the notorious character of Barabbas. So, he went to the threshold of the praetorium and said: "Whom do you wish that I release to you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?" and by way of being still more specific, he added, "the king of the Jews?"



Pilate here betrayed his very defective knowledge, not so much of the nation he governed but of its spiritual leaders. As a matter of fact, his proposal did make some impression on the mob in front of the praetorium shouting what the chief priests and elders, their spiritual leaders, told them to. Jesus was certainly repugnant to that hireling rabble because he was repugnant to their masters, but at the same time they considered Barabbas such an out-and-out criminal as to deserve not pardon, but the most severe sentence possible. Hence, there was a short-perplexed pause while the hirelings hesitated between the choice prompted by whatever honesty remained in their consciences and that demanded by their unrelenting masters.

587. Here a curious incident occurred. Pilate, confident that he had at last found a way out, unexpectedly received a private warning from his wife in these words: "Have nothing to do with that just man, for I have suffered many things in a dream today because of him." This information is recorded by Matthew, the Evangelist who is always careful to report divine messages communicated in dreams (§239). The Roman magistrates had only recently been permitted to take their wives with them to the territories they were assigned to govern; it had not been allowed under the Republic.

His wife's message must have made a deep impression on Pilate. However cynical he might be regarding philosophical theories and debates about truth and error, he was certainly very susceptible to the mysterious signs which enjoyed so much credence among the Romans of his day. All of Rome was quite sure that Julius Caesar would have escaped the twenty-three dagger thrusts on the fatal Ides of March if he had listened to his wife Calpurnia, who begged him not to go to the Senate that day because the night before in a dream she had seen him pierced by many wounds. It is not impossible that Pilate thought of Calpurnia at that moment; in any case, though he was now deeply involved in the trial of "that just man," his wife's warning certainly was another reason for doing all he could to release his prisoner.

588. In the meanwhile, the vociferous hireling rabble had gotten over its perplexity under the shrewd coaching of its masters, whom it chose to obey in preference to the honest promptings of conscience: "the chief priests and the elders persuaded the crowds to ask for Barabbas and to destroy Jesus" (*Matt.* 27:20).

And the conflict began again, because both sides had received reinforcements: the procurator from his wife, the mob from the suggestions of

the Sanhedrists. Pilate again asked the accusers: "Which of the two do you wish that I release to you?" And they answered unanimously: "Barabbas!"

Taken aback by the choice, Pilate's concern was not for the criminal they favored but for the innocent they rejected, and he asked instinctively: "What then am I to do with Jesus who is called Christ?" And with the proper coaching the crowd shouted: "Let him be crucified!"

"Why, what evil has he done?" The procurator insisted. Obviously, his legalist mind demanded some justification for the extreme penalty they wanted; and the justification he got was the same shout repeated over and over again: "Let him be crucified!" (*Matt. 27:22-23.*)

Pilate was not exactly grieved by this reasoning, but he was baffled, disconcerted, sickened. He was getting nowhere trying to reason with that bawling rabble; the man of law was speaking a language they did not understand, and it was also physically difficult for him to make himself heard above their loud and continued shouting. Pilate, however, was anxious to let them know he in no way shared their bloodthirsty wishes and so he resorted to an act which they could see even if they would not stop to listen. He had a basin of water brought to him and he washed his hands in the presence of the crowd while they continued to clamor for the death of the prisoner. The act was a conventional symbol not only among the Hebrews (*Deut. 21:6-7*) but also among other ancient peoples (*Herodotus*, 1, 35; the *Aeneid*, II, 719; etc.). In this instance it showed that the procurator refused to accept any responsibility for the request being made of him, whatever the outcome of the whole affair. Then at a moment when the din had somewhat subsided, he shouted: "I am innocent of the blood of this just man; see to it yourselves!" Several of them heard his words, and their answer came back with absolute promptness and confidence: "His blood be on us and on our children!"

589. This wish or prayer suggests a brief and elementary reflection which is, after all, not irrelevant to the trial of Jesus. It was expressed unanimously both by the spiritual leaders of Judaism and a large representation of the people of Jerusalem; it was therefore a truly representative vox populi, a strictly official prayer expressing the will of both the head and the members, of the Sanhedrin and the people. It was obviously not addressed to the Roman procurator but to a much higher Judge, to the Judge who was invoked so often in the sacred Scriptures of Israel and who was the only one who could make that disputed blood fall upon the heads of Israel's distant future children. Only

that supreme Judge could make the vox populi a vox Dei, by accepting the wish and making it come true. The modern historian can decide for himself whether or not it has come true merely by contemplating the evidence of history, modern as well as ancient.

We mention this also because in our day the question has been taken up again precisely by those “children” mentioned in the prayer. Since the Sanhedrin no longer exists which condemned Jesus to death nineteen centuries ago and expressed the wish that his blood might be on the most remote “children” of Israel, these “children” in 1933 set up in Jerusalem a special tribunal composed of five outstanding Israelites in order to re-examine the sentence. Their verdict, passed with a four to one vote, was that the ancient sentence of the Sanhedrin should be revoked; they affirmed that “the innocence of the accused was proved, his condemnation was one of the most terrible errors ever committed by men, and the Hebrew race would be honored in making reparation for it.”<sup>243</sup>

590. At this point in the trial Pilate found his own thoughts and feelings in no little conflict. He was personally convinced of Jesus’ innocence and his wife’s mysterious message had strengthened this conviction. In addition, the governor’s punctilious and cantankerous temperament saw a fine opportunity here to do the people he governed one of those mean turns he so delighted in, this time with the support of law and justice. On the other hand, the obdurate persistence of the accusers, instead of abating, had increased steadily, and if completely and unequivocally opposed, it might easily lead to one of those popular tumults which were the principal fear and worry of every Roman governor of Judea. The mere thought of such a possibility, to say nothing of his fear of the reports that might be given of him in Rome, made Pilate more than cautious about his decision, and as they beclouded the austere vision of justice in his eyes, the seductive features of political expediency gradually took its place.

Hence, he attempted to get around the difficulty, trying one thing after another almost as if to beguile the accusers with minor concessions. In the first place, he granted the mob’s request for the release of Barabbas; in addition, still hoping to make the accusers more pliable, he had Jesus scourged as he had promised.

591. Among the Romans the *flagellatio* ordinarily preceded crucifixion, but sometimes it was a penalty in itself and it could be inflicted in place of capital

punishment. It was carried out by the soldiers. The prisoner was stripped and made to bend over a post to which his wrists were bound. The blows were administered not with rods, used on Roman citizens condemned to death, but with a special instrument, the *flagellum*, a stout leather whip with several tails weighted with little metal balls or even armed with sharp points (*scorpiones*). Among the Jews the legal scourging was limited to a certain number of stripes (§61), but among the Romans its extent was left to the caprice of the floggers or the prisoners endurance. Especially if he was going to be executed, he was regarded as something less than human, an empty image with which the law was no longer concerned, a body which could be beaten with merciless freedom. And usually whoever underwent the Roman scourging was reduced to a sickening and terrifying monstrosity. At the first blows the neck, back, hips, arms, and legs grew livid, and then became streaked with bluish welts and swollen bruises; then the skin and muscles were gradually lacerated, the blood vessels burst and blood spurted everywhere, till finally the prisoner, every one of his features disfigured, was nothing but a bleeding mass of flesh. Very often he fainted under the blows, and sometimes he died.<sup>244</sup> Horace, who was none too squeamish, called the instrument of this punishment the *horribile flagellum*.

It was to this torture that Pilate subjected Jesus, although his intention was to save him, by this concession, from execution.

592. When the scourging was over, Jesus was left for some time longer at the mercy of the soldiers who had administered it, and who gave him the same treatment they usually gave those condemned to death. Any sport whatever, any brutal jest or inhuman mockery was permissible in their regard, almost as if they had been erased from the roll of humanity. So, when the scourgers had finished flogging Jesus and set about clothing him again, they called the other soldiers of the cohort to join in the hilarious performance that was to follow. Then they dressed Jesus in a red mantle, the kind worn by generals in a triumph; they plaited a crown of thorns and put it on his head; and then in his hands, still bound at the wrists, they set a reed for a scepter.

Had he not declared himself the king of the Jews? Well, then, let him present himself as a king to the soldiers, complete with scepter, diadem, and chlamys. These soldiers must have put all the more gusto into their jeers and jibes because they were not legionaries but cohort *auxiliares* and so had probably been recruited for the most part from among the neighboring

peoples hostile to the Jews, especially the Syrians and the Samaritans, the latter of whom were the Jews' most bitter enemies but extremely loyal to the Romans (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, II, 52, 69, 96, etc.). Hence for them it was a particularly diverting pastime to shower their scorn and ridicule on a king of those Jewish scoundrels they hated so much.

Then just as special homage was paid a general in his triumph, these brutal clowns began to file past Jesus, each one stopping to kneel in front of him and repeat obsequiously: "Hail, king of the Jews!" and immediately rising again to spit in Jesus' face; and taking the reed from his hands, they would slam it down on the crown of thorns.<sup>245</sup>

593. Quite a bit of time had passed meanwhile. From Jesus' first appearance before Pilate at dawn (§576), no less than four hours had been taken up by the governor's discussions with the mob, Jesus' appearance before Herod and his return to Pilate, the scourging and the soldier's insults, and so by now it must have been between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning. Meanwhile Pilate was still thinking how he might next try to save Jesus, and the mob was still waiting outside the praetorium, noisily persistent.

Pilate attached no importance whatever to the painful insults inflicted on the prisoner after the scourging since he had neither ordered nor prohibited them; but he did place some hope in the legal and psychological effect of the scourging. When Jesus, disfigured by the torture he had undergone and clad in his trumpery garments was once more brought before him, he decided to base his last appeal to the mob on the impression he hoped such a bleeding rag of humanity would have upon the people. Hence, he ordered Jesus to be led out after him, while he announced to the crowd: "Behold, I bring him out to you, that you may know that I find no guilt in him."

Jesus, who by now could barely stand, was pushed across the threshold of the praetorium and appeared, as our eyewitness tells us (*John* 19:5), "wearing the crown of thorns and the purple cloak." Pointing to him, Pilate exclaimed to his merciless and screaming accusers: "Behold the man!"

In Greek the exclamation meant something like our "Here's the fellow now," and it certainly carried with it no overtone of pity; but it did implicitly invite the accusers to reflect whether there was really any point in using further violence against a man reduced to that condition. And here we might point out that Pilate was a worshiper of Jupiter and Mars, and those to whom he was speaking adored the spiritual God Yahweh.

594. The scene which followed can be described only in the witness' own words: 'When, therefore, the chief priests and the attendants saw him, they cried out, saying: Crucify him! Crucify him! Pilate said to them: Take him yourselves and crucify him, for I find no guilt in him. The Jews answered him: We have a Law, and according to that Law he must die, because he has made himself Son of God" (*John* 19:6-7). Pilate's words by no means signified his permission to crucify the prisoner as they wished; they were a second invitation to reflect once more that he could not in conscience pronounce the death sentence they demanded, and hence the prisoner could not be put to death because they did not have the power to execute him. The accusers were quick enough to grasp the procurator's meaning, and their answer, which appealed to the Hebrew Law, drew the magistrate out of his own field to that of religion, in which the Romans had always shown the utmost respect for the beliefs and feelings of the conquered Jews. Substantially, they suggested to Pilate the possible threat that if he did not consent in passing the death sentence, they would regard him as the protector of the impious and the sacrilegious.

Here again, nothing can take the place of the Evangelist's account: "Now when Pilate heard this statement, he feared the more. And he again went back into the praetorium, and said to Jesus: Where art thou from?" Probably the uneasy procurator hoped that Jesus' answer would furnish him some new basis for prolonging the trial, some new answer to give his accusers. But Jesus did not answer him at all. "Pilate therefore said to him: 'Dost thou not know that I have power to crucify thee, and that I have power to release thee?' Jesus answered: 'Thou wouldst have no power at all over me were it not given thee from above. Therefore, he who betrayed me to thee has the greater sin.'"

At this answer, Pilate found himself alone in his opposition to the mob. The accused gave him no help and the Jews were growing increasingly vehement in their demands for the death sentence. The procurator's resistance was fortified only by his conviction that the prisoner was innocent and by his desire not to give the Jews what they wanted, but the first made no impression whatever on the accusers and the second he could not, in all prudence, make known to them. Hesitating and still uncertain, he could see no way out of the difficulty however loath he was to yield; his state of mind is described by the Evangelist: "And from then on Pilate was looking for a way to release him" (*John* 19:12).

The accusers sensed the danger, and to obviate it they resorted to an argument that could not fail to have a telling effect on the procurator. They began to shout: "If thou release this man, thou art no friend of Caesar; for everyone who makes himself king sets himself against Caesar!"

595. At that shout, Pilate could not hesitate much longer, for he was a very ordinary mortal after all, a Roman official utterly indifferent to religion and concerned only about his reputation in Rome and his own political career. But he was not yet disposed to give in.

Completely annoyed by the fact that his hated subjects, shrieking and chattering like monkeys, blocked him at every turn, and irritated besides by the whole conduct of the trial, he was still hoping for something unforeseen to save the situation, and he decided to face the conclusion of the trial in direct argument with the accusers.

Shortly before, they had threatened to consider him the protector of the impious and the sacrilegious if he freed Jesus. But had not the accused proclaimed himself the spiritual king of the accusers themselves? As a political administrator, Pilate did not enter at all into religious questions; but for this very reason he could not take action against one who claimed for himself a pre-eminence that was purely religious and had nothing political about it. How did he know but what the prisoner had a whole crowd of disciples — a kind of society like the Essenes (§44) — entirely disposed to accept his religious royalty? Could he kill the leader of a strictly religious society and then proceed to persecute all its members too? Obviously not; as a layman and an impartial magistrate, he was obliged to respect the religious royalty of the accused and command respect for it. Pilate thought this reasoning might save Jesus, and he resorted to it as his last hope.

It was "about the sixth hour" (*John* 19:14) or a little before noon. With the intention of ending the trial and pronouncing his final judgment, Pilate had his "tribunal" with its curule chair (§577) set up outside on the *Lithostrotos* in the presence of the accusers. Then he came out, the prisoner being led after him, sat down in the curule chair and reopened the discussion. Pointing to Jesus, he said: "Behold your king!" What did the accusers think of the prisoner's royalty? It was clearly not a political royalty, as the magistrate, who knew a thing or two on that score, could easily see. Was his a royalty in the religious sense of the term then? Pilate knew nothing about such matters and did not want to have anything to do with them. Let the accusers answer therefore.

The procurator's words sounded like bitter sarcasm to the mob, and they shouted loudly: "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" But Pilate persisted: "Shall I crucify your king?" The answer this time, as the Evangelist expressly states, came from the "chief priests," who shouted: "We have no king but Caesar!"

Pilate saw his last loophole blocked. The royalty of the accused could not be taken seriously either by the magistrate or by the accusers. The latter, and none other than the most prominent among them, recognized no royalty in Jesus and proclaimed that their one and only king was the Roman Caesar. Obviously, the representative of the Roman Caesar could not express any difference of opinion on this point just as he was forced to crucify the false king in order not to offend the religious sensibilities of the accusers.

That must have been Pilate's reasoning more or less: and "then," concludes the Evangelist, 'he handed him over to them to be crucified.'

596. Finally the accusers had their way; but at the same time, they were granted another wish of theirs, to which they paid no heed at the moment, although historically it had almost as much importance as their earlier wish that the blood of Jesus might be upon their most remote descendants (§589).

To achieve their purpose, they had declared they had no king but Caesar. And those who made this declaration were none other than the "chief priests," who' knew the sacred Hebrew Scriptures and had undoubtedly read in them how "jealously" Yahweh desired to be the sole king of Israel and how reluctantly he had allowed a man to be elected the first king of Israel in the person of Saul (*I Kings* 8). And now these official representatives of Israel were not only oblivious of their divine King, not only did they forget their ancient human kings and the descendants who were to live after them, but they enthusiastically proclaimed as their one and only sovereign Tiberius Claudius Nero Julius Caesar, a foreigner to their race, uncircumcised and an idolater. Well, this wish of theirs was granted too; they did in reality have Tiberius and his successors for their kings and the latter exercised their absolute sovereignty only forty years later when they destroyed forever the Temple, the city, and the nation of these their subjects.

The modern historian may well meditate on these events, especially since their historicity cannot be questioned by any critical theory.

## THE CRUCIFIXION AND DEATH OF JESUS

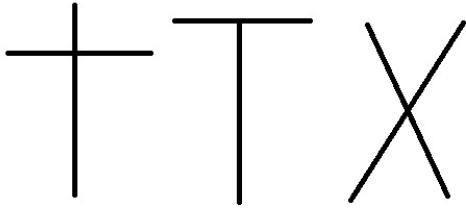


597. The sentence had now been passed and nothing remained but to execute it.

The representative of Rome had condemned the prisoner to a Roman penalty at the request of the accusers; for when the Jews had shouted to Pilate "Crucify him! Crucify him!" they had in reality asked for a punishment not Jewish originally but Roman. The ordinary Jewish penalty for blasphemy, with which Jesus had been charged before the Sanhedrin, was stoning, the death inflicted on Stephen not long afterward. At the time of Jesus, however, crucifixion had been in use for many years among the Jews of Palestine; it had been introduced among them when they first came in contact with the Romans, especially in the year 63 B.C. when Pompey the Great captured Jerusalem and changed the whole political status of the region. Before that the Hebrews had been familiar with impalement, a very common punishment in the Babylonian and Assyrian empires, from which crucifixion later developed. Crucifixion was not native to ancient Rome either but an importation; it had previously been practiced in Greece, Egypt, and many other Mediterranean regions where it was probably brought by those fearless navigators and tireless merchants, the Phoenicians.

The Romans always had a real terror of crucifixion; it is the very least we can say even if we limit ourselves to the way in which Cicero speaks of it in his orations against Verres (especially in II, 5, 62-67). He calls it sometimes "the most cruel and atrocious of punishments," sometimes the "extreme and worst punishment of slavery," or something similar. It was, in fact, the penalty reserved for slaves and inflicted only for very serious crimes. Sometimes the slave was sarcastically called "cross-bearer" (*furcifer*) and one of them was made to exclaim wittily: "I know that the cross will be my tomb. There lie my ancestors, father, grandfather, great-grandfather, great-great-grandfather" (Plautus, *Miles gloriosus*, II, 4, 372-373). In Cicero's opinion no Roman citizen could legally be crucified. He exclaims in horror: "For a Roman citizen to be bound, is a misdemeanor; for him to be struck is a crime; for him to be killed is almost parricide; what must I say then when he is hung on the cross? There is no epithet whatever which may fittingly describe a thing so infamous" (*In Verrem*, II, 5, 66). In reality, however, it seems that Roman citizens were crucified on occasion, and even that the law permitted this form of death to be inflicted on freedmen and some provincials though they were Roman citizens.

598. Ignoring its most ancient forms, the cross in the time of Jesus might have any one of the three following forms:



The first at the left was called *immissa* or *capitata*, with reference to its shortest arm or headpiece. The middle one was called *commissa* and was the only one with three arms and no headpiece. The third, which was not used very much, was the *decussata* or “slantwise” commonly known as “St. Andrew’s cross.”<sup>246</sup> The *immissa* was most probably the type used for Jesus (§606).

15

This had two parts: the vertical beam, called *stipes* or *staticulum*, which was planted in the ground; and the crosspiece, called *patibulum* or *antenna*<sup>247</sup> fastened at a later point in the crucifixion to the vertical piece. The latter, however, was not entirely smooth or flat. About halfway up there was a thick short block called in Greek *pegma* or in Latin *sedile*; the person crucified straddled it and it served to support his weight. Justin Martyr and Tertullian were quite right in likening it to a horn in general and more specifically to the horn of the rhinoceros. After all, some such support was absolutely necessary; it would have been impossible for the body of the condemned man to be held on the cross by four nails alone, for his weight would have soon torn his hands away. This is so evident that the earliest Christian artists pictured Jesus' cross with a *suppedaneum* to which his feet are nailed. This *suppedaneum*, which is not even vaguely attested in the early documents, is an archeological error, for it would not have been sufficient to support the weight of the body either, but even the error proves the necessity of having the *sedile*.

599. When the sentence was passed, the place of execution was prepared—if it was not ready beforehand. The vertical beam or *stipes*, without the crosspiece, was set up in the ground. It was not ordinarily very high; the feet of the condemned man were at about the height of a man's head and so the whole post could not have been more than twelve or fifteen feet tall.

A conspicuous and greatly frequented place was always chosen for the execution because the sight was to produce a salutary effect on slaves and

other wretched individuals who were liable to the same penalty. Hence places where there was a great deal of traffic were generally preferred, right outside the city but near one of the gates, and possibly among tombs. This is suggested, among the testimonies, by the cynical tale of the matron of Ephesus recounted by Petronius Arbiter (*Satyricon*, 111-112). The usual place for crucifixions in Rome, for instance, was the *campus Esquilinus*, right outside the Servian walls (*agger*) and near the Esquiline gate; this *campus*, approximately the site of the modern Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, contained a number of tombs of patricians and slaves. Above it hovered swarms of the gloomy "birds of the Esquiline" mentioned by Horace, attracted by the unburied cadavers of the crucified.

Before being crucified the prisoner was scourged, sometimes on the way to the place of execution. The condemned man (*cruciarus*) was entrusted to soldiers, usually four (*quaternio*), commanded by a centurion whose duty it was to certify his death (*exactor mortis*). The horizontal beam of the cross (*patibulum*) was placed, sometimes tied, on the condemned man's shoulders. A servant of the court walked ahead of him bearing a tablet (*titulus*) on which his crime was written in large clear letters, but sometimes this inscription was hung about the prisoner's neck instead. The procession always went through the most popular and crowded streets (*celeberrimae eliguntur viae*, says Quintilian in this regard) in order to make the execution as public as possible.

Even when he was not scourged along the way, the condemned man was the victim of every kind of brutal jest on the part of the morbidly curious and bloodthirsty rabble. He was no longer a man to them, but something beyond the law, a walking dunghill.

600. When the place of execution was reached, the condemned man was led to the vertical post, already set in the ground, and there stripped of his garments, unless he had been previously stripped for the scourging along the way. It was common among the Romans for a man to be nailed to the cross completely naked, but among peoples more sensitive in this regard, it may be that he was covered for decency's sake in some way or other with whatever rag happened to be handy. The Jews were certainly more sensitive about this than the Romans (cf. *Sanhedrin*, VI, 1-4), and therefore it is probable that the latter respected their feelings, but we know nothing definite about it.

Thus stripped, the prisoner was made to lie on his back on the ground so that his shoulders and outstretched arms lay on the crosspiece he had been

carrying, and then his hands were nailed to it. Next, probably by means of a rope fastened about his chest and thrown over the top of the vertical beam, he was hoisted up the latter until he was able to straddle the sedile. Only if we keep these things in mind can we adequately explain certain phrases which occur frequently in the Roman authors, such as *ascendere crucem*, *excurrere in crucem*, *inequitare cruci* or the sarcastic *requiescere in cruce*. In addition, we know that this “ascent” of the cross was made after the condemned man had already been partly nailed to it from the phrase, *patibulum suffixus, crudeliter in crucem erigitur* (Firmicus Maternus), where the term *patibulum* is used in its strictly technical sense to mean the crosspiece.

After the prisoner had been lifted up in this manner, the crosspiece was nailed or tied to the vertical beam, and then his feet were nailed. Naturally this required two nails and not one as Christian art has so often imagined, for since the prisoner was straddling the sedile his feet hung almost at the sides of the vertical beam and could not be crossed. The executioners could easily accomplish this final part of the crucifixion from the ground since the condemned man’s feet would be at about the level of their heads.

601. And in this state, the crucified awaited death. Hour after hour he could see all kinds of people pass beneath him: patricians who refused him even a glance; toddlers gazing with round-eyed curiosity at his livid and swollen body; busy merchants who might pause for just a moment as they passed; the riffraff and the slaves who amused themselves watching the progress of his suffering. He might perhaps glimpse some sign of compassion — the only one — on the face of a relative or former associate in crime lingering in the vicinity; but it was a barren pity at best, for the soldiers on guard at the foot of the cross prevented anyone from approaching to give the sufferer any relief whatever. The only things that could possibly reach the shred of humanity nailed to the cross were the stones thrown from a distance by urchins with nothing better to do or by some former rival anxious for a last bit of revenge.

Death might result from loss of blood, fever, the acute suffering caused by hunger and especially by thirst, or from other physiological causes<sup>248</sup>. Usually, it was not long in coming especially because of the great weakness that resulted from the terrible scourging which preceded the crucifixion. More robust constitutions, however, sometimes remained alive on the cross whole days together, dying gradually in the most frightful agony. Sometimes the executioners deliberately hastened the end either by lighting a fire at the foot

of the cross to produce a thick cloud of heavy smoke, or by piercing the body of the victim with a lance, or by resorting to the Roman *crurifragium*, which consisted in breaking his thigh bones with a club.

In earliest times the corpse was left hanging on the cross until it decayed and the dogs from below and the birds from above had left little or nothing. Around Augustus' time, however, friends or relatives were ordinarily granted permission to bury the body if they requested it.

All this was the general procedure in all crucifixions, and it was followed in the crucifixion of Jesus also.

602. When the procurator had pronounced the sentence and written his statement of the crime on the tablet (*titulus*; §599), it assumed an official character; it was to be transcribed in the government archives and communicated to the emperor in Rome, and it was also to be executed immediately. After all, not much preparation was necessary to carry out the sentence of crucifixion. The vertical piece was always standing ready in the place of execution, or if not, it could be set up in a few minutes; and it would not take more than a few strokes of an ax to prepare the crosspiece from any kind of beam; hence all that remained to be done was to summon the soldiers, hand over the condemned man to them, and proceed to the place designated.

The place where Jesus was crucified fulfilled all the conditions mentioned above. Just outside the walls at the northern end of the city there was a little rocky mound, a few yards higher than the surrounding terrain, the appearance of which had prompted its picturesque name, "the Skull," or in Latin, *Calvaria* and in Aramaic *Golgotha* (Hebrew *Gulgoleth*). It was an ideal spot for crucifixion because its height guaranteed that the condemned man would hang in full view and since it was such a short distance from the city gate, many people were sure to pass that way. Besides this, there was a tomb nearby and perhaps more than one (§617), and so the place fitted this last condition too.

As early as the first century the city of Jerusalem began to expand toward the north, and in the radical transformation it underwent in the second century the "Skull," together with the walls of the city in that particular part and the hollow that lay between them, all disappeared. When in the fourth century Constantine built the basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, the whole area was leveled even more except for a small part of the Skull which was enclosed

in the building. The name of the mound, however, with the tenacity characteristic of Oriental place names, has persisted to the present; a few years ago, it turned up in the Arabic form *Ras* ("head"), which is the name old native residents of the quarter have for the area around the basilica.

This, then, is where Jesus was sent to be crucified. It would not have been a long walk from the Antonia because even in those days the most direct way to it was only a little over half a mile. Not only were the streets very crowded that day because of the Pasch, however, but it is also probable that the soldiers deliberately chose the longest and most congested route to give the execution the required publicity. Those most concerned about the latter were the chief priests and the other Sanhedrists who followed the condemned man in triumph and who would by no means have lost the opportunity to prolong their victory and his humiliation in the sight of the populace.

603. Yet from the beginning, a very bitter fly turned up in their ointment. The procession was composed of the soldiers, the chief prisoner, who was Jesus, and two common thieves also condemned to death and brought out for execution at this time. Each of them was accompanied according to rule, by the tablet which announced his crime to the public. Jesus' tablet was inscribed in the three languages commonly used in the district, Hebrew (Aramaic), Greek, and Latin, and its text, dictated by Pilate, read substantially as follows (§122): "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The sharp-eyed Sanhedrists caught a glimpse of this along the way, and they were able to read it even more clearly when it was nailed up on Jesus' cross. Precise jurists that they were, they discovered an enormous error in this statement: the man was being crucified not because he was the "king of the Jews," as the inscription would indicate, but because he had said he was the "king of the Jews" and he really was not. Touched to the quick, they hurried to the procurator and with great earnestness they pointed out the terrible mistake which had to be corrected in the interests even of the government. The good people might be insulted upon reading in an official document that the king of the Jews had been crucified, especially since only an hour before that same devoted loyal people had publicly and solemnly declared that they recognized the Roman Caesar as their only and beloved sovereign (§595).

"The chief priests of the Jews said therefore to Pilate: 'Do not write, "King of the Jews," but "He said, I am the King of the Jews"'. Pilate answered: 'What I have written, I have written'" (*John* 19:21-22). Pilate had somewhat recovered himself; now that there was no longer any danger of being

denounced to Rome, he took his revenge for the defeat he had suffered and repaid the Sanhedrists' exhibitions of loyalty with spiteful perversity.

And this was the first drop of bitterness in their cup of triumph. All that day they were forced to read from the official tablet dictated by Caesar's representative that Jesus was dying on the cross because he was, in effect, the "king of the Jews."

604. From the Antonia the procession wound slowly through the crowded streets of the festive city. Many of those who had been shouting in front of the praetorium were probably gone home to prepare for the Paschal meal; the Sanhedrists did not need their shouting anymore and so they had been free to go. Several of the elders followed the procession, however, to make sure that nothing went wrong and that the pater was finally ended once and for all. The jokes and jibes the rabble always had ready for the condemned were certainly not wanting along the way, but the most exquisitely cruel jests were directed at the man whom the elders with scornful gestures pointed out to the especial attention of the mob's brutality: the Galilean Rabbi was a much more worthy object than the two thieves for their obscene derision.

Carrying his crosspiece, Jesus managed to walk only with great difficulty. It was now about noon (§595), and from before midnight he had passed through an uninterrupted succession of physical and mental sufferings of incomparable violence. First there had been his painful and affectionate farewell to the Apostles in the Cenacle; then had come Gethsemani and the arrest, the trial before the Sanhedrin, the cruel mockery in the house of Caiphas, and finally the horrible scourging, and by now he had no reserve strength left. He tottered under the weight of the beam and stumbled at every step, and there was real danger that he might fall at any moment not to get up again. The possibility worried the centurion in command because it would either keep him from carrying out his assignment or it would delay it enormously, and he would be reprimanded as a consequence. So, he resorted to the "requisition" previously discussed (note [118](#)).

There happened to be passing by a certain Simon of Cyrene<sup>249</sup>1 whom Mark takes care to point out to his Roman readers as the father of Alexander and Rufus (§133). He was coming from the country, where he had obviously been working (§537) and was now on his way home, but the centurion, since the need was pressing, "requisitioned" him, ordering him to carry the crosspiece which Jesus could not hold up any longer. There is no reason for

believing that Simon knew Jesus or was his disciple, and so the centurion's order must have been anything but welcome. If, however, his son Rufus later became a leading figure in the Christian community in Rome and if Paul through respect called Simon's wife "mother" (§133), we may conclude that the service he reluctantly lent Jesus produced the very best of consequences in some way unknown to us.

605. But Simon was not the only one who helped Jesus. Another comfort, this time spontaneous, came to him from the women, and Luke, the Evangelist of feminine pity (§144), is the only one to record it for us. Perhaps when the crossbeam was taken from his shoulders and he straightened a little in relief, Jesus noticed in the hostile or idling crowd following him a group of women who were weeping and lamenting him: they were "daughters of Jerusalem," hence citizens of the capital although there may have been with them some of the Galilean women who ordinarily followed Jesus (§343.). A rabbinic testimony (Sanhedrin, 43 a) would seem to indicate that there was in Jerusalem a kind of society of mercy composed of noble ladies and organized to help in some way those condemned to death, particularly by bringing them an abundance of wine mixed with incense which was believed to produce an anesthetic effect. Perhaps these women of Jerusalem who now approached Jesus belonged to some such association, and they must have performed their act of mercy all the more wholeheartedly if they knew Jesus at least by name.

Jesus returned their compassion in kind. Thinking again of the imminent destruction of Jerusalem, he saw the anguish women and mothers would have to endure in that catastrophe, and he felt with them in their maternal grief, forewarning them of its future victims; and so, he said to them: "Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me, but weep for yourselves and for your children. For behold, days are coming in which men will say: 'Blessed are the barren, and the wombs that never bore, and breasts that never nursed.' — Then they will begin to say to the mountains: 'Fall upon us'; and to the hills: 'Cover us' (cf. Osee 10:8). For if in the case of green wood they do these things, what is to happen in the case of the dry?" (*Luke 23:28-31*). If these things which the pious women deplored with tears that day were befalling the Innocent condemned to death, what would happen forty years later when the destruction of Jerusalem would overwhelm "a sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a wicked seed, children of perdition," as *Isaias* had expressed it (1:4)?



When the procession reached the place called the Skull, the crucifixion was carried out immediately. Wine mixed with myrrh,<sup>250</sup> believed to numb the senses, was offered to Jesus, and certainly to the two thieves also; but it no sooner touched his lips than he refused it, choosing to drink with full consciousness to the last drop the chalice given him by his heavenly Father.

606. All three were stripped of their garments, though it is possible they were conceded some kind of loin cloth (§600). The garments of the crucified fell to the soldiers, who divided them into equal shares. This they did with Jesus' garments too, and the Evangelist who watched them tells us exactly what happened.

A Jew usually wore an outer garment or cloak (imation) and beneath it a tunic (citwn). The cloak was made of two pieces of cloth sewed together, but the tunic might be without seam (arrafoz), being woven all in one piece from the top. This was true of the tunic of the high priest which is mentioned by Josephus (*Antiquities of the Jews*, III, 161), and it was true also of Jesus' tunic.

"The soldiers, therefore, when they had crucified him, took his garments and made of them four parts, to each soldier a part, and also the tunic. Now the tunic was without seam, woven in one piece from the top. They therefore said to one another: 'Let us not tear it, but let us cast lots for it, to see whose it shall be'" (*John* 19:23-24). The cloak could be divided along the seams with no great loss; but since the tunic was all in one piece it would have lost most of its value if it had been cut into four parts. So, the soldiers agreed to give it to the one favored by the dice they had brought with them to pass the time as they stood guard under the three crosses. But in their action, the Evangelist sees the fulfillment of the messianic prophecy in *Psalms* 22:19 which says, "They parted my garments amongst them; and upon my vesture they cast lots."

Stripped of his garments, Jesus was laid upon the ground. His arms were stretched along the crosspiece he had carried, and his hands were nailed to it. Next, he was lifted to the vertical beam, already set in the ground, and set astride the support (*sedile*). Then his feet were nailed (§600).

His cross was in the middle; the two thieves were crucified one on each side of him. On his cross was fastened the tablet describing his crime; if it was placed — as *Matthew* 27:37 seems to indicate — at the top of the vertical beam, his cross was *immissa* and not *commissa* (§598).

The crucifixion was finished not long after noontime.

607. On this last point there seems to be a contradiction between John's statement that Pilate pronounced sentence at the "sixth hour" or a little before noon (§595), and Mark's (15:25) information: "Now it was the third hour and they crucified him."

Various hypotheses have been proposed to reconcile these two statements. St. Jerome — and some modern scholars agree with him — supposed that there was a copyist's error in the two letters of the Greek alphabet which expressed these numbers, namely, that some amanuensis exchanged the letter *gamma* (G which stood for three) with the letter *digamma* (F which stood for six). Hence, we should read the "sixth hour" in *Mark* as we do in *John*. But while this solution is theoretically possible, it is not supported by any of the codices. Other scholars supposed that John was counting the hours from midnight according to the official reckoning of the Occident, and that Mark, on the other hand, was counting them from the first light of dawn as the Orientals did. But this theory has not won much support either because, among other things, we should expect Mark, who was writing in Rome, to use the western mode of counting time, and John to use the Oriental method since he was writing in the Orient.

The most reasonable solution seems the one based on the customs of the country in that particular period. The period from dawn to sunset was divided into twelve hours which varied in length according to the season of the year, but this division was theoretical rather than practical. In countries like Judea, where mechanical devices for measuring time were extremely rare, the people usually determined the time of day from the sun, and so had ended up by dividing the hours of daylight into four equal periods, two before noon and two after noon. Since each of these periods was longer than one hour, it could be more easily distinguished from the next period because of the greater variation in the sun's brightness. Hence from the dawn to what we should consider 9 a.m. was always "morning" or the period of the "first" hour; from 9 a.m. until noon was the period of the "third" hour; from noon until 3 p.m. was the period of the "sixth" hour; from 3 p.m. until sunset was the period of the "ninth" hour. The Synoptics very rarely deviate from this terminology (*Matt.* 20:1-6), but it is more usual for John to name some of the intermediate hours (*John* 1:39; 4:6, 52; 11:9) instead of the longer periods because of his desire to be specific. In all likelihood the discrepancy between Mark and John with regard to the hour in which Jesus was crucified is due entirely to this one point: that Mark is referring to the period of the "third" hour, which lasted

until the sixth hour or noontime, while John means literally the “sixth” hour of the day, or high noon.

608. So far as we know Jesus did not speak at all throughout the whole process of crucifixion. There was scarcely any strength left in his torn and disfigured body and his thought was absorbed in contemplation of his heavenly Father, to whom he was offering the sacrifice of himself. The first words from the cross which are recorded for us, however, while addressed to the heavenly Father, concern those on earth around him. Perhaps it was while they were nailing his hands or his feet, that he exclaimed: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing!” (*Luke 23:34.*)<sup>251</sup> He asks pardon not so much for the unwitting soldiers hammering on the nails as for those others who had deliberately arranged things so that he would be crucified. Even to them Jesus grants his own forgiveness and implores the Father's pardon for them because “they do not know” now what they earlier refused to know: he generously uses the consequence of their earlier guilt to excuse the present crime.

From the cross, Jesus continued to watch with drooping but still penetrating eyes all that was going on below and beside him. Below him lingered the chief priests and the other Sanhedrists to taste their victory a while; really it was time for them to be returning home like good Israelites to superintend the preparations for the Paschal meal, but they preferred to loiter a while longer in the place of their triumph, gloating happily.

They kept walking back and forth beneath the three crosses. Sometimes they glanced angrily at the cross in the middle; sometimes they pointed it out scornfully to passing acquaintances; and now and again they planted themselves in front of it with their hands behind their backs, and addressed the Crucified directly: “Thou who destroyest the temple, and in three days buildest it up again, save thyself! If thou art the Son of God, come down from the cross!” And the people they stopped, intimidated by their authority, repeated the derisive challenge.

Other Sanhedrists preferred an argument *ad hominem*, which was at the same time an apologia for their own behavior: “He saved others, himself he cannot save! If he is the King of Israel, let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he wants him [cf. Ps. 21 [22] 9]; for he said: I am the Son of God.” But no answer

came from that cross and neither did the One they had crucified descend from it; for in either case, it would have done those interlocutors no good.

609. And there were insults and reproaches also from the two crucified thieves. Matthew and Mark say “the robbers also,” but this is a categorical plural (cf. note [256](#)), meaning that the insults came from the pair of thieves without specifying whether from one or both. Luke does make a distinction, however, and says that one insulted Jesus while the other prayed to him. One of them, perhaps to suck some bitter consolation from the ruin that had overtaken his own life, perhaps to take revenge for some vague vanished hope, kept repeating to Jesus: “If thou art the Christ [Messiah], save thyself and us!” But the other robber did not share his feelings and he rebuked him saying: “Dost thou not even fear God, seeing that thou art under the same sentence? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what our deeds deserved; but this man has done nothing wrong.” The force of the rebuke lies in the “not even fear” (*oude fobh su*): if you have no reverence for God at least have a little fear since you are suffering the same penalty as Jesus, who is innocent. Probably the good thief knew Jesus of Nazareth by reputation and had heard of his goodness and his miracles and of the kingdom of God which he preached. And obviously, despite his crimes, there was a residue of goodness left in him. In the face of death, it rises to the surface and covers all his past; the dying man clutches the last hope left to him, personified in the Just Man unjustly killed. Turning to him, he says: “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” — when you come reigning gloriously in that kingdom which you have foretold. And Jesus answers: “Amen I say to thee, this day thou shalt be with me in paradise.” Although it is not easy to determine the exact meaning of the word “paradise” in Jesus’ day,<sup>[252](#)</sup> it is certain that it signified the dwelling of the just after death and was therefore analogous to the “bosom of Abraham” (§[472](#)).

610. Among the persons Jesus could see from the cross there was only one small group, a few steps away, which was any source of comfort to him. Or was it comfort and not rather an added source of sorrow? They were, in fact, all members of his family or friends, who were not forbidden by Roman law to watch the execution provided they did not try to offer the condemned man any assistance, and the guards were there to prevent that. The names of those in the little group nearest the cross have been given us by the Evangelist who was with them, although he omits his own name, referring to himself only as “the disciple whom [Jesus] loved” (§[155](#)). With him were standing “his [Jesus’]

mother and his mother's sister, Mary of Cleophas [Alpheus] and Mary Magdalene" (*John* 19:25).<sup>253</sup> After Jesus' death the Synoptics, for their part, mention another more numerous group at a greater distance from the cross, composed of women who were weeping and lamenting. They were the women who had helped Jesus in his ministry (§343.) and had followed him from Galilee to Jerusalem (*Matt.* 27:55-56; *Mark* 15:40-41). Among those in this second group we have the names of "Mary Magdalene" [as in the first group] "Mary the mother of James the Less (§313) and of Joseph" (and this Mary also appears in the first group as "Mary of Cleophas") and in addition a "Salome" and the "mother of the sons of Zebedee" (§496), both of whom are the same person. That at least two of the women are mentioned in both groups is not surprising because they are mentioned at different times —the first group before Jesus' death, and the second group, standing a certain distance away, after it —and some of them may meanwhile have moved from one group to the other.

In the group nearest the cross, then, stood the mother of Jesus with the beloved disciple. Was her presence a comfort to him as he hung on the cross? The soldiers prevented her from approaching him, and the nails prevented him from making any gesture whatever to her. Mary's voice was stilled with grief and Jesus could not speak from weakness; they could communicate only with their eyes. As the mother gazed on her Son, she perhaps thought to how frightful a state that body, formed in her womb in a manner unique in the world, was now reduced. And as the Son looked at his mother, perhaps he reflected how she who had been proclaimed "blessed among women" was now become the object of extreme pity. But at a certain moment, gathering all his strength, he nodded to his mother and said: 'Woman (§283), behold thy son.' And then to the beloved disciple he said: "Behold thy mother." In this his last will and testament, the dying Jesus united forever his two greatest earthly loves, the humble woman of Bethlehem and the young man who had heard the beating of his heart at the Last Supper. And from that day John took Mary into his home (§156).

611. Jesus was failing rapidly. Suddenly it began to grow dark: "from the sixth hour there was darkness over the whole land until the ninth hour" (*Matt.* 27:45), or from noon until about three o'clock. The expression "the whole land" here means Judea as it does in the Hebrew Bible.

We are not given the reason for the darkness. It certainly was not an eclipse of the sun, which cannot occur while the moon is at the full as it was then; this was observed in ancient times by Origen, Jerome, and John Chrysostom. It is true that the pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite related he had seen, in Heliopolis, the whole world grows dark because of the death of Jesus and he explained it by an abnormal lunar movement, that is, the moon supposedly moved back to cover the sun (*Epist. VII, ad Polycarpum*). But his story is sheer fantasy, for we know today that this unknown author did not write before the fifth century and his explanation ignores the very sensible observations of the earlier writers mentioned above. Even the eclipse noted by Phlegon, the freedman of Hadrian, and recorded by some of the Fathers (Origen, *Contra Celsum*, II, 33) supposedly took place in 32 and therefore cannot affect the question. It is clear that the Evangelists viewed this darkening of the earth at Jesus' death as something miraculous, like the miraculous signs which accompanied his birth. But whether the darkness was produced by a dense mass of clouds or in some other way it is impossible to determine.

In the darkness that hung over physical nature, Jesus' earthly existence ebbed slowly away through an agony that lasted about three hours and which the Evangelists have shrouded in a reverent silence. His life and strength were bleeding from him through his torn hands and feet and the gaping welts left by the scourging. His head was riddled with the thorns; not a muscle in his body could relax in that position on the cross. There was no rest from pain as torture piled on torture and grew more and more excruciating with every moment.

In that dark spasm of agony, only the pinnacle of his soul was serene, lifted in contemplation of the Father.

He hung in silence.

612. Suddenly, about the ninth hour, Jesus cried aloud, saying in Aramaic: 'Eli, 'Eli, lema shebaqtani. Rather than an exclamation in themselves, these words were a quotation. They are the beginning of *Psalms* 21 [22] and are exactly the same as the Aramaic version in the Targum (except for lema instead of *metul mah*). They mean, as Matthew and Mark add in Greek: "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Since this is a quotation, its full meaning must be derived from the entire composition which it introduces. This Psalm, in fact, predicts the final sufferings of the future Messiah, and in

reciting its first line from the cross Jesus meant to apply it to himself. Among other things, the ancient Psalm had said:

“My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?  
Far from my salvation are the words of my lament.  
O my God! I cry by day, and thou dost not answer,  
and by night, neither is there any rest for me!  
“And I am a worm, and no man,  
the reproach of men and despised by the people.  
All they that see me laugh me to scorn,  
they open wide their mouths and wag their heads [exclaiming],  
‘Let him turn to the Lord: let Him deliver him,  
Let Him save him, seeing he delights in him!’

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“Yea, dogs have surrounded me,  
the council of the wicked has encircled me,  
They have pierced my hands and my feet;  
I can number all my bones.  
They look and see me,  
they part my garments among them  
and for my vesture they cast lots.”

Hence Jesus’ exclamation affirms once again that he is the Messiah and as proof indicates the manifest fulfillment in himself of the prophecy he is quoting.

But some did not clearly understand the very first words of the exclamation, ‘Eli, ‘Eli. The learned scribes who were present certainly recognized the quotation, but others, less well informed, took them as an invocation to the ancient prophet Elias (§404), unless they purposely misunderstood them to have a fresh excuse for jeering at the suffering Christ as if he were raving. And with mingled curiosity and sarcasm, they began to exclaim: “Behold! This man is calling Elias!”

613. And as he hung waiting on the cross, Jesus spoke again: “I thirst.” Given his loss of blood and extreme exhaustion this was very natural, but it is not the whole explanation. In fact, the Psalm which Jesus has just quoted also said:

“My mouth (*hikki*) has become dry as a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to my jaws!”

Thirst then, was also a part of the prophetic vision of the suffering Messiah; hence John (19:28) calls attention to the fact that Jesus, “that the Scriptures might be fulfilled, said: ‘I thirst!’”

This time Jesus’ request —his last —met a compassionate response in all likelihood from one of the soldiers guarding the crosses. For want of something better, the Roman soldiers used to quench their thirst with a mixture of water and vinegar, still commonly used by harvesters in Italian country districts. Even its Latin name *posca* survives today among the peasantry in some regions of Italy. Foreseeing that they would have to spend quite a long time on guard below the crosses, the soldiers had brought a jar of it with them. At Jesus’ cry, one of them soaked a sponge in it, set the sponge on a rod<sup>254</sup> and held it up to his lips. Those who had been shouting about Elias did not like the soldier’s action at all, and they tried to dissuade him, exclaiming: “Wait, let us see whether Elias is coming to save him!” (*Matt.* 27:49.) In their opinion, if Elias were going to save Jesus, he would also manage somehow to cure his thirst. It seems that the soldier answered them with the same exclamation (*Mark* 15:36: ‘Wait, let us see,’ etc.) as if to say that it might be better to comfort the crucified a little while they were waiting for Elias to come.

Jesus, who a few hours before had refused the wine with myrrh, now sucked the liquid from the sponge. The Evangelists call it “vinegar” for a definite reason, to echo the passage in *Psalms* 68 [69] 22 which says: “In my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink” (cf. note 250). When he had taken the *posca*, Jesus murmured, “It is consummated!”

Shortly afterward, a shudder seemed to pass over his wracked body, and he again cried out in a loud voice, saying: “Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit” (cf. *Ps.* 30 [31] 6). Then he bowed his head.

He was dead.

614. At that moment strange things took place in the darkened city. Two great embroidered curtains hung within the Temple: one (*masak*) between the vestibule and the “holy place,” and one (*paroketh*) between the “holy place” and the “holy of holies” (§47), to remind the devout of the inaccessibility and invisibility of God, who dwelt in the “holy of holies.” About the ninth hour, as Jesus was dying, one of these curtains (probably the inner one) split in two from top to bottom, almost as if to signify that it no longer had any function for the invisible God was no longer inaccessible.



There were earthquake tremors also: “and the rocks were rent, and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep arose; and coming forth out of the tombs after his resurrection, they came into the holy city, and appeared to many” (*Matt. 27:51-53*). The resurrection of the dead is probably anticipated in this passage, for it seems to have taken place after the resurrection of Jesus, with which it is here connected. As early as the fourth century (Lucianus Martyr, Cyril of Jerusalem), a crack still visible in the rocky part of the Skull incorporated in the basilica of the Holy Sepulcher, was pointed out as one result of this earthquake. The crack is almost two yards long and about a foot wide, and contrary to the usual fissures produced by earthquakes, it does not follow the veining in the rock but runs counter to it.

When the centurion and the soldiers on guard saw the strange phenomena which accompanied Jesus’ death and reflected besides on the calm and unusually rapid manner in which it had come, they recalled his whole unique attitude during the trial, and putting two and two together, were convinced that such a prisoner was not only innocent but a very extraordinary being. They began to exclaim: “Truly this was a just man” (*Luke 23:47*); and with reference to the disputed accusation against him: “Truly this man was the Son of God” (*Mark 15:39*).

Then the attitude of the mob changed. As soon as Jesus was dead, the Sanhedrists who had been strutting their victory beneath the cross had nothing more to fear from him at least for the moment, and so they went home to prepare for the Paschal meal. Hence there was no one left to bully the crowd and prompt the jibes and the derision against the crucified, and so, relieved of their prudential fears, they could show their true feelings. They, too, were impressed by the darkened day and the heaving earth, and remembering what had taken place at the trial, they began to walk away from the cross, “beating their breasts” (*Luke 23:48*).

There were still the two groups of Jesus’ relatives or friends standing by, one near the cross and the other at a little distance, and some of them moved from one group to the other (§610).

615. On their way home, the Sanhedrists suddenly remembered a precept of the Law. They kept reminding themselves that they had done a very holy deed in having Jesus crucified, but its holiness would be imperfect if his body were left hanging and exposed that night. No; it must be taken down from the

cross and buried that same afternoon before sunset as the Law commanded (*Deut.* 21:23), especially since sunset marked the beginning of the most solemn feast of the Pasch. So on their way, they went to the procurator and requested him to observe this precept, suggesting at the same time the simplest way to do so. It would be enough to break the legs (§601) of the three who had been crucified and in a few moments they would all be ready for burial.

Not many moments before, another Sanhedrist had gone to the procurator with a request to bury Jesus. Christ's death had somewhat revived the courage of his disheartened disciples. There was among them a certain Joseph, a native of Arimathea (ancient Ramathaim, today Rentis, northwest of Lydda), a wealthy man of great prestige, a member of the Sanhedrin and also "a disciple of Jesus, although for fear of the Jews a secret one" (*John* 19:38). Spiritually, then, he somewhat resembled Nicodemus, who was also a member of the Sanhedrin (§288), although Joseph had had the courage to disagree with his fellow Sanhedrists when they condemned Jesus to death (*Luke* 23:51). Now he dared even more. Perhaps at the request of Jesus' relatives and friends, who would naturally appeal to one of his authority, he went to Pilate and requested the body of Jesus for burial as Roman law allowed (§601). Pilate heard his request willingly, but was surprised that Jesus had died so soon; so he called the centurion who was the *exactor mortis*, and when he had confirmed Jesus' death, Pilate gave Joseph permission to take the body.

616. Almost at the same time the other Sanhedrists arrived, and Pilate, granting their request too, ordered other soldiers, not those still on guard at the crosses, to perform the *crurifragium* and then take the bodies down. The Evangelist who witnessed their arrival says: "The soldiers therefore came and broke the legs of the first, and of the other, who had been crucified with him. But when they came to Jesus, and saw that he was already dead, they did not break his legs; but one of the soldiers opened his side with a lance, and immediately there came out blood and water" (*John* 19:32-34). Hence the two thieves had survived Jesus and were dispatched with the *crurifragium*; Jesus' legs were not broken because it was clearly evident he was already dead, and so the soldiers saved themselves a little work as well. One of them struck with his lance in the direction of Jesus' heart, just to remove any possible doubts. The lance tore a wide wound in his side, as large as a man's hand (cf. *John* 20:25, 27), and from it flowed blood and water.

Learned English physiologists have tried to explain the water and blood by supposing that Jesus' heart was literally broken before being pierced by the lance. If the heart is ruptured, they claim, there is a hemorrhage within the pericardium and subsequently a decomposition of the blood. The red globules sink to the bottom and the watery serum remains on top. Hence when the pericardium is opened the two come out separately. According to these physiologists, then, Jesus' rapid death is to be explained by a rupture of the heart produced by mental suffering. Jesus died literally of a broken heart caused by grief.

Whatever the merits of such an explanation, the Evangelist who witnessed the incident sees much deeper and more mysterious meanings in it: "For these things came to pass that the Scripture might be fulfilled,

'Not a bone of him shall you break.'

And again, another Scripture says,

'They shall look upon him whom they have pierced.'"

The first quotation is from *Exodus* 12:46 (*Num.* 9:12), and refers to the Paschal lamb. The Hebrews were not to break any of its bones when they ate it during the Paschal meal. For the Evangelist this precept confirms the fact that Jesus was the true victim of redemption foreshadowed in the Paschal lamb. The second quotation is from *Zacharias* 12:10, who predicts that the Jewish nation will mourn for one whom they have pierced as one mourns for a first-born.

The Evangelist does not give us the name of the soldier who pierced Jesus' breast, but Christian legend has bestowed an unforgettable one on him, calling him "Lancer." In Greek, "lance" is *lonche*; and so the soldier was called Longinus.

617. The soldiers must have been performing their lugubrious work while Joseph of Arimathea stood waiting to use the permission granted him by Pilate. He had asked for Jesus' body because he and those who had perhaps prompted him to act were anxious that it should not be thrown in the common grave for the executed along with the bodies of the two thieves. As soon as Jesus' body was taken down, Joseph immediately set about giving it a fitting burial, which had, however, to be hasty because of the legal repose which began at sunset (§537).

Joseph was assisted by others. His spiritual brother Nicodemus is mentioned by name, who "came . . . bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, in

weight about a hundred pounds” (*John* 19:39). It is easy to imagine that the pious women who had been present at the crucifixion also helped to prepare Christ for his burial, and first among them his mother, who certainly would not have renounced the sorrowful joy of receiving his body in her arms as it was taken down from the cross. Just as Nicodemus had brought the spices to anoint the body, Joseph had bought a “sindon” (§561); the term here does not have its specialized meaning of a light nightgown, but means a shroud or winding sheet of fine linen.

Since there was not much time, the preparation of the body was quite brief: “They therefore took the body of Jesus and wrapped it in linen cloths with the spices, after the Jewish manner of preparing for burial” (*John* 19:40), in fact, in the manner Lazarus had been prepared (§491). Then the body was wrapped in the shroud. Time also prevented their moving the body to a tomb any distance away, but this difficulty was easily overcome thanks to the generosity of Joseph, who offered his own tomb, which was right on the hill of the Skull: there was “a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid” (*John* 19:41). The garden lay at the foot of the Skull and the tomb “had been hewn out of a rock” (*Mark* 15:46), which was a projection of the one that formed the little height of the Skull. Probably other wealthy citizens of Jerusalem also had their tombs built there. And this dovetails perfectly with the custom of carrying out a crucifixion near a burial ground (§599). (See Figure 72)

618. The tomb Joseph gave up for Jesus’ burial was arranged on the inside like all other Jewish tombs (§491), with a vestibule and then a burial chamber with its niche for the body. The outer door was shut with a huge stone resembling an enormous millstone which was set against the opening. To enter one had only to push the stone — but not without considerable effort — to the left or the right and it moved along a little groove hewn out of the rock on either side of the door.

Since Jesus had died about three in the afternoon, all was over before six, when Joseph “rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb, and departed” (*Matt.* 27:60).

But the tomb was not left alone immediately: “Mary Magdalene and the other Mary [the mother of James and Joseph] were there, sitting opposite the sepulcher” (27:61). Other pious women also drew near to see where and how the revered body had been buried. Then returning into the city they took

advantage of the last bit of daylight left and “prepared spices and ointments” (§537). Their devotion apparently was not satisfied with the abundant supply contributed by Nicodemus, and they planned to anoint the body of Jesus more carefully and hence to return to the sepulcher as soon as the Sabbath was over (*Luke* 23:55- 56).

None of the Apostles is mentioned in connection with these tenderly solicitous tasks. We may glimpse only John, through the reticence of his Gospel, helping the mother of Jesus and taking her home with him to care for her as her adopted son. And there they both waited.

619. That night was a fine one indeed for the triumphant Sanhedrists. They celebrated the Paschal meal not only with the traditional air of gaiety but with a special inward satisfaction as well which did not have — or at least did not seem to have — anything to do with the solemnity of the Pasch.

That Galilean Rabbi was actually gone; he was dead, safely dead! There was no danger that they would ever have to listen to his invectives again and be humiliated in the eyes of the people. The few disciples he had managed to attract would unquestionably scatter now that their master was dead, and no one would speak of him anymore. Everything had gone so well, thanks to the help not so much of Moses or Elias as of that uncircumcised wretch Pilate; at any rate, circumcision or not, theirs had been a splendid victory and the thought of it must have added a special flavor to the Paschal supper.

And yet, the more they thought of it, these perspicacious worthies began to notice a little flaw in the shining crystal of their cup of triumph. A little thing certainly, but not to be neglected. They remembered that while Jesus was still living, he had predicted that three days after his death he would rise again (§446). Now this was sheer boasting, there was no doubt about that; most of them were convinced Sadducees and so maintained that resurrection of the dead was impossible (§515). But the boast, however mistaken, might give rise to impostures, rumors, and other annoying consequences; hence it might be better to remedy the little flaw and forestall the trouble. So, on the following day, although it was their Pasch, some of them took the short legitimate walk to Pilate’s house to give him some very good advice: “Sir, we have remembered how that deceiver (planoz) said, while he was yet alive: ‘After three days I will rise again.’ Give orders, therefore, that the sepulcher be guarded until the third day, or else his disciples may come and steal him away, and say to the people: ‘He has risen from the dead’; and the last imposture

(planh) will be worse than the first.” Pilate answered them brusquely: “You have a guard [of your own]: go, guard it as well as you know.”

The procurator’s rudeness was apparent only; it merely served to cover the fact that he was giving in to them again. Actually, he had granted the request and again let the Sanhedrists use the detachment of guards, composed of Roman soldiers, that he was accustomed to put at their disposal (*Matt.* 28:14; cf. *John* 18:12). In short, however much he snarled at them the procurator still kept saying yes to the Sanhedrists. That was all they wanted, and on that same Sabbath they led the soldiers to the place.

But no one could surpass those Jewish leaders for wariness; they took precautions against a possibility that would hardly occur to anyone else. They foresaw that the soldiers, though they stayed on guard before the tomb, might yet be susceptible to the bribes of Jesus’ disciples and let them into the tomb. Now that their two colleagues in the Sanhedrin, Joseph and Nicodemus, had had the face to help bury the crucified Jesus, they might just as well expect them to imitate the Sanhedrin and buy the guards with shekels as it had bought Judas. So they affixed their seals between the stone rolled against the entrance and the rock from which the tomb was cut.

This was a wise precaution, since no one could possibly enter the tomb without breaking the seals, for which the soldiers were responsible, and the dead man would be sure not to rise again.

## CHAPTER XXVI: The Second Life<sup>255</sup>

620. THE same documents, the same historical testimonies which have narrated the story of Jesus up to this point, do not stop with his death, but with the same authority and the same degree of information they proceed to relate his resurrection and second life.

That is more than sufficient for all those who do not admit the possibility of the supernatural — not only the moderns but also the ancients (cf. *Acts* 17:32) — to promptly reject this whole second part of the gospel narrative. These persons are entirely logical granted the philosophical principles from which they start. But it is significant that their conclusion is determined solely by those philosophical principles and not by any deficiencies or uncertainties in the documents. The documents do truly exist, and they derive from the very same informants as before; but since on this point they contradict the aforementioned principles more than ever, they must be "interpreted" in the light of these principles, or in other words, subordinated to them. The studies and research expended on the second life of Jesus are nothing but a more radical continuation of those made on the first. In the case of his first life, it was a question of choosing from among the things narrated of him, of accepting a discourse or a trip in a boat as entirely natural but rejecting the cure of a man born blind or the resurrection of a dead man as supernatural and therefore impossible. But with regard to his second life, there was nothing to choose because it was all in the realm of the supernatural and therefore impossible. Here the task was merely to explain how the belief in this second life of Jesus ever arose among his immediate disciples.

But though this method is logical, it is not logical enough; it stops halfway and does not proceed to the ultimate and conclusive consequences of the philosophical principles on which it is based. To be truly and thoroughly logical, it should deny not only Christ's second life but also the first and assert that he never existed on this earth at all. Several very recent scholars have already begun to do this, and they will certainly be joined by more and more future critics. In discussing these very recent studies (§221), we noted their logical integrity and the reasons why, when one begins to subordinate documentary fact to certain philosophical principles in these matters, he must inevitably end by denying everything. I mention the respective critical positions here again, because the subject we are about to consider demands

even more that we attribute *unicuique suum*, to history what is history and to philosophical theory all that derives from it.

In the account of Jesus' second life, the four Evangelists follow the same procedure as before. They do not pretend to give a complete, detailed, and strictly chronological account of what happened. They choose those facts which seem most opportune to them, and they arrange their material in the most convenient order for their individual purposes without hesitating now and then to alter the time sequence. In relating the discovery of Jesus' empty tomb, Matthew and Mark are parallel enough. Luke does not give so many names but he does not differ very much from Mark's account. Finally, John is sketchier, because here again he wants to specify and fill out the familiar story of the Synoptics with a few points on his own authority as an eyewitness.

## THE APPARITIONS IN JUDEA

621. No one saw Jesus in the act of rising from the dead. None of the Evangelists says how he emerged from the sepulcher; one of them implies that he did so without disturbing the stone rolled against the entrance, although his resurrection was accompanied by extraordinary signs: "And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord came down from heaven, and drawing near rolled back the stone, and sat upon it. His countenance was [dazzling] like lightning, and his raiment like snow" (*Matt.* 28:2-3). Hence it was the angel who rolled away the stone, but the tomb was already empty, and that was why the stone was removed, because it no longer served any purpose.

All four Evangelists agree that the sepulcher was discovered to be empty very early Sunday morning. The soldiers sent by the Sanhedrists had been on guard there since the day before, and certainly at that early hour of the morning they were still stretched out upon the ground sleeping. The tremor of the earthquake and the appearance of the angel and the wide-open tomb so terrified them that they fled immediately, making for safety through the nearby city gate. Once surrounded by houses, and recovered somewhat from their panic, they remembered that their flight was a formal desertion of their post of duty and subject to heavy penalties according to Roman military discipline (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, V, 482). They had to find some remedy and shrewdly perceived that their best hope lay with the Sanhedrists who had the greatest interest in the matter. So they went straight to them to make a bargain (§627).



The sepulcher did not remain alone very long, for a group of pious women was already on its way from the city. They were the women who on Friday evening had prepared the spices in order to give the beloved body of Jesus a more fitting burial as soon as the legal repose of the Sabbath was over (§618); from one or another of the Evangelists we learn the names of Mary Magdalene, the other Mary mother of James, Salome, Joanna, and "the other women who were with them" (*Luke* 24:10). The time at which they arrived at the sepulcher is indicated in a very curious fashion by Mark (16:2): "And very early (*lian prwi*) in the morning on the first day of the week [Sunday], they come to the tomb, the sun being now risen." At first glance it is difficult to reconcile "very early" with "the sun being now risen," since the former would mean the very first light of dawn or about four o'clock in the morning while the latter phrase would seem to refer to a much later time, no earlier than six. It is another instance of Mark's rough unpolished style (§132), which here is a little too condensed. It all becomes clear if we read between the lines: "Very early in the morning they come to the tomb [and reach it] the sun being now risen." Certainly, they did not have to go a great distance to get to the tomb, but the reason why they took so long is given by Mark himself (16:1), who has just said, "when the Sabbath was past," that is, on that same morning, they "bought spices, that they might go and anoint him." Their devotion was not satisfied with the spices some of them had prepared two evenings before, and the rest wanted to make their own contribution of ointments, which it took some time to buy.

622. These feminine delays were too much for the most ardent and whole-souled among them, Mary of Magdala, the only one whom John mentions and the first one named by all three Synoptics. At a certain point she left her busy and slow-moving companions and, sped by her great love, she ran on alone to the tomb. She reached it, as John says in complete agreement with Mark, "early (*prwi*) . . . while it was still dark" (*John* 20:1). But what she saw as soon as she arrived struck her with dismay. She knew nothing about the soldiers placed there on the Sabbath, so she was not surprised by their absence; but she did see that the round stone had been rolled to one side and the entrance stood wide open. Perhaps her eagerness carried her as far as the entrance but a glance inside was enough to tell her that the tomb was empty.

What had happened? Who could tell her? Certainly not her slow-limbed companions scattered about the city in search of spices which would now be useless. She must go to the disciples; perhaps they knew, especially Peter and

John, how the tomb had been opened and the body carried away. "She ran therefore and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and said to them: They have taken the Lord from the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid him'" (*John* 20:2). The plural "we" kept by John is an excellent link between his account and the Synoptics. They speak of several women at the sepulcher whereas he speaks only of Mary Magdalene, but he has her use the plural "we" which implicitly confirms what the Synoptics tell us. Mary was speaking also for her tardy companions.

623. They had meanwhile finished their purchases and were on their way to the tomb. But near the end of their walk, they suddenly remembered another difficulty they had not thought of before: "And they were saying to one another: 'Who will roll the stone back from the doorway of the tomb for us?' (*Mark* 16:3). We know that those round stones were very large and heavy, and the women certainly could not move the one in front of Jesus' sepulcher by themselves. As soon as they reached the sepulcher, however, and looked about them, "they saw that the stone had been rolled back, for it was very large" (*ibid.*, 16:4). No less startled than Mary Magdalene but less impulsive than she, they made their way in, and "on entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting at the right side, clothed in a white robe, and they were amazed" (*ibid.*, 16:5). Luke says more accurately that there were "two men . . . in dazzling raiment" (24:4).

The young man in Mark said to the women: "Do not be terrified. You are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen, he is not here. Behold the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he goes before you into Galilee; there you shall see him, as he told you (*Mark* 16:6-7; cf. *Matt.* 28:5-7). The two apparitions in Luke say very much the same thing, but they develop the last thought more fully and their words produce a different result. According to Mark, the women "fled from the tomb, for trembling and fear had entered into them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid." Here Mark's narrative ends abruptly and so does his Gospel except for a brief appendix which does not follow directly from what has gone before. According to Luke, on the other hand, the women, "having returned from the tomb . . . reported all these things to the Eleven, and to all the rest"; and this is what Matthew (28:8) says also.

Mark's account probably refers only to the women's first impression; they were in the beginning so stunned with fear and bewilderment that they said nothing. If, however, his narrative had not ended here, it would probably have

told something of how the women, recovered from that first fright, did what the other two Synoptics relate. In any case, the news they were about to communicate was certainly not such as to win them a very cordial welcome, and that is perhaps another reason for the reluctance indicated by Mark. When they returned to the city, they “were telling these things to the Apostles. But this tale seemed to them to be nonsense, and they did not believe the women” (*Luke 24:11*).

624. Meanwhile, Mary Magdalene’s announcement had made a much greater impression on Peter and John. As soon as they heard her excited and breathless story, “Peter... went out, and the other disciple, and they went to the tomb. The two were running together, and the other disciple ran on before, faster than Peter, and came first to the tomb. And stooping down he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief which had been about his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded in a place by itself. Then the other disciple also went in, who had come first to the tomb, and he saw.... The disciples therefore went away again to their home” (*John 20:3-10*). What they saw was enough to convince them that the body had not been stolen, as Mary Magdalene supposed. If it had been, there would have been no purpose in unwinding the linen cloths or carefully folding up the handkerchief and setting it by itself. There was nothing more to be done there, however, and so reflecting on what they had seen, the two hurried back to the city, anxious to consult with the other disciples.

625. Mary Magdalene, who had returned to the sepulcher either with them or shortly afterward, did not leave with them, but “was standing outside weeping at the tomb” (*John 20:11*). After a little while, she stooped down to look once more through the low narrow door of the vestibule at the niche in the burial chamber, for in her desolate love she still hoped against hope. But this time she unexpectedly saw two angels seated one at the head and one at the foot of the niche where the body had lain. And they said to her: “Woman, why art thou weeping?” She answered: “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him!” And with this, she turned around, almost as if looking for him still, and saw a man standing before her. But she hardly glanced at him, for absorbed as she was in her own grief-filled thoughts, she mistook him for the gardener. But the man said to her: “Woman, why art thou weeping? Whom dost thou seek?” She answered: “Sir, if thou hast removed him, tell me where thou hast laid him and I will take him away.” But the man was Jesus.

“Jesus said to her: ‘Mary!’

“Turning, she said to him: ‘Rabboni’ (that is to say, Master)!”

It was the first time that the risen Christ had been seen and recognized by any human being unless he had already appeared to his mother, although the Evangelists say nothing about this.

As soon as she recognized the Master, Mary threw herself at his feet to embrace them, but he said to her: “Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brethren and say to them: ‘I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (*John* 20:17). It was urgent for his disciples, whom he calls his “brethren,” to know that he was soon to ascend to his Father and God and theirs, and hence her natural expression of affection was not to delay the message.<sup>256</sup>

She did immediately as she was bid: “Mary Magdalene came, and announced to the disciples: i have seen the Lord, and these things he said to me” (*John* 20:18). But her jubilant announcement met an utterly humiliating response: “And they, hearing that he was alive and had been seen by her, did not believe it” (*Mark* 16:11).

626. In fact, the first Christians consistently accorded the women witnesses of the Resurrection a very cold reception. When the pious women returned from the sepulcher and said they had found it empty and repeated the message of the angels, they were told they were talking “nonsense” (§623). Here, when Mary Magdalene reports that she has seen and spoken to Jesus, she fares no better. But even later, when the Apostles and the whole Church were unshakably and officially convinced of Jesus’ resurrection, there still persisted a certain unwillingness to appeal to the testimony of the women. In fact, not one woman is mentioned in the famous passage in which Paul lists, not all certainly, but many of the witnesses of Christ’s resurrection: “He rose again the third day, according to the Scriptures, and . . . appeared to Cephas, and after that to the Eleven. Then he was seen by more than five hundred brethren at one time, many of whom are with us still, but some have fallen asleep. After that he was seen by James, then by all the Apostles. And last of all, as by one born out of due time, he was seen also by me” (*I Cor.* 15:4-8). All these witnesses were men. Probably the official attitude of the Church was prompted by alert prudence, so that Jews and idolaters might not be able to accuse it of being too quick to accept the tales of overimaginative women.

It is certain in any case that the immediate disciples of Jesus, as we shall see presently, were anything but ready to believe anyone —man or woman — who said that he had seen Jesus alive again.

627. The Sanhedrists to whom the soldiers went after their flight from the sepulcher (§621), on the other hand, seemed more ready to believe them. These Jewish leaders found nothing incredible in the story told them by the soldiers, still breathless from running and from fright, and they believed every word of it. But naturally they, like the soldiers, saw the need of some expedient to save themselves as well as these guards they had posted. And they began in their usual fashion to hang little screens up in front of the sun to blot out its unmistakable light. When the chief priests “had assembled with the elders, and had consulted together they gave much money to the soldiers, telling them: ‘Say, “His disciples came by night and stole him while we were sleeping.” And if the procurator hears of this, we will persuade him and keep you out of trouble.’ And they took the money, and did as they were instructed; and this story has been spread abroad among the Jews even to the present day” (*Matt.* 28:12-15).

The coaching the runaway soldiers received from the Sanhedrists — “they stole him while we were sleeping” — was hardly a miracle of shrewdness; and St. Augustine’s answer is still the final one, when he figuratively addresses the Sanhedrin to ask wittily: “How is this? Do you call on witnesses who were asleep?” Much more effective was their money, from the same treasury which had supplied Judas. In any case, the lie took hold and when Matthew was writing his Gospel, it had become the official Jewish explanation for the empty tomb. In fact, we can see in it the seed of that whole crop of calumnies which in succeeding centuries furnished official Judaism with its material for a biography of Jesus (§§88-89).

628. Are there any pagan documents which echo this calumny? There was published in 1930 a Greek inscription entitled “Rescript of Caesar” (*Diatagma Kaisaroz*) directed principally against the *violatio sepulchri*. In it the emperor commands that tombs must remain forever inviolate and that anyone who has tampered with a tomb or exhumed a body or “transported them [bodies] to other places through malicious fraud (*dolw ponhrw*),” or removed inscriptions, etc., is to be brought to trial. The conclusion is as follows: “It is absolutely unlawful for anyone to transfer remains (*metakeinhσαι*); otherwise, I command that he be condemned to death for violating a sepulcher.” The inscription, formerly part of a private collection (Froehner), is

now in Paris. The deceased collector's inventory states that it was sent from Nazareth in 1878.

The mention of Nazareth and the content of the inscription have given rise to a seductive hypothesis. The unnamed Caesar was supposedly Tiberius, who in this rescript was sending instructions into Judea for one particular case. This case, a delicate and a dangerous one, was the empty tomb of Jesus, because according to the lie of the Sanhedrists the disciples had carried away his body. As soon as their version of the story, which could have serious political consequences, became generally known, Pilate sent a detailed report to Tiberius (cf. Justin, *I Apol.*, 35; Tertullian, *Apology* 21; Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, II, 2) both about Jesus' trial and the disappearance of his body. Pilate's report elicited the imperial rescript, which was cut in marble and publicly exposed in Nazareth, the home of Jesus.

The hypothesis is attractive, as I have said, but for that very reason we must beware of it. As soon as the inscription and this interpretation of it were published, the discussions began. The reasons pro and con were minutely examined, and it was discovered that the theory assumes various things as certain and proved which are far from being either.

In the first place, did the inscription really come from Nazareth? The only evidence that it did is the brief annotation of the collector (Froehner) who is now dead, and that is too little to warrant our blind acceptance of it as fact. The inscription may have been sent to Europe from Nazareth, but it may also have been found elsewhere since we know from experience that the Palestinian Beduin carry the *antika* they happen to turn up with spade or hoe around with them from place to place until they find a purchaser. Besides, who is the "Caesar" of the rescript? It is certainly an emperor governing his own provinces directly, in contrast to the senatorial provinces, and so the rescript can be no earlier than 27 B.C. (§20). But from this date, we may come down a long succession of years with nothing in the text or the shape of the letters to give us a solid reason for assigning it to any one particular period. Did it come from Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, or Claudius? All these emperors have been named in connection with it, and even Vespasian and Hadrian; and more or less reasonable arguments have been brought forward for each one of them. Hence, without entering into any discussion here on the nature of the inscription, it does seem risky to restrict it to Tiberius and to Nazareth and to the specific case of Jesus' tomb. Theoretically, it is capable of a variety of

interpretations, all of them likely, but it unfortunately does not offer us any means to discover its one true interpretation.

629. But to return to the gospel narrative, it was still the Sunday after Jesus death, and two or three hours had passed while the various persons mentioned went back and forth to the tomb. In the meanwhile, the news that the women had gone to the tomb at daybreak and found it empty had spread among the disciples of Jesus gathered in the city for the Pasch but now cautious and timid because of the Master's tragic end. The word that Mary Magdalene had seen Jesus and spoken with him had not yet had time to circulate.

But all this was nonsense" prattled by women (§623), and it was not to be taken seriously. The Paschal solemnity did not require the pilgrims to remain in the holy city for the entire octave and on the day after the Pasch, the sixteenth *Nisan*, many of them were already setting out for home. And this was what two of Jesus' disciples did, one of whom was called Cleophas. Hopeless and dispirited over what had taken place, they set out alone for Emmaus where they lived. It must have been about nine in the morning. Luke's account is written with such delicacy and psychological insight that it seems an idyll, and it would be impossible to tell it in any other words.<sup>257</sup>

As they walked along, "they were talking to each other about all these things that had happened. And it came to pass, while they were conversing and arguing together, that Jesus himself also drew near and went along with them; but their eyes were held, that they should not recognize him. And he said to them: 'What words are these that you are exchanging as you walk [along]?' " Who was this strange wayfarer who thus questioned them, putting his finger as it were on the wound in their hearts? Their surprise interrupted their journey for a moment. And they stood still, looking very sad.

"But one of them, named Cleophas, answered and said to him: 'Art thou the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have happened in these days?' — And he said to them: 'What things?

"And they said to him: 'Concerning Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet, mighty in work and word before God and all the people; and how our chief priests and rulers delivered him up to be sentenced to death, and crucified him. But we were hoping that it was he who should redeem (lutrousqai) Israel.'" What "redemption" is Cleophas thinking of? It is difficult to exclude the nationalist-messianic meaning, namely, that Jesus would deliver — though

with the miraculous help of the God of Israel —the holy people from all foreign domination. But at Jesus' death, the hope had vanished, and so Cleophas continues: "Yes, and besides all this, today is the third day since these things came to pass. And moreover, certain women of our company, who were at the tomb before it was light, astounded us, and not finding his body, they came, saying that they had also seen a vision of angels, who said that he is alive. So some of our company went to the tomb, and found it even as the women had said, but him they did not see."

630. These last words show that the two left Jerusalem before Mary Magdalene's announcement that she had seen Jesus, otherwise they would have mentioned this too, if only to cast the same doubt on it. But when Cleophas had finished, the unknown traveler's manner suddenly changed; rather than ignorant of all these things, he now seemed extraordinarily well informed.

"But he said to them: 'O foolish ones and slow of heart to believe in all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things before entering into his glory?' And beginning then with Moses and with all the Prophets" — or with the first two parts of the Hebrew Bible — "he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things referring to himself." Hence the care taken by all the Evangelists in general but especially by Matthew and John to demonstrate the fulfillment of the ancient biblical prophecies in the things pertaining to Jesus is in reality nothing but a continuation of what Jesus himself did in this peripatetic lesson.

The lesson lasted to the end of the journey, but to the disciples both seemed much too short. The narrative continues: "And they drew near to the village to which they were going, and he acted as though he were going on. And they urged him, saying: 'Stay with us, for it is getting towards evening (*proz esperan estin*), and the day is now far spent.' And he went in [to stay] with them." It is not necessary to suppose that it was already nightfall. The expression "toward evening" could apply any time from noontime on (cf. *Judges* 19:9 with 14), and so if the two disciples had left Jerusalem about nine o'clock in the morning and traveled approximately twenty miles, it must have been by now toward two or three in the afternoon. "And it came to pass that when he reclined at table with them, that he took the bread and blessed and broke and began handing it to them. And their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. And they said to each other: Was not our heart burning within us while he was speaking on the road and



explaining to us the Scriptures?’” The fact that the two disciples recognized Jesus at the breaking of the bread has often been linked with the phrase “to break bread,” which in the early Church designated the Eucharist, and so it was concluded that Jesus renewed this rite at Emmaus. But the conclusion is not justified, historically speaking, for we do not know whether these two disciples knew that Jesus had instituted the Eucharist three days before, or whether Jesus spoke to them of it along the way, or whether he would be likely to perform the rite for anyone who had no idea of it. If we restrict ourselves to the letter of the narrative, we may conclude only that the disciples recognized Jesus while he was breaking the bread, that is, before eating, whether or not they actually ate it afterward midst the surprise and wonder of the recognition.

631. Their emotion and wonder were so great that they immediately set out again: “And rising up that very hour, they returned to Jerusalem, where they found the Eleven gathered together and those who were with them, saying: The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon.’ And they themselves began to relate what had happened on the journey, and how they recognized him in the breaking of the bread” (*Luke 24:14-35*). If they had left Emmaus again between two and three in the afternoon and taken the shortest route, perhaps on horseback, they could have been in Jerusalem by eight or nine in the evening.

But even when they reached the city it was not easy for them to find the Apostles because no one had seen them and no one knew where they were. They finally discovered them in a very safe hiding place, with all the doors carefully barred for fear of the Jews” (*John 20:19*). But notwithstanding their outward fearful caution, they were all very much moved and excited. As soon as the two dust-covered travelers entered the room, certain that they were bearing astonishing news, they were greeted with an outburst which prevented them from saying a word. All the Apostles crowded around them to announce: “The Lord has risen indeed, and has appeared to Simon!” Hence on that same day, after the two disciples had left Jerusalem and after he had appeared to Mary Magdalene, Jesus appeared also to Simon Peter; and the latter hastened to tell the Apostles and other disciples, winning from them the belief which Mary Magdalene had not.

None of the Evangelists relates any detail of Jesus' appearing to Simon Peter on this Sunday after his death, but it is unquestionably the same appearance which Paul sets first in his list of the resurrected Christ's appearances (§626).

Luke, the disciple of Paul, learned of it from his master, and the latter in his turn had learned of it, among others, from Peter himself, when, still new to the faith, he had gone To Jerusalem to see Peter” (*Gal.* 1:18). The Rock of the Church had been singled out from among the other Apostles by virtue of his office; he who had denied Jesus had been abundantly forgiven because of his abundant tears of repentance, such as Judas had not shed.

When the two travelers finally got the opportunity to speak of their own experience, their words were unexpectedly received with great coldness. Whether it was a certain diffidence the Apostles felt toward the two from Emmaus, or a subconscious resentment that these obscure disciples had received the same privilege just granted to Peter but still denied to them, it is certain that, if not all, at least several of those present "even then . . . did not believe” (*Mark* 16:12). And it is easy to imagine the discussions which arose between the two insisting they had seen the Master and those refusing to believe they had, which perhaps lasted some time.

632. But that day was to end with certainty, not with discussions and disbelief. "Now whilst they were speaking these things [Jesus] himself stood in their midst, and saith to them: ‘Peace be to you.’ But they were terrified and stricken with fear and thought that they beheld a spirit.

“And he said to them: ‘Why are ye troubled, and wherefore do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and feet, that it is my very self. Feel me and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me to have.’ — And saying this, he showed them his hands and his feet. But as they still disbelieved for very joy and marveled, he said to them: ‘Have ye aught here to eat?’

"They handed him part of a broiled fish; and he took and ate [it] before them” (*Luke* 24:36-43). We must remember that this scene is described for us by a physician and psychologist; the same episode related by John (20:19-23) does not contain the practical observations that betoken the scientific mind nor the subtle notice that the Apostles "disbelieved for very joy,” that is, for fear of deceiving themselves since it is so easy to believe what one is anxious to believe. Their doubts were dispelled by physical reality. In his second life Jesus has the very same body as before; he can eat just as he did before. He is not a misty shade risen from Sheol (§79); his physical body has come to life again and rejoined his soul.

Having assured them of this present fact Jesus tells them of the future, and that is what John records for us especially: " ‘As the Father has sent me, I also

send you.’ When he had said this, he breathed upon them (enefushsen) and said to them: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit; whose sins you shall forgive, they are forgiven them; and whose sins you shall retain, they are retained’” (*John* 20:21-23). The old promise made the Apostles regarding the future government of the Church (§397, §409) was here fulfilled.

633. Not present that evening in the Apostles’ cautious retreat was the diffident and skeptical Thomas (§372, §489). Was his absence perhaps another manifestation of his character? Did he refuse even to discuss the assertions of Mary Magdalene and Peter and therefore avoid the company of the other Apostles? We do not know, and any answer we might try to give would be mere conjecture. Certain it is that when a little later he was with the Apostles and they assured him: “We have seen the Lord,” he shook his head, almost as if scandalized, and vehemently declared: “Unless I see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the place of the nails, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe!”

After all, they must be reasonable! How could a man rise again when he had been crucified, reduced to a mass of torn and wounded flesh, with his hands and feet pierced and a gaping hole in his side? Mary Magdalene had seen him? Now what reason could there possibly be for believing a hysterical woman, a woman from whom “seven devils had gone forth” (§343.) no less? The other Apostles had seen him, and had especially noticed his hands and feet? Well, those Apostles were all fine good men, but they were a little on the volatile side and too easily imagined they saw what they wanted to see! He, Thomas, was the calm, deliberate man among them, just the right man to have around in certain cases; and in cases like this, it was not enough to see — one must touch and feel, and put in one’s fingers; only on this condition would he believe!

The prince of positivists and hypercritics remained unshakable in his conviction for eight days, and no argument the Apostles might propose could budge him. But “after eight days, his disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being closed, and stood in their midst, and said: ‘Peace be to you!’ Then he said to Thomas: ‘Bring here thy finger, and see my hands; and bring here thy hand, and put it into my side; and be not unbelieving, but believing.’ Thomas answered and said to him: ‘My Lord and my God!’ Jesus said to him: ‘Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed. Blessed are they who have not seen, and yet have believed.’” Did Thomas stick to his intention to feel the body of the resurrected Christ? We have every

reason to believe he did not. His hypercritical positivism collapsed, as it always does, not so much as the result of intellectual discussion as of a change in spiritual disposition.

## THE APPARITIONS IN GALILEE

634. All of the appearances of Jesus which we have discussed up to this point took place in Jerusalem or its environs, that is, in Judea. There were still others, also narrated by the Evangelists, which took place shortly afterward in Galilee; of those recorded by Paul (§626) some undoubtedly took place in Judea and some in Galilee.

The difference in place has an importance of its own. The angels at the sepulcher had charged the women to bid the disciples and Peter to go into Galilee where they would see the risen Christ (§623). Matthew and Mark both record this, and in fact they relate only the apparitions in Galilee (except *Matt.* 28:9-10, and the appendix of *Mark* 16:9-20). This bidding is not given in either Luke or John, and hence these Gospels relate at length the appearances in Judea, though without omitting those in Galilee entirely (for example, *John* 21). But these differences derive solely from the particular choice and purpose of the respective Evangelists. In Galilee Jesus appeared to more numerous groups of witnesses and gave more ample and fundamental instructions concerning the kingdom of heaven (cf. *Matt.* 28:16-17, and *1 Cor.* 15:6). Matthew and Mark do not relate these things explicitly so much as they imply them. Hence, to call the reader's attention to these appearances, they relate first the bidding of the angels, which directed the disciples to Galilee. But this choice on the part of the first two Synoptics does not preclude the tradition concerning Jesus' appearances in Judea, which Luke and John, to a certain extent, chose to relate instead for their particular purposes. We know by now from long experience that no one of the Evangelists pretends to exhaust his subject, and we have here still another clear confirmation of this from Luke. After recounting Jesus' appearances on the Sunday of the Resurrection (24:1-49), he proceeds immediately to the Ascension (24:50-53), so that if we read only his Gospel, we should rightly conclude that the Resurrection and the Ascension occurred on the same day. But soon after finishing his Gospel the same Luke also wrote the Acts, in which (1:3) he states more explicitly that after his Resurrection, Jesus showed himself alive to the Apostles "by many proofs" and spoke to them "during forty days" of the kingdom of God. Hence, we have two traditions in the New Testament, one concerning the

appearances in Galilee and the other those in Judea. Neither one is complete in itself nor does it exclude the other, although each writer follows one or the other, and sometimes (Paul, John) both.<sup>258</sup>

635. When the festivities of the Pasch were all ended, the Apostles returned into Galilee, in obedience to the command Jesus had given them (§623; *Matt.* 26:32) and prompted besides by the fact that in Galilee they would be at a safe distance from the direct surveillance of the Sanhedrin, and therefore freer to wait for the risen Jesus to appear to them when and how he pleased. Jesus' promise had indeed mentioned the place, but not the time, and so there was nothing to do but wait. Perhaps the Apostles left Jerusalem a few hours after Jesus had shown himself to Thomas, when they may have already been gathered to form the caravan for the return journey. Some days later, we find once more on the shores of Lake Tiberias Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael (Bartholomew), James and John, and two other unnamed Apostles, who were perhaps Andrew and Philip.

The little group probably still supported themselves from their common earnings, just as they had when Jesus was with them and the purse was kept by Judas. It may be that after Judas' disappearance with all their resources and their expenses in Jerusalem and for the journey they had little or nothing left. In any case, fishermen that they were, they could not remain idle with the lake rippling invitingly before them, and though awaiting from one day to the next the return of the risen Christ, they resumed their old occupations to earn their living in the meanwhile. One evening Simon Peter said to the others: "I am going fishing." And they answered: "We also are going with thee." For night fishing it was better to have a number of helpers because then they could use the long drag nets. So they got into the boat and cast their nets, but it was a hopelessly bad night, and at dawn they had not yet caught anything. After all, Simon Peter had known similar nights in the past (§303). So they pulled toward shore again to disembark.

When they were about two hundred cubits (or about a hundred yards) from land, they glimpsed a figure through the mist; they could not see it at all clearly, but it seemed to be a man waiting for them. Perhaps he wanted to buy their catch. When they were within calling distance he asked: "Young men, have you any fish?" After that long night of wasted toil and effort the question sounded more than a little ironic and from the boat came a quick brusque "No!" which would normally discourage any further discussion. But the man

shouted again through the morning mist: "Cast the net to the right of the boat and you will find them."

Who was this unknown person giving them such confident advice? Was he just talking for something to say or did he know what he was talking about? Both alternatives were possible; but so many times expert fishermen can draw precious information from the faintest sign in the water, and perhaps this man had seen some good indication from the shore where he was standing. In any case, one more attempt would not cost them too much after all they had done in vain. The net was cast where the man had said, and now they were unable to draw it up for the great number of fishes."

At this, old memories rose in the minds of those fishermen (§303). An instant of tremulous uncertainty and then the disciple whom Jesus loved leaped to Peter's side, and pointing to the man on the shore, shouted: "It is the Lord!" Then everything was suddenly perfectly clear and natural.

636. When Simon Peter therefore heard that it was the Lord, he girded his coat about him (ton epndutahn diexwsato) — for he was naked — and cast himself into the sea. But the other disciples came with the boat, dragging the net full of fish; for they were not far from land, but about a hundred yards off. The impetuous Peter naturally could not wait; he had to jump into the water to get to shore as quickly as possible. To swim more easily he tied up his coat about him, which he wore over his bare skin while working. Hence, he was "naked" (gumnoz) in that he was not wearing the customary tunic, but he was wearing the coat, which he girt up about his waist at John's shout. A few strokes carried the swimmer to shore and he was soon at the feet of his risen Master, but the others stayed in the boat, which came in slowly because it was dragging the great weight of the fish.

When they disembarked, they saw a little fire already lit, with a fish laid upon it and the bread prepared for them. "Jesus said to them: 'Bring here some of the fishes that you caught just now.'" Peter went back into the boat, and with the other Apostles hauled the net to land; it contained one hundred and fifty-three large fish.<sup>259</sup> "And though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them: 'Come and breakfast.' And none [of the disciples] dared ask him: Who art thou?' knowing that it was the Lord." The Apostles felt a certain reverent fear, almost a mystical reserve, that prevented them from asking their risen Master anything about himself. That he was himself, there was absolutely no doubt; but oh! how they would have liked to ask him: How

did you rise from the dead? Where have you been all these days? How did you come here? Where are you when you are not with us?

But they could not speak for reverence, and "none . . . dared ask him."

637. Their reverence did not affect their appetites, however, and they all ate joyously the bread and the fish which Jesus divided among them. And when their bodies had been refreshed, Jesus spoke to their souls. 'When, therefore, they had breakfasted, Jesus said to Simon Peter: 'Simon, son of John, dost thou love me (agapaz) more than these do?' He [Peter] said to him: 'Yes, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee' (filw). He [Jesus] said to him: 'Feed my lambs.' He said to him a second time: 'Simon, son of John, dost thou love me?' He said to him: 'Yes, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee.' He said to him: 'Feed my lambs.' A third time he said to him: 'Simon, son of John, dost thou love (fileiz) me?' Peter was grieved because he said to him for the third time: 'Dost thou love me?' And he said to him: Lord, thou knowest all things, thou knowest that I love thee.' He said to him: 'Feed my sheep....'" Jesus' threefold question, in tactful charity, made no explicit reference to the past, but in its threefold repetition it was nevertheless linked with a painful past. Three times had Peter denied the Master in the hour of darkness, and now, in the hour of light he three times professes his love for him.

But the threefold question was linked with the past in still another way. On the day of Caesarea Philippi, Jesus had proclaimed the same Simon Peter the Rock which was the foundation of the Church and had charged him to govern it as a shepherd rules his flock (§397). Now Simon Peter must remember that this office entrusted to him is to be a labor of love, a consequence of the love he has professed for Jesus. The supreme Shepherd will depart from his flock, but he will not leave it unprotected. In his stead, he places over it a shepherd who is his vicar and who must rule it with the same love and for the same love which has animated the supreme Shepherd.

The Shepherd has been killed for that love; hence it is possible that the same fate awaits his vicar. Jesus predicts this as a certainty for Peter personally for he continues: "'... Amen, amen, I say to thee, when thou wast young thou didst gird thyself,'" as Peter had actually done but a little while before, " and walk where thou wouldst. But when thou art old thou wilt stretch forth thy hands, and another will gird thee, and lead thee where thou wouldst not.' Now this he said to signify by what manner of death he [Peter] should glorify God." When John wrote this last statement, Peter had already



been killed, several years before, for his faith in Jesus and his love for the office entrusted to him. Others had in truth girt him with chains and led him to his execution, so that the vicar followed the Shepherd even in his death. That was why Jesus closed his message to Peter saying, by way of exhortation and of comfort both: "Follow me!"

638. But this and Jesus' other appearances in Galilee obviously did not have the solemnity of the occasion mentioned by *Matthew* (28:16ff.). This incident occurred on a mountain which, we are told incidentally, Jesus had already named to the Apostles as the place where he would meet them. With only this bit of information, it is naturally impossible to determine which mountain it was; we might suppose it was the Mount of the Beatitudes or of the Sermon on the Mount (§316) but only on the basis of the similarity between the scenes described. It is very possible that at the beginning or the end of this appearance, which must have been a long one, there were other disciples besides the Apostles present; but it is not at all certain that Paul is referring specifically to this occasion when he mentions that the risen Jesus "was seen by more than five hundred brethren at one time, many of whom are with us still" (§626).

This time no details of the episode are recorded for us. Hence, we do not know to what circumstances or persons the phrase "but some doubted" (oi de edistan) refers. Perhaps these doubters were not the Apostles, and if they were the Apostles, their "doubt" had nothing to do with the reality of the Resurrection but perhaps questioned some circumstance which was to establish the identity of the risen Master. When the Apostles were certain it was he, Jesus said to them: "All power in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples (maqhteusate) of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching (didaskontez) them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you all days, even unto the consummation of the world" (sunteleiaz tou aiwnoz: cf. §525).

The Church founded by Jesus was now entering upon a new period in its history, a period which is to last until the end of the world. The vicar is to take the place of its Shepherd; the flock must be composed of all peoples of every race and region and not of the chosen nation of Israel alone; all the newcomers to the flock will be "disciples" of Jesus, just as those who had known him personally had been his immediate disciples. They must enter into the flock through baptism and through faith "in the name of the Father, and of



the Son, and of the Holy Spirit." The task and duty of the new disciples will be to observe what Jesus had commanded his first disciples to observe. Above all, the Shepherd himself will help and protect his flock; in an invisible but no less effective manner, he will be among his future disciples "even unto the consummation of the world."

Here, therefore, the story of Jesus ends and that of the Church begins: the life of Christ "according to the flesh" comes to a close and that of the mystical Christ begins (*Eph.* 5:23; *Col.* 1:18).

## THE ASCENSION

639. Entirely absorbed in this idea, that the story of Christ according to the flesh is but the first chapter in the history of the Church, the Evangelists have given little emphasis to his physical departure from the earth, namely, his Ascension. The loss of his visible and tangible presence did not matter so much now they were convinced of his invisible presence and his continued assistance from heaven. So, we find that Matthew does not relate the Ascension at all; it is briefly mentioned in the appendix in *Mark* (16:19); John (20:17) barely suggests it and then in the form of a prediction; the only Evangelist who describes it at any length is Luke (24:50 ff.), but this is precisely because when he brings to a close his Gospel, which is the story of Christ according to the flesh, he is already planning to follow it immediately with the story of the mystical Christ as well. His *Acts of the Apostles* are an episodic history of the Church, and at the beginning of this new work (*Acts* 1:1-11) he repeats the story of the Ascension with which he had ended his Gospel.

The Ascension occurred on the Mount of Olives near Bethany, forty days after the Resurrection. Since the Apostles left Jerusalem for Galilee no less than eight days after the Resurrection (§635) and were again in Jerusalem some time before the Ascension, they must have stayed in Galilee less than a month. It is to this period that we must assign the other many appearances indicated in a general way by Paul (§626) and also by Luke when he says that the risen Jesus appeared to the Apostles, showing himself alive "by many proofs," speaking to them of the kingdom of God and meeting habitually with them (*Acts* 1:3-4). Undoubtedly, they had gone up to Jerusalem again at Jesus' bidding, and there they met for the last time. The risen Master gave them his last instructions, among them that they were not to leave the city but were to wait there "for the promise of the Father, 'of which you have heard ... by my

mouth; for John indeed baptized with water, but you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence” (Acts 1:4-5).

640. The promise referred to what took place shortly afterward on the day of the Jewish Pentecost (§76) when the Holy Spirit descended upon them. But even at this last meeting with the risen Master, the Apostles felt vaguely that something extraordinary was about to happen. And in their minds rose again the old messianic ideas so dear to their nation, so deeply rooted in their Jewish souls that they had survived in part even the realities of Jesus’ death and resurrection.

Hence, they approached Jesus, full of hope and with an affectionate smile of expectancy as if to invite the confidence they had so long hoped for, and they asked him: "Lord, wilt thou at this time restore (apokaqistaneiz) the kingdom to Israel?" Poor Israel had, in fact, been shorn for many years now of all political power and subjected first to the bastard Herods and then to the uncircumcised Romans; this would indeed be the opportune time to create a fine kingdom for it, the king of which would naturally be Jesus himself who would use the Apostles as his ministers. With an organization like that, it would be extremely easy to dispatch armies to the four corners of the world to rout the Romans and at the same time preach the doctrine of Jesus. What would be the harm of accomplishing both things at once, of being political conquerors and at the same time missionaries of the Gospel with sword in hand. The ancient Psalm had glorified the saints of Israel who had

"the high praises of God ... in their mouth,  
and two-edged swords in their hands." (Ps. 149:6).

Now Jesus, who had raised himself from the dead, could raise dead Israel to a new life of political glory.

But unfortunately the risen Messiah’ answer this time was just what it had been on this subject so many times before his death, that is, it chilled instantly the fiery spirits of his Apostles: "It is not for you to know the times or dates which the Father has fixed by his own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you shall be witnesses for me in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and even to the very ends of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8). It is not for the Apostles to worry about the manifest triumph of the kingdom of God; the hour of this triumph has been established by the heavenly Father and it will come when he wishes. Instead of thinking of far-famed political conquests, the Apostles must propose to conquer the

whole world, Hebrew and non-Hebrew, to the teaching of Jesus, and they will achieve this conquest not by military or political strategy but solely by virtue of that “power” which they will receive when the Holy Spirit descends upon them.

This was Jesus’ farewell to the friends he loved best. When he had finished speaking, he left Jerusalem with them and led them along the dear familiar road to Bethany. Toward the top of the Mount of Olives, he gathered them about him and raised his hands to bless them; and it came to pass as he blessed them, that he parted from them and was carried up into heaven” (*Luke 24:51*). He was lifted up before their eyes, and a cloud took him out of their sight” (*Acts 1:9*).

Jesus’ four official biographers do not go beyond the earth; their narratives end with the Ascension or just before it. Only the appendix of Mark’s Gospel (16:19) casts a fleeting glance heavenward and states that Jesus “was taken up into heaven, and sits at the right hand of God.” These last words, which proclaim that the man Jesus was associated in glory and power with the heavenly Father, are especially dictated by the “mind of the Church”; but this “mind,” which has given us the four accounts of Jesus’ earthly life, shrank from even a single narrative of his heavenly life, and has recorded only what would be its fundamental theme: “He sits at the right hand of God.”

## A Backward Glance

Jesus is the greatest paradox in history. He appears in a region of secondary importance in the Roman Empire, in a nation which its conquerors are quick to describe as the 'most dismal' of all (Tacitus) and "injurious to the others" (Quintilian), "a contemptible collection of slaves" (Tacitus). Not once in all his life does he emerge from among this people of his, not once does he evince any desire to know the world of the learned, the aesthetes, the politicians and the warriors who hold the civil society of his day in their grasp. In his own region, he spends at least nine tenths of his life in an extremely humble little village, known only to be despised, proverbial for its worthlessness. There he attends no schools, handles no learned parchments, has no correspondence with distant scholars of his nation. He is simply and solely a carpenter. For thirty years no one knows who he is except for two or three people who are as silent as he.

All of a sudden, when he is past thirty, he emerges into public life and begins a new activity. He has no human means of any kind at his disposal. He has no weapons, no money, no academic knowledge, no aesthetic power, no political support. He spends almost all his time among poor folk, fishermen, and peasants; with particular solicitude he seeks out publicans, harlots, and others rejected by good society. Among these people he works miracles in great number and variety. He joins to himself a little group of fishermen who follow him constantly as his particular disciples. His activity lasts less than three years.

What he does is preach a doctrine which is neither philosophical nor political, but religious and moral exclusively. It is the most unheard-of teaching that has ever been stated in the whole world. It seems a doctrine composed of everything that all the various philosophies have unanimously rejected, of all that the entire world, in every region, has consistently cast as far from it as it could. What is evil for the world is for Jesus a good; what the world deems a good, for Jesus is an evil. Poverty, humility, submission, the silent sufferance of insult and injury, withdrawing oneself to give way to others — these are the greatest of evils in the world and the greatest goods to Jesus. Conversely, wealth, honors, dominion over others, and all the other many things which spell happiness for the world represent a total loss for Jesus, or at least a very serious danger.

The world, in fact, sees only the visible and the tangible; Jesus declares that he sees the unseen. The world fixes its gaze on nothing but the earth, and it sees it from below. Jesus fixes his gaze on heaven especially, and he contemplates the earth from heaven. For Jesus, the earth has no sense or meaning of its own; it is a painful and fleeting episode which has no adequate solution in itself. It receives its adequate solution only in heaven; it derives meaning and significance only from heaven. The present life has value only as preparation for a future life; it is a toilsome and impermanent dwelling, but it has value as a runway, from which to take off for the flight toward a permanent and joy-filled home. The tenants of the impermanent dwelling who place all their hopes in it alone and refuse to leave it comprise the kingdom of the world. On the other hand, the tenants who remain in it only through resigned obedience but aspire constantly to their permanent home, preparing their journey to it, these constitute the kingdom of God.

Between the two kingdoms there is relentless warfare both in the present and the future; neither of the two will cease warring until the other is utterly defeated. The respective strengths of both kingdoms derive from love, but for different objects. The subjects of the kingdom of the world love only themselves or whatever is useful or pleasing to themselves; for all other beings on earth and in heaven they feel either formal hatred or cold indifference. The subjects of the kingdom of God love God first of all, and then the whole hierarchy of beings down to those who are useless and who do evil, and for these they have a particular love, and they seek to do good to those who do evil or do not know how to do good. For them to give is to acquire, and therefore they do not know any hatred, which is the peak of avarice. Of this kingdom of God, the strength of which is the love of God and of men, Jesus is the founder.

The kingdom of God is the kingdom foretold by the ancient prophets of Israel, who predicted that its founder would be the Messiah promised the chosen people. In preaching his anti-mundane doctrine Jesus is conscious of his identity as the Messiah, but he does not declare himself in the beginning in order that the crowds, throbbing with politico-messianic hopes, may not acclaim him as a national leader and interpret his doctrine as a political proclamation. Hence his mission is a most difficult one. He must instruct the crowds in matters that will be sure to be misunderstood, for when he speaks of victory over evil, they will think he means victory over the Romans, and when he names the kingdom of God, they will think he means the dominion

of Israel. And yet he has to speak of these matters and use precisely these terms because they have been already established in the Holy Scriptures of the people of God. And Jesus, as the Messiah, has come to fulfill those Scriptures, not to annul them; to complete, not to destroy. His personal mission is directed solely to the chosen people, the depository of God's ancient promises; when those promises have been fulfilled, however, the effects of his mission will pour over all the peoples of the earth.

To this end, he institutes a permanent society, the Church.

But the majority of the chosen people do not accept his preaching, and those most hostile to him are none others than the leaders of that people, namely, the chief priests from the Temple and the Pharisees from the synagogues. In Galilee, his work yields very meager fruit, and so he abandons it and goes into Judea and to the capital, Jerusalem. Here the harvest is no greater than in Galilee, but the hostility he encounters is very much greater. The chief priests and the Pharisees are convinced of his miraculous power, and they would not take issue with him on many points of his teaching. But they do not forgive his outspoken denunciation of the hypocrisy of the ruling classes and his unflinching condemnation of the empty formalism which is withering their religious life. After having unwillingly tolerated him for some time, they arrest him through treachery, condemn him in the tribunal of their nation on religious charges, and have him condemned a second time in the tribunal of the representative of Rome on political charges.

Jesus dies on the cross.

After three days, those who have condemned him are convinced that he has risen. His disciples are at first unconvinced; but they later yield to the evidence of their senses, for they see him and touch him with their hands a number of times, and speak with him just as they did before his death.

But the paradox of Jesus continues, unchanged, even after his death. Just as in his first life he was the antithesis of the world, so the institution which he founded continues in the most incredible manner to be a negation of the world.

He left no echo of himself in the upper circles of the society of his time. In the whole Roman Empire, the historians ignore him, the learned are unaware of his teachings, the civil authorities have at the most noted his death in their records, as they would the death of a revolutionary slave, and have given it no further thought. The very leaders of his nation, satisfied with his

disappearance from the scene, are more than ready to forget him altogether. His institution seems to have been reduced to the agony of his own tortured body on the cross. Before it the world stands to gloat in triumph over its agony, just as the chief priests stood gloating at the foot of his cross.

And instead, this institution shuddering in agony suddenly rises up again to gather into its arms the entire world. There are three centuries of persecution and slaughter, three centuries which seem to prolong the agony of the cross and re-echo the three days in the sepulcher, but after the third century civil society becomes officially the disciple of Jesus.

The kingdom of the world is not overthrown, however, and the war goes on in somewhat different forms but with the same obdurate tenacity as before. Jesus, or his institution, becomes increasingly the “sign of contradiction” in the history of human civilization. His utterly paradoxical and burdensome doctrine has been accepted by infinite numbers of men and practiced with intense love, even to the supreme sacrifice. Infinite numbers of others reject it with inflexible pertinacity and hate it with a rabid hatred. It might be said that the efforts of the most civilized portion of humanity have all been concentrated on this “sign of contradiction,” either to exalt it or to trample it underfoot.

The furious conflict goes on, not without frauds and treachery. Often troops appear waving standards copied after the “sign of contradiction” and shouting cries tuned to the precepts of Jesus; they proclaim brotherhood and other altruisms unknown to the subjects of the world. But the deception does not last; in the end the imitation betrays itself because its voice and its accent are different.

Certain it is that Jesus is today more alive than ever among men. All have need of him, either to love him or to curse him, but they cannot do without him. Many men in the past have been loved with extreme intensity — Socrates by his disciples, Julius Caesar by his legionaries, Napoleon by his soldiers. But today these men belong irrevocably to the past; not a heart beats at their memory. There is no one who would give his life or even his possessions for them even though their ideals are still being advocated. And when their ideals are opposed, no one ever thinks of cursing Socrates or Julius Caesar or Napoleon, because their personalities no longer have any influence; they are by-gones. But not Jesus; Jesus is still loved and he is still cursed; men

still renounce their possessions and even their lives both for love of him and out of hatred for him.

No living being is as alive as Jesus.

He is the “sign of contradiction” in his historical reality also. It is true that the celebrated historians of the great official world of his time are unaware of his existence. This is not surprising, for these historians, dazzled by the splendor of the Rome of Augustus, lacked the sharpness of vision — and even the documents — to discover an obscure barbarian from among a “contemptible collection of slaves.” But this does not mean that the figure of Jesus is historically less documented and certain than that of Augustus and other of his famous contemporaries. Certainly, we today desire most earnestly to know much more about him than we do; but if the things we know are too few for our desire, in compensation the writers who have recorded them for us enjoy a prime authority. Of these four writers, two are eyewitnesses who were at Jesus’ side night and day for almost all his public life. The other two knew and abundantly questioned similar witnesses. All four narratives are told with precious simplicity and lack of ornament and with that “dispassionateness” before the facts, whether pleasing or atrocious, which does not in the least belie their sympathies but knows how to rise far above them. There is no doubt that the four Gospels are propaganda; their authors wrote them in order to acquaint the world with Jesus and spread belief in him. But for that very reason they had to take the way of objectivity and truth, because thousands of interested witnesses were ready to rise and contradict those narratives had they been prejudiced or fabricated. The guarantee we have for the historicity of the facts and teachings of Jesus is not equaled even by that for Augustus and his other famous contemporaries.

But here, as in everything else, the “sign of contradiction” is contradicted again. The Jesus presented to us by the four historians is not true, he cannot be true because he is supernatural. It is necessary to reduce the portrait painted by the four Evangelists to natural, rational proportions, to trim away the miraculous. This is the program of rationalist criticism.

Reimarus starts it, and he declares that the Evangelists are common cheats and liars. — Paulus comes next, but he defends the Evangelists: they are in perfect good faith, only they are naive enthusiasts and do not understand what they see. — Strauss continues: the Evangelists do not pretend to be relating true history; they are merely setting forth myths, abstract concepts



expressed in the form of historical fact. — Baur sees things differently; the gospel narratives are the result of conflicts within the social life of the Church and they contain little that is history. — In fact, Baur adds a little later, they contain nothing that is fact, and Jesus has never existed; he is a myth. — Then comes the Liberal school, for whom Jesus is a kind of “revivalist,” a dewy preacher of piety for men and religious feeling for God. — But the eschatologists come forward to find that Jesus is a visionary and a fanatic who thinks the end of the world is imminent and so preaches his paradoxical teachings of renunciation and self-denial. — Finally, the critics go back to Baur’s idea and maintain that Jesus is a mythical creature who never existed on the face of the earth.

Well, all these various interpretations inevitably rise as a reaction of one against the other. One always flatly denies what the preceding theory has maintained. On one point only do they agree perfectly, and that is that the gospel narratives are not historical and therefore that the Jesus of tradition is false.

There is one very eloquent practical consequence of all this. If the Jesus of tradition is not true, and if, on the other hand, no way has been found to prove in what way or to what degree he is not true, then it is impossible today to write any scientific biography of Jesus. And that is the fact as it stands: the great “lives” of Jesus produced in abundance by the Liberal school appeal no more today; there are at the briefest sketches of Jesus’ personality, in which the traits historically certain have been reduced to almost nothing. The result is an elusive and intangible Jesus, who for all practical purposes very closely resembles the completely mythical Jesus. And this is the last word spoken by rationalist criticism on the subject of the Gospels.

Now all this is no more than an episode in the centuries-long conflict between Jesus and the world. We said that the conflict will not end until one of the two has completely defeated the other; that is why the world defeats Jesus in the historical field by erasing as much as it can of his figure and personality.

It is the old strategy. The Pharisees too wanted to obliterate Jesus entirely, his works, his teachings, his institution. They were even afraid of his cold dead body, and they sealed it in the tomb and set their guards in front of it. Since then, Jesus has been obliterated from the face of the earth and sealed in his tomb a thousand times, and the guards set in front of it have been, according

to the period, the state or religion, philosophy or science, democracy or aristocracy, the proletariat or the nation.

But what has happened in the past? What will happen in the future?

The Gospels tell us that the Jesus whom the Pharisees sealed in his tomb rose again. History tells us that the Jesus afterward killed a thousand times has always come back more alive than ever before. Now, since the strategy is unchanged, there is every reason to believe that the same will be true of the Jesus nailed back on the cross by historical criticism.

These critics, in fact, are utterly devoid of originality; they do nothing but repeat the old tactics, copy the same old methods over and over again. They have stolen the method of the Pharisees; they have even plagiarized the devil.

After his description of Jesus' death, Renan says: "Rest in your glory, O noble innovator! Your work is finished, your divinity has been established. Fear no more that the edifice you have erected will fall through some error; from now on, immune from all frailty, you will watch from the peak of divine peace the infinite consequences of your acts.... For thousands of years the world will obey you: the standard of our conflicts, you will be the sign about which the fiercest battles of all will be waged. A thousand times more alive, a thousand times more beloved after your death than during your sojourn here below, you will become the cornerstone of humanity, so much so that to tear your name from the world would be to tumble it from its very foundations. Men will no longer distinguish between you and God . . . etc."

Now this is nothing but rhetoric; it is sheer declamation devoid of sincerity or any true feeling. Worse still, the whole declamation is a plagiarism; it is a steal from the devil himself. Luke relates (4:41), in fact, that at Jesus' command "devils also come forth from many, crying out and saying: 'Thou art the Son of God!'" Stretch this restrained and substantial declaration of the devil over a few sentences of highly wrought prose, and you have the grandiloquent peroration of Renan.

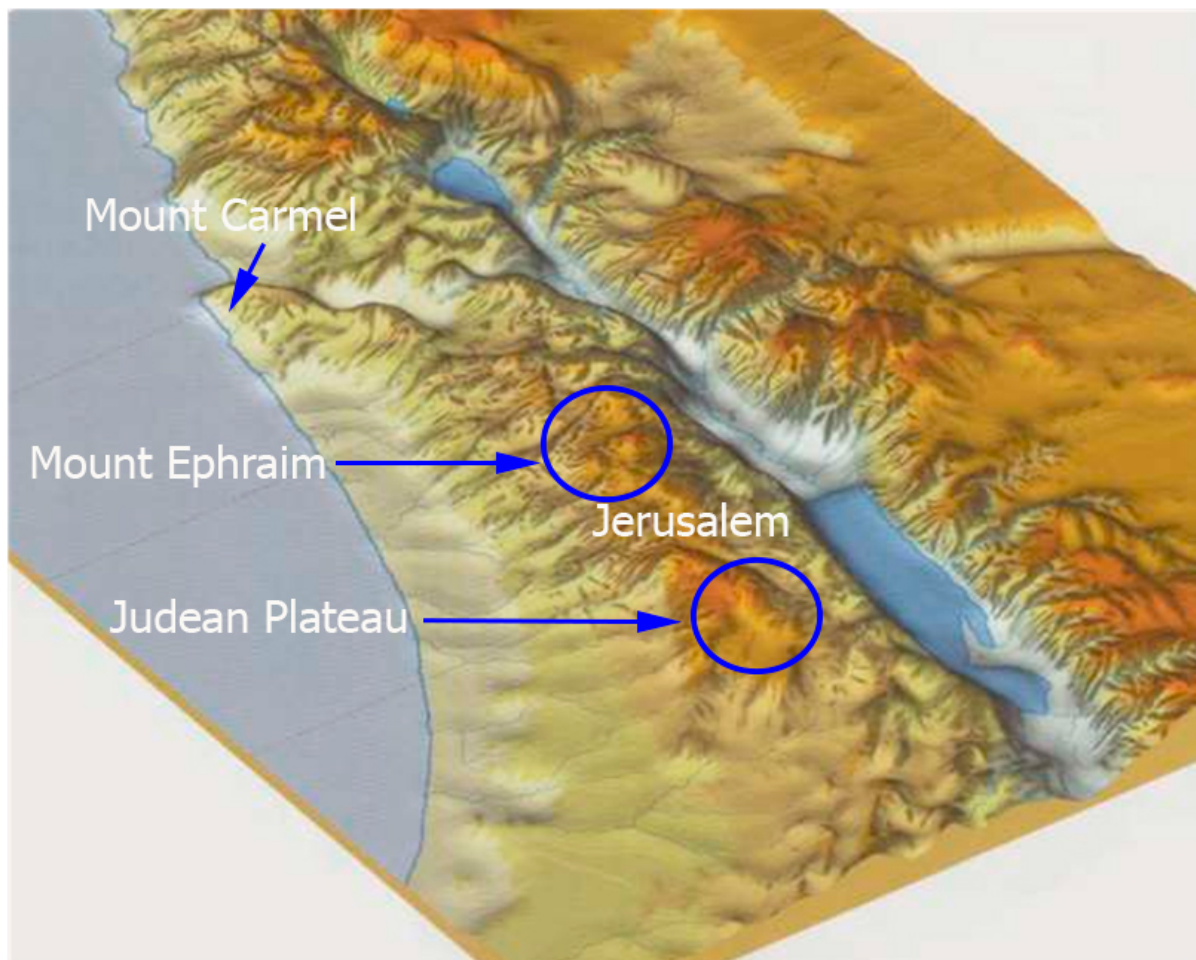
Between the two, in this case, it is better to choose the devil. The "father of lies" is the much more competent judge, and above all, he is the more truthful.

And the conflict around the "sign of contradiction" will continue, as long as there are men upon the earth.

## Figures

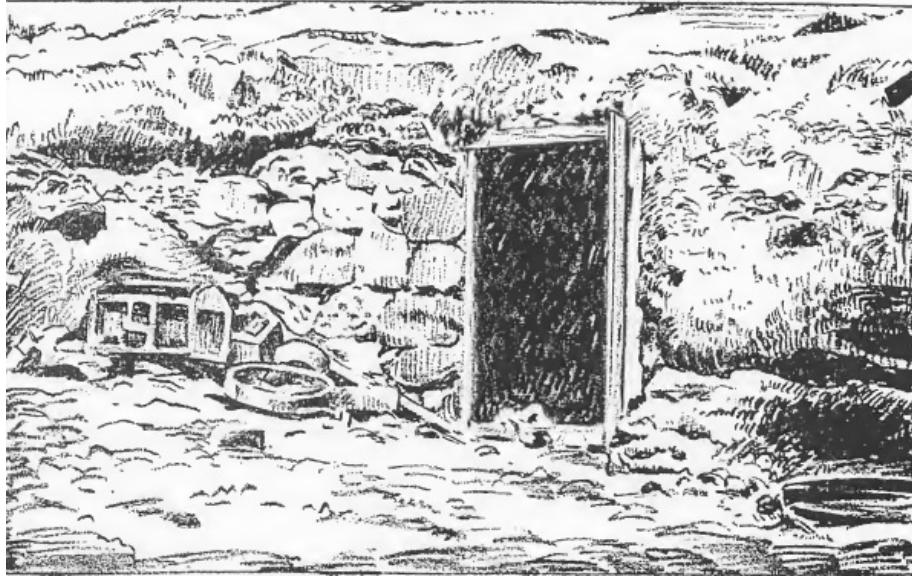


Figure 1. Israel in the Time of Jesus.



*Figure 2. Topography of region. Note the other major mountains and raised regions besides Jerusalem.*





*Figure 3: Nazareth. An ancient cave, used as a dwelling.*



*Figure 4. The Jordan river.*





*Figure 5. Hills of Samaria*



*Figure 6: Typical bit of the Holy Land - bare hills and flat-topped houses.*





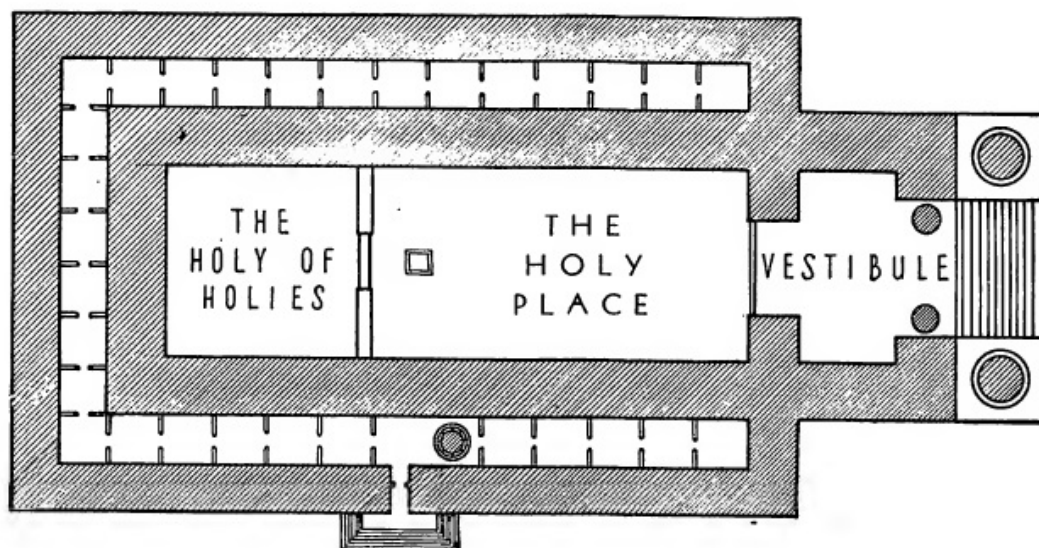


Figure 7. Plan of Sanctuary of Herod's Temple.



*Figure 8. The Fortress Antonia (<https://segulamag.com>).*





Figure 9. The Temple of Jerusalem at the time of Christ (By Ariely - Own work, CC BY 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org>)

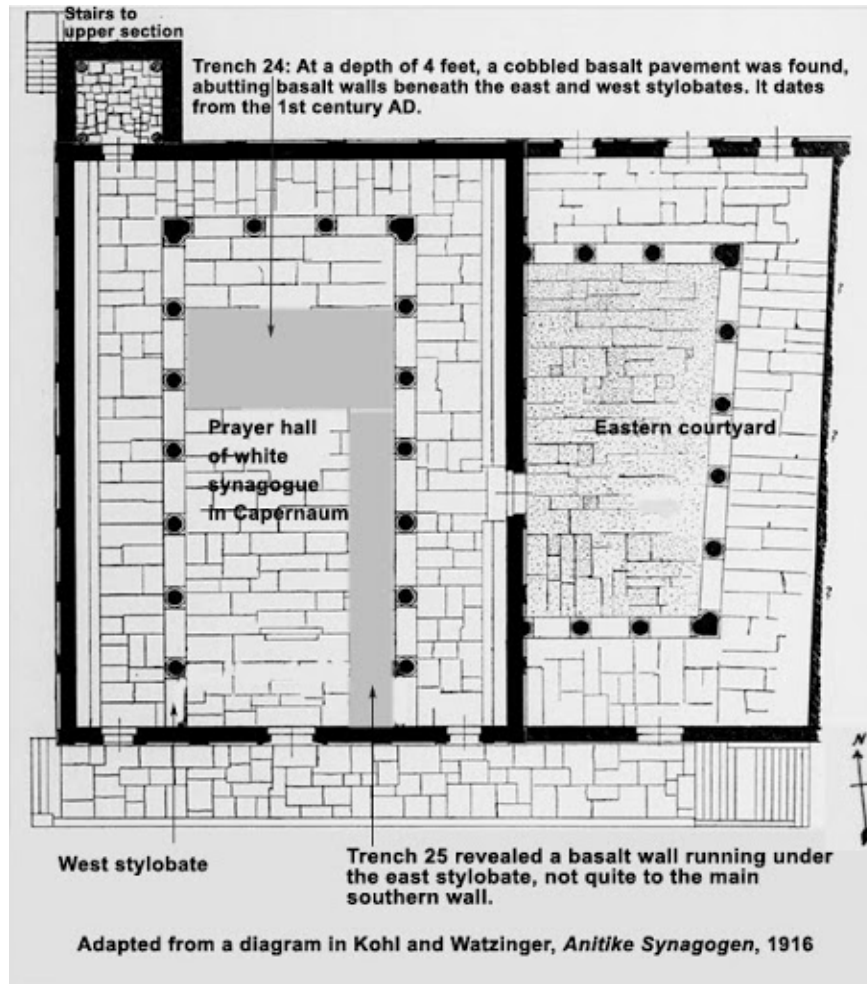


Figure 10. Plan of Ancient Synagogue at Capernaum.





*Figure 11. A Reconstruction of the Synagogue of Capharnaum.*



*Figure 12. Jerusalem from the northeast (Ewing Galloway)*



*Figure 13. The Tyropean Valley.*





*Figure 14. Bethlehem of Juda, birthplace of Jesus.*





*Figure 15. Ruins of Caesarea maritima.*





Figure 16. Temple Mount in Jerusalem. By Andrew Shiva / Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 4.0,  
<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=24494770>





*Figure 17. The site of Fortress Antonia.*



*Figure 18. Kfar Bar'am synagogue in Galilee.*



Figure 19. Papyrus containing John 18:31-38.





*Figure 20. Ein-Karem today (By Gila Brand, CC BY 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=4059455>).*



*Figure 21. Nazareth (Wikipedia).*





*Figure 22. The white-walled houses of Nazareth.*



*Figure 23. The Virgin's Fountain (Wikipedia).*



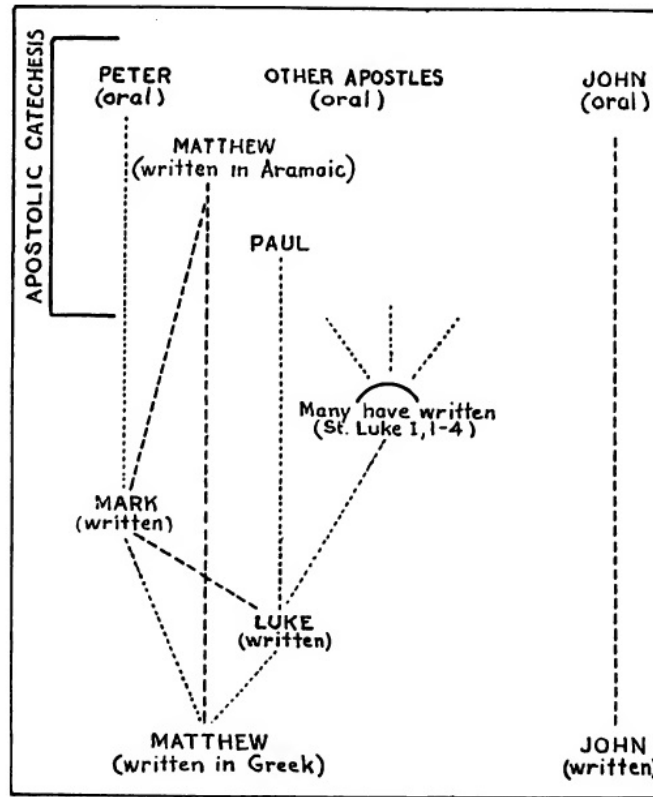


Figure 24. The Relationship Among the Four Gospels.



*Figure 25. General View of Bethlehem 1800s is a photograph by Munir Alawi.*



*Figure 26. Judean Desert (Wikipedia)*





*Figure 27. A desert scene.*



*Figure 28. Shepherds' field, near Bethlehem.*





*Figure 29. A possible site of Our Lord's baptism on the Jordan (Wikipedia)*



*Figure 30. General view of Nazareth.*



*Figure 31. Southern corner of Temple area (the pinnacle of the Temple).*





*Figure 32. The Mount of Temptation.*



*Figure 33. Greek Monastery in the Wadi el Qelt, in the backlands of Judea.*





*Figure 34. Jordan Valley in the vicinity of the ancient city of Jericho.*



*Figure 35. Street scene in Cana of Galilee.*



*Figure 36. Schem, the well of the Samaritan Woman*





*Figure 37. A Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well.*



*Figure 38. Israel, Jerusalem, two Ashkenazi Jews on Shabbat in the old city on their way to the Western Wall.*

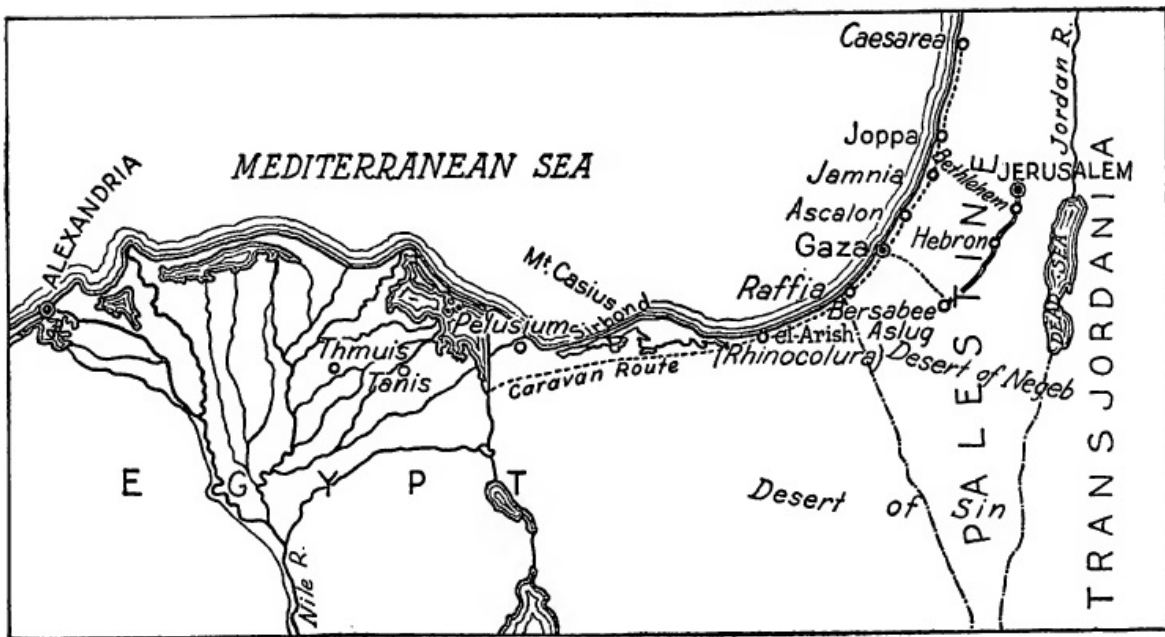


Figure 39: The Old Caravan Route Between Palestine and Egypt. Probable Route of the Flight.

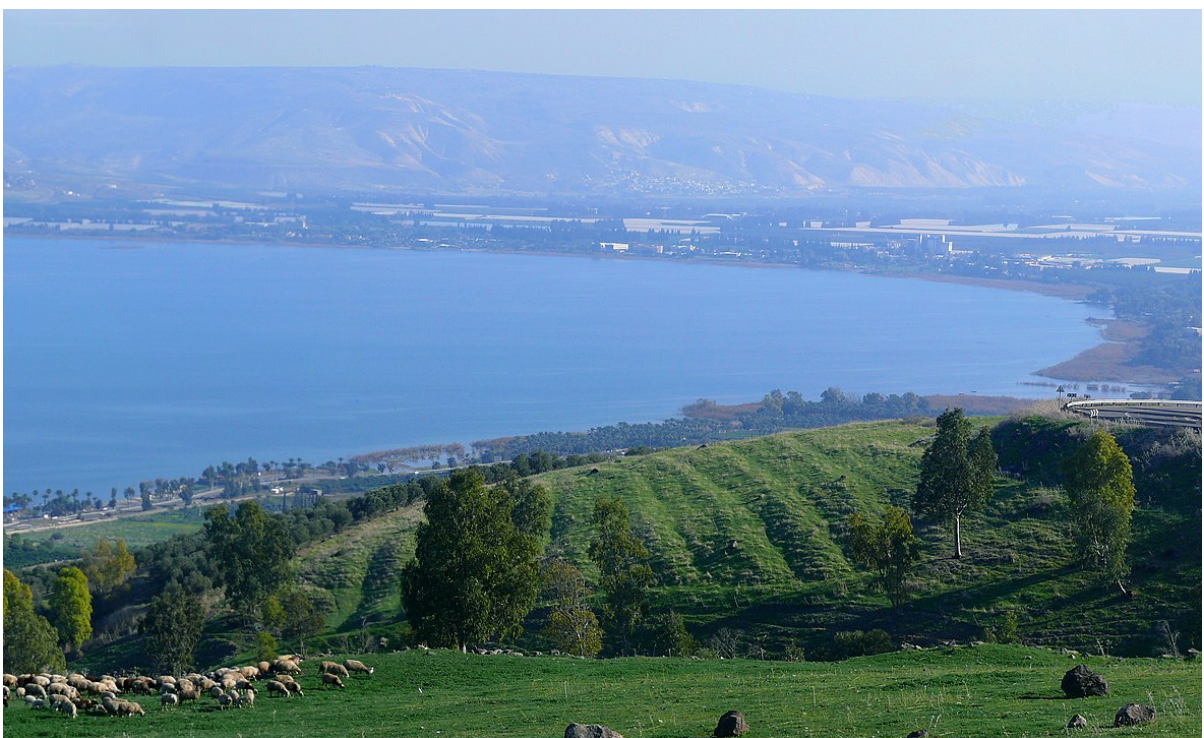


Figure 40. Lake of Tiberias.





*Figure 41. Fishermen in the Sea of Galilee (from late 1800s).*



*Figure 42. The modern city of Tiberias in 2009. (Wikipedia)*





*Figure 43. Ruins of the ancient Great Synagogue at Capernaum (or Kfar Nahum) on the shore of the Lake of Galilee, Northern Israel.*



*Figure 44. The ruins of the Byzantine Church, adjacent to the site of the Pool of Bethesda.*



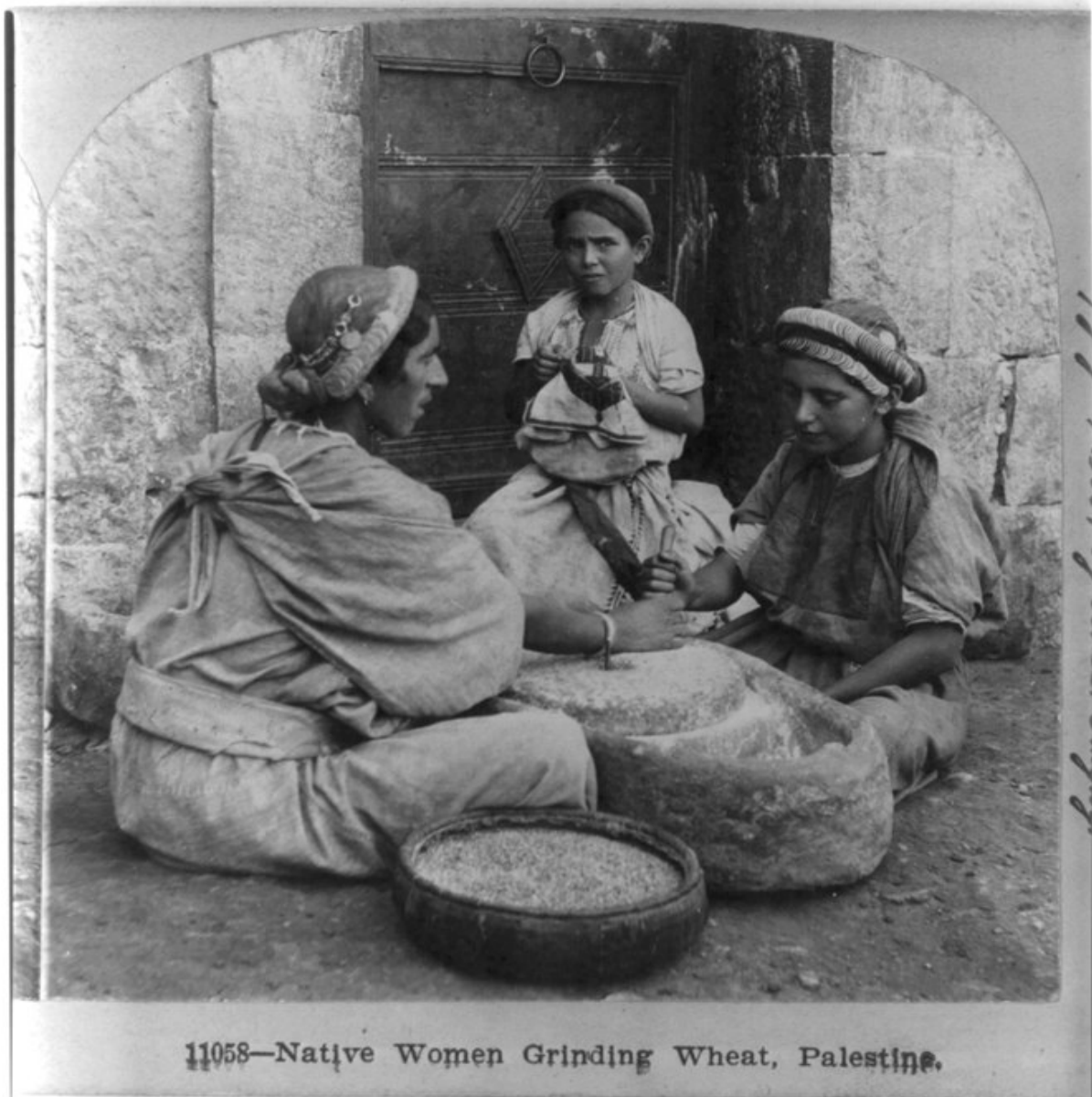


Figure 45. Women grind grain with a hand mill, Palestine, 1900(Wikipedia). The method was the same as in the time of Jesus.



*Figure 46. Jezreel or Esdraelon Valley and Mount Tabor.*



*Figure 47. Huts built for the Feast of Tabernacles.*





*Figure 48. Mount Tabor.*



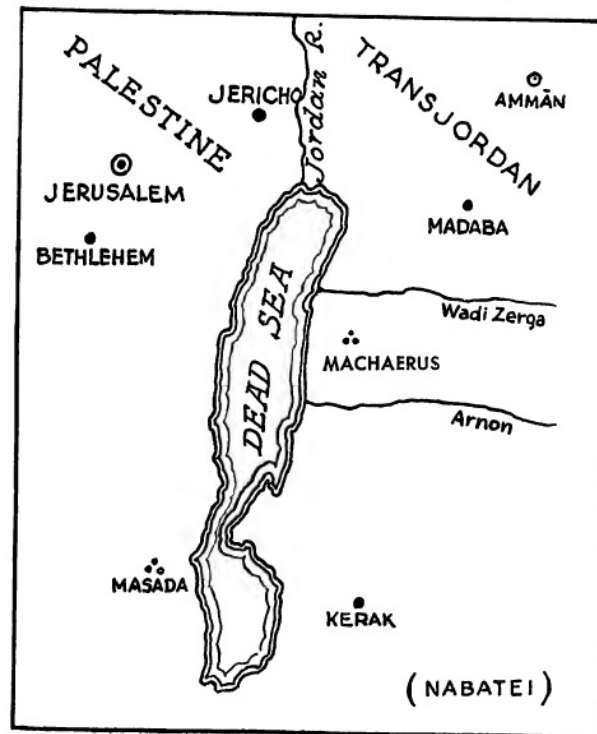


Figure 49: The desert country about the Machaerus.



*Figure 50. Traditional middle eastern shepherd.*



*Figure 51. The Byzantine pool of Siloam (Wikipedia).*



*Figure 52. The "Spring of the Apostles" on the road to Jericho.*





*Figure 53. "Cenacle" on upper floor of David's Tomb Compound.*



*Figure 54. Khan al-Hatruri, known in Western terms as the Inn of the Good Samaritan.*



*Figure 55. Bethany, as photographed in the 1940s.*



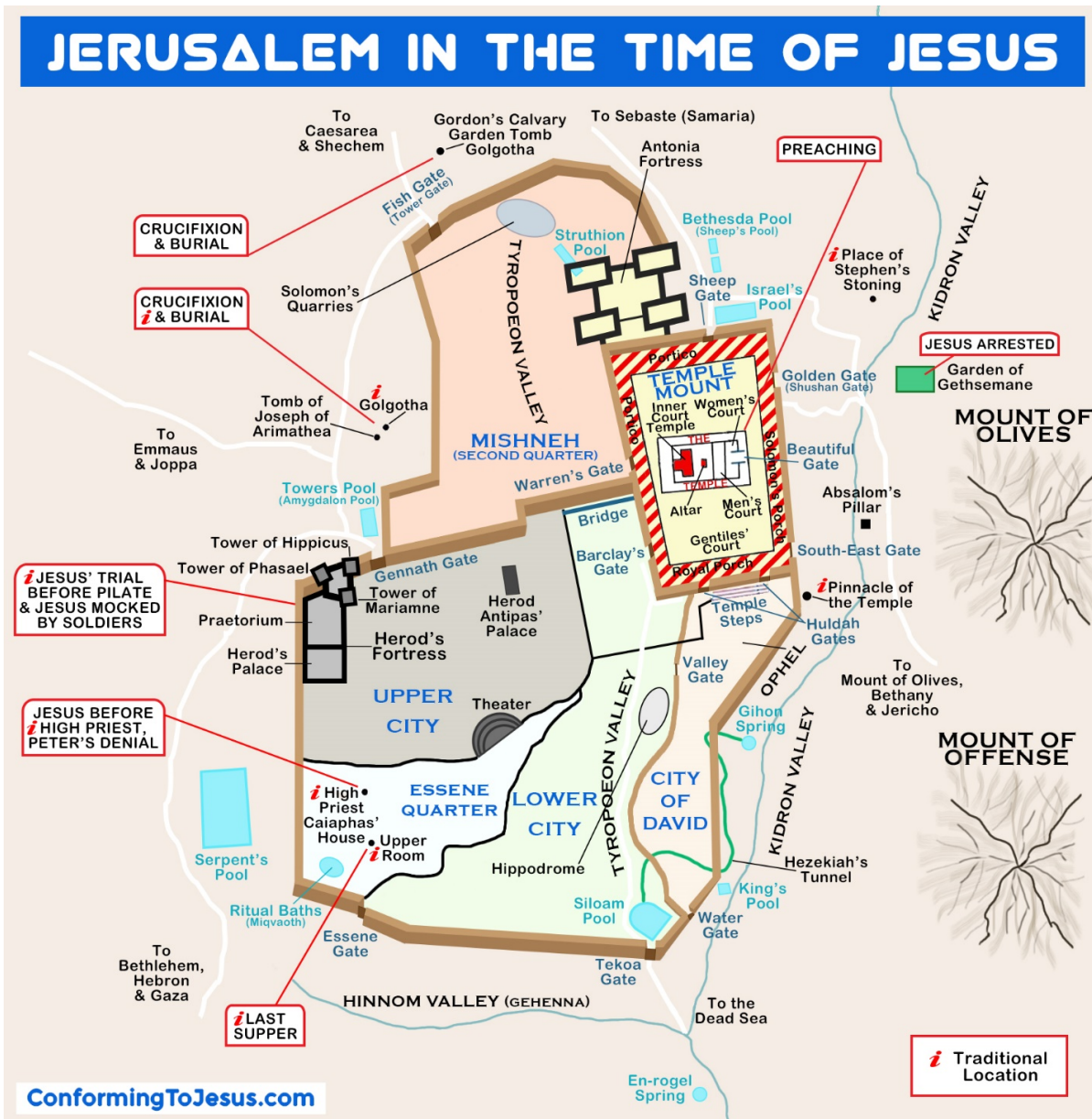


Figure 56. Map of Jerusalem in the time of Jesus.





*Figure 57. Jerusalem north wall (1898).*



Figure 58. Tomb of Lazarus in Bethany (Wikipedia)





*Figure 59. Model of Herod's Jerusalem Palace-Fortress in the northwest corner of the Upper City walls. The three towers, from left to right, are Phasael, Hippicus, and Mariamne. Just beneath the latter two, a portion of the reconstruction of the palace building itself is visible (Wikipedia).*



*Figure 60. A general picture of the city Nablus in the west bank. Taken by Basel Quzeih in 2014 (Wikipedia).*





*Figure 61. Jericho from the air in 1931 (Wikipedia).*



*Figure 62. The city of Jericho from Tell es-Sultan. (Wikipedia).*



*Figure 63. Mount of Olives in July 2009 (Wikipedia).*



*Figure 64. The road from Bethphage to Jerusalem.*





*Figure 65. A street in the old city of Jerusalem.*



*Figure 66. Garden of Gethsemane in 2012 (Wikipedia).*





*Figure 67. Roman pavement thought to be the site of Jesus' trial with Pontius Pilate (Wikipedia).*



*Figure 68. Valley of Hinnom or Gehenna, 2007 (Wikipedia).*

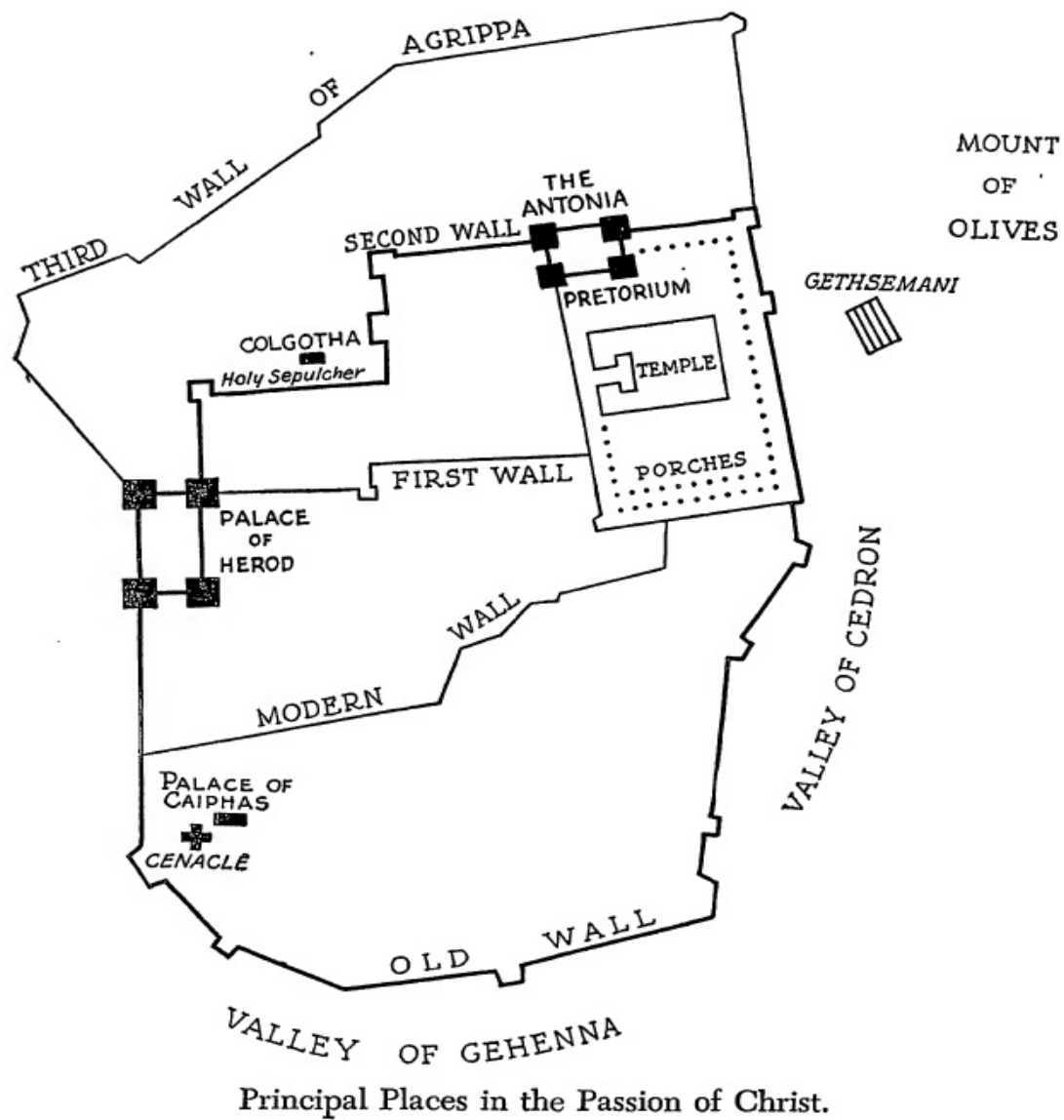


Figure 69: Principal Places in the Passion of Christ

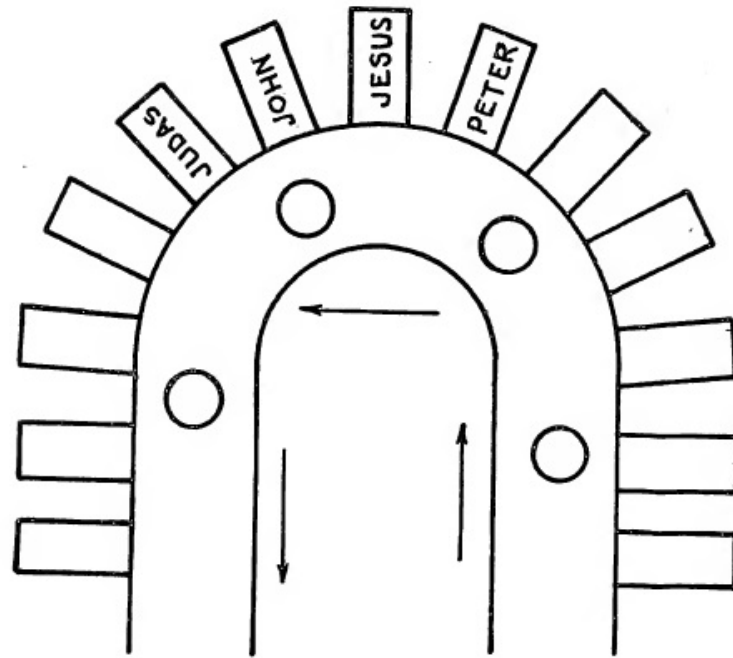
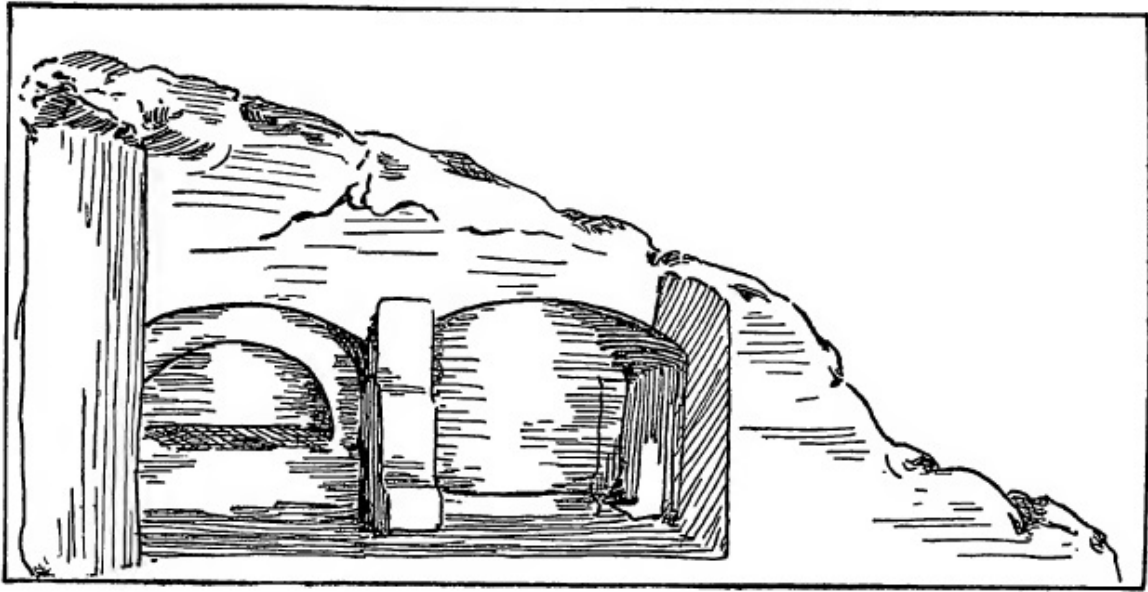


Figure 70: Diagram of seating arrangement at the Last Supper.





*Figure 71: The Via Dolorosa in Jerusalem*



*Figure 72: A type of Palestinian Tomb of our Lord's time.*



## Notes

[←1]

Almost all our information concerning Herod the Great is furnished us by Flavius Josephus, who in his turn took it from the lost writings of Nicholas of Damascus, Herod's minister. According to the *Antiquities of the Jews*, XV, 174, Herod wrote his own *Memoirs*, but it is not at all certain that Flavius Josephus consulted them directly.

[←2]

There is every probability that Augustus' quip is authentic and by no means the least proof in this regard is its subtle wit. Macrobius, however, who got it we know not where since he was writing in the fifth century, wrongly connects it with the slaughter of the Innocents (§257), in which he says a son of Herod, only two years old, was also a victim. Instead, this son must have been Antipater, who was killed by his father shortly after the episode of the Innocents. Here is the passage in Macrobius: "[Augustus] cum audisset inter pueros quos in Syria Herodes rex Judaeorum intra bimatum iussit interfici filium quoque eius occisum, ait: Melius est Herodis porcum esse quam filium."

[←3]

All quotations from the Old Testament are from the Douay version unless otherwise indicated. The New Testament quotations are from the Confraternity of Christian Doctrine (St. Anthony's Guild), the Douay or the Westminster versions, or from the translation of the Rev. F. A. Spencer, O.P. (Macmillan). [Trans.]

[←4]

Quills, used in writing their unjust decrees.

[←5]

Hiss, of the serpent.

[←6]

Cf. also Antiquities of the Jews, XIII, 171-173, 288-298; XVII, 41-45; XVIII, 11-17.

[←7]

The importance of this distinction is confirmed by the various excerpts from the Talmud recently published by modern Hebrew scholars. These excerpts or summaries are all most accurate; there are no errors in quotation or translation. But historically speaking they are untrue because they are incomplete; they in no way give an adequate picture of the whole. The Talmud therein presented is a twentieth-century Talmud, selected, winnowed, lacking at least ninety parts out of a hundred, and precisely those ninety parts which represent the casuistical Talmud, which is truer historically. And if today the other ten parts which are presented to us are those most valued -because they are of nobler morality and are more universally human, we may well believe that there is some Christian influence responsible for the fact.

It is not at all certain that even at the time when the Talmud was in process of development those same ten parts were those valued most highly by every class of Judaism in preference to the other more typical and characteristic ninety parts. It would be easier to disparage the Talmud, if anyone did have any such deplorable omitted; yet in this case also the collection would be literally true but historically false.



[←8]

Some modern scholars have maintained that even under the procurators the Sanhedrin could carry out its own death sentences but their arguments have convinced very few. The Talmud contradicts itself on this point: in Sanhedrin, pal., I, 18 a, and VII, 24 b, it says the Sanhedrin did not have this power; elsewhere it seems to state that it did.

[←9]

That is, a unanimous conviction was not permissible; at least one judge had to plead in favor of the accused.

[←10]

The reason for this was the fact that twenty-three judges were necessary for a quorum as explained above; in the instances mentioned here, one judge was lacking in effect because he did not vote.

[←11]

Cf. *Enoch* 22, 10-13; 51, 1-2; 90, 33, etc.; IV *Esdras* 7, 32; *The Apocalypse of Baruch*, 30, 1 ff.; 51, 1 ff.; *The Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs*: *Juda* 25; *Benjamin*, 10; *Shemone 'esre*, second prayer; etc.

[←12]

Some consider the following parts of the Old Testament apocalyptic: *Isaias*, chaps. 24-27 and 34; *Ezekiel*, chaps. 38-39; *Joel*, 3:9-17; *Zacharias*, chaps. 12-14; and the book of *Daniel*.

[←13]

This strange name, which has also the variants *Pantheri*, *Panthori*, *Pandera*, has been explained this way. After the definite separation between Christianity and Judaism, the Jews used to hear the Greek-speaking Christians assert that Jesus was the son of “parthenou” (parenou), that is, of a virgin; hence the common noun was mistaken for a proper one, and instead of an epithet of Jesus’ mother it became the name of his alleged illegitimate father. This explanation is a highly probable one and offers one more evidence that Judaism did not have its own heritage of information regarding Jesus, but took all it knew from Christianity and distorted it for controversial purposes.

[←14]

For these data and epithets see Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, 4 vols., Munich, 1922-28, Vol. I, p. 36 ff. and the passages indicated in Vol. IV, p. 1240, col. I. The last epithet mentioned above is in Vol. I, pp. 42-43, and p. 1040.

[←15]

*Bekoroth*, 8 b; cf. Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., I, 236.



[←16]

From god-spell, which is literally “good tidings,” also. —Translator

[←17]

The reading put in order” is given by five out of seven codices and is certainly the right one; only two codices read (sunegrayato), “composed,” which is less acceptable.

[←18]

These precepts of the Greek grammarians were known well enough and used even among the Hellenistic Jews. The author of the second book of the Maccabees, who sums up the five books of Jason of Cyrene, recalls at the beginning of his work that it is the duty of the historian to *embatenein poieisfai logw kai polnprnonein eu tois kata meros* (2:30), which the Vulgate (2:31), more faithful to the concept than to its expression, renders as “to collect all that is to be known, to put the discourse in order, and [diligently] to discuss every particular point.”

[←19]

St. Augustine makes a similar observation with regard to the Latin translations of the Greek text of the Septuagint: “Qui enim Scripturas ex hebraea lingua in graecam verterunt, numerari possunt, latini autem interpretes nullo modo. Ut enim cuique primis fidei temporibus in manus venit codex graecus et aliquantum facultatis sibi utriusque linguae habere videbatur, ausus est interpretari” (*De doct. Christ.*, II, 11)

[←20]

It is enough to cite a few instances. *Mark* 6:5 says that Jesus "could not do any miracles there, only that he cured a few that were sick..." in *Matthew* 13:58 this is softened somewhat to read, "And he wrought not many miracles there, because of their unbelief." More complicated is the case of the conversation between Jesus and the rich young man. In *Mark* 10:17 (cf. *Luke* 18:18-19) the young man says: "Good Master, what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting? And Jesus said to him: Why callest thou me good? None is good but one, that is God." In *Matthew* 19:16-17 (Greek text) the conversation is softened: "Good master, what good shall I do that I may have life everlasting? Who said to him: Why askest thou me concerning good? One is good."

[←21]

St. Augustine with his usual acumen, had already called attention to this extremely important criterion: "From these expressions of the Evangelists, different but not contradictory, we learn in truth a most useful and necessary thing: that is, that in the words of any one we must give heed only to the intention (*voluntatem*) which the words must serve; and that one does not speak falsely if he tells in different words what another means, whose words he does not quote. Therefore, let there be no word-hunters who believe that the truth is in some manner to be snared in the flourishes of the script, when certainly it is the sense (*animus*) alone which is to be sought, in words just as in all other manifestations of the spirit" (*De consensu evangel.*, II, xxviii [67]).

[←22]

The 'kingdom of God' occurs in Mark fourteen or fifteen times, in Luke thirty- three times; but it occurs only four or five times in Matthew, which is the only Gospel to use the other expression "kingdom of heaven" (thirty-two or thirty-three times), and these few exceptions to Matthew's constant usage are perhaps due to the Greek translator.

[←23]

That is Matthew and Luke; but that Luke preceded Mark is an untenable opinion.



[←24]

Cf. Cicero's expression, "accipere aliquem verberibus (ad necem)."

[←25]

“Tertium evangelii librum secundum Lucam. Lucus iste medicus, post ascensum Christi cum eum Paulus quasi ut iuris studiosum secum adsumpsisset, nomine suo ex opinione conscripsit; Dominum tamen nec ipse vidit in carne, et ideo prout assequi potuit, ita et a nativitate Johannis incepit dicere.”

[←26]

Here is the introduction of Pedanius Dioscurides: "Since many, not only among the ancients but also in recent times, have arranged discourses (*suntaxamenwn*) concerning the preparation and the efficacy and the testing of drugs, O excellent Areus, I shall attempt to show thee that I have had for this subject an attitude which is neither vain or unreasonable." Cf. Luke's prologue (1:1-4) in §140.

[←27]

The most extensive work on this subject is still that of W. K. Hobart, *The Medical Language of St. Luke*, Dublin, 1882. Several scholars since have reviewed the subject, some to disagree with his findings; but none of them has gone beyond the material he assembled.

[←28]

The reading *impudens* is that found in the codices and confirmed by the attributes which follow; some editors, however, have chivalrously read *imprudens*.

[←29]

“Parem autem deo pecunia non faciet: deus nihil habet . . . nudus est” (Epist., 31:8-9).”

[←30]

The similarities between one Synoptic and another have been figured out mathematically in various ways, the most practical being that based on the usual division into verses (although it is perhaps not the most accurate method because the verses vary in length). Here is the calculation according to verses, but note that the figures are subject to variation due especially to variants in the codices.

*Matthew* contains 1070 verses; of these 330 are peculiar to this Gospel, 170 appear again in *Mark* only, 230 in *Luke* only, and 340 recur in both *Mark* and *Luke*. As for the other two Synoptics, it is sufficient to note that *Mark* has 667 verses, of which only 68 are peculiar to it, and that *Luke* has 1151 verses, of which 540 are proper to it alone. To sum up, about one third of the content of *Matthew*, one tenth of *Mark*, and one half of *Luke* are proper to their respective Gospels.

Another calculation, based instead on measured units of text, shows that of 100 sections shared by two or more, 53 are common to all three Gospels, 20 to *Matthew* and *Mark* only, 21 to *Matthew* and *Luke* only, and 6 to *Mark* and *Luke* only.

Even the words have been counted to yield the following proportion: 17 out of 100 words used in *Matthew* are found in the other two, and about the same percentage is true of *Mark*; while for *Luke* the count is 10 out of 100. The words common to all three are about 70.

[←31]

The arguments for this hypothesis are the following. Speaking to both sons of Zebedee together, Jesus says to them: "Of the chalice that I drink, you shall drink; and with the baptism with which I am to be baptized, you shall be baptized . . ." (*Mark* 10:39; cf. *Matt.* 20:23). The conclusion drawn from this is that both brothers drank the chalice of martyrdom, but this is exaggerated because "chalice" and "baptism" are metaphors neither of which necessarily designates a martyrdom of blood; they may easily symbolize a bloodless martyrdom as well. This is all the truer in our case since the words are addressed to both the brothers (one of whom was actually killed) and so permit a somewhat broader interpretation. True, there was a rumor current in antiquity that John had literally undergone martyrdom in Rome, having been immersed in boiling oil from which he emerged unharmed; the rumor, which goes back only to Tertullian (*De praescriptione*, 36) and is quoted by Jerome (*Adv. Jovin.*, 1, 26) is not sufficiently reliable. Besides, the exponents of the hypothesis in question naturally suppose that this is not really a prophecy of Jesus but that these words are attributed to him by the author of the Gospel after the events had taken place, that is, after the execution of James and the supposed martyrdom of John in 44. But if the double execution was so generally known, why do the Acts (12:2) mention only that of James although they name John in the very same verse? Instead of saying that Herod Agrippa "killed James, the brother of John, with the sword," it would have been just as simple and much more to the point to say that he "killed James and his brother John with the sword." Obviously, the author of the Acts did not say it merely because he could not do so and be true to fact. And if John had already died in 44, how did Paul meet him in Jerusalem in 49 as it is possible to conclude with almost complete certainty by comparing *Gal.* 2:9 with *Acts* 15:1 ff.? Furthermore, if we are to suppose even more arbitrarily that John was killed after his brother, i.e., later than 44, then certainly his death would have been well known enough to prevent the rumor that "that disciple should not die."

Still another argument is based on two quotations said to be from Papias. A single codex carries a fragment of the lost *Christian History* written in the fifth century by Philip Sidetes, in which he states: "Papias, in the second book, says that John the Theologian and James his brother were killed by the Jews." Another passage, from the ninth century *Chronicle* written by George Hamartolos and also contained in one codex only (contrary to all the other codices which do not have this passage) states in keeping with tradition that John was the author of the Gospel and went back to Ephesus in the reign of Nerva, but then it adds that Papias says that, "he was killed by the Jews." As for the fragment of Philip Sidetes, Papias could not have described John as the "Theologian" for that is a later and Byzantine epithet attributed to him no earlier than the fourth century; hence what we have here is not a literal quotation from Papias but an erroneous summary, for Philip must have confused John the Baptist with John the Evangelist. The same is to be said for the passage from George Hamartolos, which is probably nothing but a later interpolation contaminated by the same mistake in identity.

Other proofs, like the one that some of the early churches celebrated one feast day for James and John together, do not even merit an answer.

Rather, after examining these pitiful little shreds of evidence, we cannot help asking how anyone could ever attach so much importance to them and yet deny it to the impressive authority of the opposing proofs. Evidently the answer is that the thesis was accepted prior to and apart from its "historical" proofs.



[←32]

“Postmodum Johannes apostolus scripsit Apocalypsin in insula Pathmos, deinde evangelium in Asia.”

[←33]

“Evangelium Johannis manifestatum et datum est ecclesiis ab Johanne adhuc in corpore constituto, sicut Papias nomine Hierapolitanus, discipulus Johannis carus, in exotericis, idest in extremis quinque libris retulit; descripsit verum evangelium dictante Johanne recte.”

[←34]

We note immediately the difference between the authority of this reference to Papias, made in his own century, and the reliability of the references to him in Philip Sidetes and George Hamartolos (see preceding note), doubtful in themselves and several centuries later.

[←35]

We note immediately the difference between the authority of this reference to Papias, made in his own century, and the reliability of the references to him in Philip Sidetes and George Hamartolos (see preceding note), doubtful in themselves and several centuries later.

[←36]

The passage, with its more glaring Latin errors corrected, is as follows: “Quartum evangeliorum Johannis ex discipulis. Cohortantibus condiscipulis et episcopis suis dixit: Conieiunate mihi hoc triduo, et quid cuique fuerit revelatum, alterutrum nobis enarremus. Eadem nocte revelatum Andreae ex apostolis, ut recognoscentibus cunctis Johannes suo nomine cuncta describeret. Et ideo, licet varia singulis evangeliorum libris principia doceantur, nihil tamen differt credentium fidei, cum uno ac principali Spiritu declarata sint in omnibus omnia.... Quid ergo mirum, si Johannes tam constanter singula etiam in epistulis suis profert, dicens in semetipsum “Quae vidimus oculis nostris, et auribus audivimus, et manus nostrae palpaverunt, haec scripsimus vobis”? Sic enim non solum visorem se et auditorem, sed et scriptorem omnium mirabilium Domini per ordinem profitetur.”

[←37]

G. H. Roberts, *An Unpublished Fragment of the Fourth Gospel in the John Rylands Library*, Manchester, 1935.

[←38]

Other and older texts divide the passage this way: "and without him nothing was. — What was in him was Life, and the Life ...."

[←39]

On this subject also the most abundant documentation is collected in *Strack and Billerbeck, Kommentar zum N. Test, aus Talmud und Midrasch*, Vol. 2, 1934, in the whole section devoted to the Gospel of John.



[←40]

“Consors tribuniciae potestatis. . .”

[←41]

“... ut provincias cum Augusto communiter administraret simulque censum ageret.”

[←42]

A rather serious objection to this may be based on *John* 4:35. Jesus returns to Galilee from Jerusalem after having wrought many miracles there, the fame of which has preceded him to Galilee (4:45). But while he is crossing Samaria there occurs the dialogue with the Samaritan woman, and during his stay in the region he says to his disciples: "Do you not say: There are yet four months and then comes the harvest?" The conclusion derived from these words is that the incident must have occurred about the month of January because the harvesting in Palestine begins four months later. Hence, Jesus, who had left for Jerusalem shortly after the marriage in Cana and on the occasion of the first Pasch (*John* 2:12 ff.) must have stayed there nine months, returning to Galilee in January. But in contradiction to this, John's narrative gives the impression that Jesus' sojourn in Jerusalem and Judea at this time was very brief (*John* 8:22; 4:3; cf. *Matt.* 4:12; *Mark* 1:14) and that he crossed Samaria not in January but in the warm season (*John* 4:6-8). Hence the interpretation of other commentators seems more reasonable, namely, that the words in question are a farmers' proverb which Jesus here applies to the spiritual harvest which he speaks of immediately afterward; in that case, he crossed Samaria a few weeks after the first Pasch, probably in May (§294, §297).

[←43]

J. K. Fotheringham, "Astronomical Evidence for the Date of the Crucifixion," in *Journal of Theological Studies*, 12 (1910-1911), pp. 120-127; D. R. Fotheringham, *The Date of Easter*, London, 1928; K. Schoch, "Christi Kreuzigung am 14 Nisan," in *Biblica*, 1928, pp. 48 ff., 466 ff.; J. B. Schaumberger, "Der 14 Nisan als Kreuzigungstag und die Synoptiker," in *Biblica*, 1928, pp. 55-77. Other references are mentioned in all of these writings and more generally in U. Holzmeister, *Chronologia Vitae Christi*, Rome, 1933, p. 191 ff.

[←44]

“Impiger militiae et acribus ministeriis, consulatum sub divo Augusto, mox expugnatis per Ciliciam Homonadensium castellis insignia triumphi adeptus, datusque rector Gaio Caesari Armeniam obtinenti.”

[←45]

Sed et census constat actos sub Augusto tunc in Iudaea per Sentium Satuminum, apud quos  
genus eius inquirere potuissent.

[←46]

A little later, about A.D. 36, the legate to Syria, Vitellius, assigned to *M. Trebellius, legatus*, an expedition against the Cliti, a people of the Taurus subject to the kingdom of Cappadocia, a Roman ally, because they refused to be registered in the Roman way (Tacitus, *Annal.*, VI, 41).

[←47]

“...quando auditus est a Pilato, ubi vestigia illius remanserunt. Pedem pulchrum, modicum, subtilem, nam et staturam communem, faciem pulchram, capillos subanellatos, manum formosam, digita longa imago designat, quae illo vivente picta est et posita est in ipso praetorio.”



[←48]

“Apparuit temporibus istis et adhuc est homo (si fas est hominem dicere) mag- nae virtutis nominatus Jesus Christus, qui dicitur a gentibus propheta veritatis, quem eius discipuli vocant filium Dei, suscitans mortuos et sanans (omnes) languores, homo quidem statura procerus mediocris et spectabilis, vultum habens venerabilem, quem possent intuentes diligere et formidare, capillos habens coloris nucis avellanae praematurae, planos fere usque ad aures, ab auribus (vero) circinnos crispas, ali- quantulum ceruliores et fulgentiores, ab humeris ventilantes, discrimen habens in medio capitis, juxta morem Nazaraenorum, frontem planam et serenissimam, cum facie sine ruga et macula (aliqua), quam rubor (moderatus) venustat; nasi et oris nulla prorsus (est) reprehensio; barbam habens copiosam capillis concolorem, non longam, sed in mento (medio) parum bifurcatum; aspectum habens simplicem et maturum, oculis glaucis variis et clavis existentibus; in increpatione terribilis, in ad-monitione blandens et amabilis, hilaris servata gravitate; aliquando flevit, sed nunquam risit; in statura corporis propagatus et erectus, manus habens et brachia visu delectabilia, in colloquio gravis, rarus et modestus, ut merito secundum prophetam diceretur: ‘Speciosus inter filios hominum.’”

[←49]

Rom. 10:13; cf. Joel 2:32.

[←50]

Phil. 2:10; cf. *Isa.* 45:23.

[←51]

This paragraph was written before Loisy's death (June, 1940); but I find no reason to change anything. It is clear to everyone that we are dealing here with scientific methods and not with persons.

[←52]

It will perhaps be noted that this survey does not include any Italian; this is not due to prejudice of any kind but simply to the fact that there have been none worth mentioning. It certainly is not necessary to name the two or three critics prior to 1910 who have left no contribution to science and whose names are barely remembered today. But even in the period between 1910 and 1940, scarcely three or four scholars in Italy have adopted rationalist aims and methods and these too have disappeared without leaving any important trace behind them. The chief reason for this is their lack of originality. Anyone who has read Loisy has also read his Italian imitators. They faithfully follow his principal conclusions but usually ignore the vast analytical process by which he arrived at them. They disagree with him only on some trivial point, as much to affect a certain independence of thought as anything else but without deceiving anyone. They even imitate Loisy's habitual indifference to historical geography and archeology, but not his fine philological background, which was excellent in Hebrew too. In any case, their writings have not attracted any particular attention among specialists or laymen and therefore do not merit any special mention here.

1 Almost all the mistaken interpretations of the name of Mary are due to the notion that it must allude in some way to her divine motherhood, or else they are prompted solely by pious devotion to her and are, besides, usually suggested by people who do not know Hebrew or any other Semitic language. No one seems to have thought of the example of humility which Our Lady gives us in this instance as in so many others, since not even her name would in any way distinguish her from other women. Among the mistaken interpretations, the most widespread is that of “Star of the sea,” often attributed to St. Jerome. But St. Jerome knew Hebrew too well to translate the name in that fashion. It seems that he did translate it *stilla maris* (Hebrew: *mar jam*) and that some copyist later changed it to the more poetic *Stella maris*. The least improbable of all the interpretations is that the name of the Egyptian-born sister of Moses was of Egyptian derivation. Many hieroglyphic names are formed from *mry*, *mryt* (“beloved”) followed by the name of a god, like *Beloved-of-Ra*, *Beloved-of-Ptah*, etc.; in our case, the original would have been *Mryt-ja(m)*, meaning *Beloved-of-Yah(weh)*, God of the Israelites. But in Jesus' time the real etymology of the word must have been completely unknown, and its meaning seems to have been influenced by the common Aramaic noun *mar(a)*, *mar(i)*, “lord,” or “my lord” whence the above-mentioned change in pronunciation. In that case the meaning “lady” was artificially attributed to the ancient Egyptian name. St. Jerome said: *Maria, sermone syro, Domina nuncupatur*. Thus, practically speaking, the Italian epithet *Madonna*, “my lady” *par excellence*, is a true equivalent of Mary [so also, in English, “Our Lady”—Translator].

[←54]

The Vulgate adds at the end of the angel's greeting, "Blessed art thou among women." These words, however, seem to have been transferred here from the subsequent salutation of Elizabeth (*Luke* 1:42).

[←55]

For the rabbinic texts which give the age at betrothal, see Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 373-375.



[←56]

The Italian examples are non mi sposo, non mi fo prete, avvocato, etc., which are more commonly used than the parallel English expressions— Translator.

[←57]

Dante, naturally, attributes the traditional meaning to these words when he has the souls being purged of lust chant them on the last terrace in purgatory:

“After the close, which to that hymn is made  
Aloud they shouted: Virum non cognosco.  
Then recommenced the hymn with voices low.”  
(Purg., XXV, 127-129.)

The rationalists as a rule do not deny that these words, when taken in context, imply a vow, but to prove they have no historical value, they are forced to revert to the usual convenient hypothesis that they were interpolated, supposing that one or more persons inserted them in the text at this particular point. But any of these supposed redactors would have been incomparably stupid not to notice that such an interpolation would be contradicted by the whole original context.

[←58]

The Vulgate adds “of thee” after ‘horn,” probably because of *Matt.* 1:16, but the expression is not in the best Greek codices.

[←59]

All this is summed up and also interpreted by Dante in those two famous lines which, for felicity of phrase, far surpass any other comment that has been written through the centuries:

“Virgin mother, daughter of thy son,  
Humble and exalted above every creature. . .

Besides the triple antithesis ‘Virgin-mother,’ ‘daughter-son,’ ‘humble-exalted,’ note how true the poet is to fact in emphasizing the humility which is characteristic of Our Lady together with her position, “exalted above every creature.”

Even Boccaccio—of all people—is a keen exegete on this subject, and his beautiful sonnet, written with unquestionable sincerity, deserves to be quoted in its entirety:

“Not braids of gold, nor beauty in thy eyes,  
Nor queenly dress, nor winsome maiden grace.  
Nor youthfulness, nor music’s melodies,  
Nor loveliness of angel in thy face,  
Could draw the king of heaven from sovereign place  
To this our life of guilt and sordidness  
To be made flesh in thee, Mary, Mother of grace,  
Mirror of joy and all our happiness,

But thy humility—so great in thee.  
It broke the ancient barrier of wrath  
Twixt God and us, to open heaven’s bars.  
Then of thy virtue lend to us that we,  
May follow, Holy Mother, in thy path  
Unwavering, to rise beyond the stars.”

The ninth line of the Italian begins *ma l’umilta tua*; with a strong stress on the fifth syllable, which is unusual and points up the key of the whole sonnet. The deliberate emphasis on this concept shows that the author of the Decameron might have become an excellent exegete if he had followed other trails.

[←60]

Three codices of the *vetus Latina* assign the Magnificat to Elizabeth instead of to Mary, and so does the fourth century writer, Nicetas of Remesiana. One or two other testimonies of this nature are doubtful. These instances, and especially the Magnificat's similarity to the canticle of Anna, who is rejoicing that her barrenness has become fruitful, have led some scholars (Loisy, Harnack, Burkitt) to attribute it to Elizabeth. This opinion is a mere extravagance, inspired by the desire for something new, and time has already frowned its judgment on it. All the manuscripts of the Greek original without exception together with those of the Syriac and Coptic versions and all the other Latin codices, as well as all the Christian writers (except Nicetas) attribute it to Mary.

[←61]

Christian tradition is not unanimous in its interpretation of Joseph's conduct. Not a few of the Fathers, including Ambrose, Chrysostom, Augustine, and others, who are followed today by some modern scholars (Fouard, etc.) think rather crudely that Joseph truly suspected Mary's behavior; but this does not tally with his "being a just man" nor with his intention to put her away "privately." Some writers go to the opposite extreme and believe Joseph was already informed of Mary's supernatural motherhood and therefore decided to leave her out of a profound sense of humility. This interpretation is very pious but not very sensible for it contradicts Matthew's narrative and makes the subsequent intervention of the angel, who warns Joseph in a dream, useless and illogical. The correct interpretation is that pointed out by St. Jerome, who, while he gives due consideration to the phrase, "being a just man," also asserts that Joseph never doubted Mary and hence finds himself facing an insoluble problem: "How does it happen that Joseph, while he conceals the guilt of his wife (uxoris) is called 'just'? The truth is that his silence is a witness of Mary's innocence, since Joseph, knowing her chastity and dumbfounded by what has happened, conceals by his silence the mystery which he does not understand" (in *Matt.* 1:19).

Two Evangelists give us the genealogy of Joseph, and hence of Jesus who was legally his son, but they differ completely in their presentation of it. Matthew (1:2-16), the Evangelist for the Hebrews, traces the genealogy from Abraham to Jesus in three groups of fourteen names each: one from Abraham to David, one from Solomon to the end of the Babylonian exile, and the third from the exile to Jesus. We can today compare the first two groups with the genealogies in the Old Testament from which they were taken, but the third group is based on particular documents unknown to us and now lost. We see now that the number fourteen in each group is a conventional one, probably a memory aid, since the separate links in the first two chains of ancestry should be more numerous according to the Old Testament. The number fourteen, repeated three times, seems to have been chosen out of reverence for the name of David (Hebrew  $D^aV\dot{D}$ ), the three consonants of which have been assigned a numerical value ( $4+6+4=14$ ). Luke, however (3:23-38), the disciple of Paul, works back from Jesus, through David and Abraham, all the way to Adam and God, and therefore gives us many more names than Matthew does (seventy-seven in the Greek text and from seventy-two to seventy-six in the various versions). They seem to be arranged in eleven groups of seven: counting backward, we find three such groups between Jesus and the exile, three from the exile to David, two from David to Abraham, and three from Abraham to God. When we compare the two genealogies, we find that the part from God to Abraham is given us only by Luke so we do not need to be concerned with differences here. In the section between Abraham and David the names in the two genealogies correspond exactly. In the part from David to Jesus they differ completely both in number (twenty-eight in *Matthew* and forty-two in Luke) and in the names themselves (only two, Salathiel and Zorobabel, are contained in both lists).

The problem of reconciling the two genealogies is an old one and has been studied ever since the third century, but no definite solution has been arrived at yet nor perhaps ever will be except by the rationalists, who, as usual when there is some insurmountable difficulty, deny that the texts have any historical value, forgetting completely how much importance was and is still attached to such genealogies by ancient and modern Semitic peoples and especially the Jews, as we learn from Flavius Josephus among others: *Contra Apionem*, 1, 3-37; *Life*, 3-6. One theory, which is very widely held although it is only five centuries old, is that one list represents Mary's genealogy and the other Joseph's; but apart from the other difficulties involved in this hypothesis, the Hebrews never traced their ancestry through the maternal side, nor do the two genealogies we possess indicate in any way that they trace Mary's lineage. The most reasonable supposition seems even now to be the ancient one, based on the law of the levirate (*Deut.* 25:5-10) whereby a man was bound to marry the widow of his brother, though he was born of a different father, and the first son of this marriage was considered the legal son of the deceased although he was in reality the brother's son. Joseph, besides his own father, may have had just such a legal father through a levirate marriage, and this same thing may have been true of others mentioned in the two genealogies (Salathiel, Zorobabel). This was the opinion of Julius Africanus in the third century (in Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.*, 1, 7, 2-16).

[←63]

Again in A.D. 104, the prefect of Egypt, Caius Vivius Maximus, orders that since a house-to-house census is about to be begun (thz kat oikian aporahz), those who for some reason or other are not in their own *nome* (i.e., district) should return to their paternal place of origin (epanelqein eiz ta eantwn efestia) to be registered as required and to tend to the cultivation of the fields assigned to them (papyr. Lond.; in U. Wilcken, *Papyruskunde*, I, 193, p. 235 ff.).



[←64]

This is the reading in the best Greek codices; the Vulgate reads “together with Mary his espoused wife,” etc.; the Sinaitic-Syriac version has “together with Mary, his wife,” etc. The wedding ceremony followed by the bride's reception into her husband's home (nissu'in, §231) had already taken place although Luke does not mention it. It seems, however, that Luke here deliberately uses the two terms “betrothed” and “with child” side by side to emphasize the fact that Mary was still a virgin though she was lawfully wedded and with child. The addition, or substitution, of the word “wife” seems to have been made by copyists anxious to clarify the meaning of the verse.

[←65]

Constantine's structure also ended a profanation. St. Jerome, who lived for a long time in Bethlehem, narrates that from the time of Hadrian to that of Constantine, the pagans had deliberately desecrated the most famous places associated with the life of Jesus, and among them the place of his birth had been shadowed by a "grove of Tammuz, that is, of Adonis, and in the cave where Christ had cried as an infant, the lover of Venus was bewailed" (*Epist.* 58). This information is not surprising when we think of the great Jewish rebellion under Bar-Kokba and its terrible repression under Hadrian in 135. Palestine was then systematically paganized: just as Jerusalem became the pagan Aelia Capitolina with a temple to Jupiter on the site of the old Hebrew Temple and one to Aphrodite on the site where Jesus had died, so care was taken to plant around the cave in Bethlehem the grove of Adonis-Tammuz with its attendant licentious cult. St. Jerome's information, then, is historically clear and admissible. But the interpretation ascribed to it recently by some few scholars is both artificial and extremely forced. They claim that the worship of Adonis-Tammuz was the original cult of the cave, while that of Christ was of later growth and supplanted the former in that particular place. This means that they are trying to make St. Jerome say exactly the opposite of what he does say, to assign this statement to him for a priori reasons which contradict every historical evidence. Justin Martyr is testifying to the worship of Jesus and not of Adonis-Tammuz, and he does so in the second century when the Christian persecutions favored the violent introduction of pagan cults, but certainly not of Christian worship.

[←66]

“Nulla ibi obstetrix, nulla muliercularum sedulitas intercessit; ipsa pannis involvit infantem: ipsa et mater et obstetrix fuit.”

The expression is typically Hebrew: “first-born son” is the Hebrew *bekor*, a term of special legal significance because the first-born was to be presented to the Temple, and Luke employs this particular word almost as if to prepare us for the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, which he alone of the four Evangelists narrates. But the use of the term here has furnished the pretext for attributing to Luke the implied information that Mary later had other children, otherwise the word “firstborn” would not make sense. As early as the fourth century, St. Jerome answered this in his reply to Helvidius, the first exponent of this argument, pointing out that

Every only-begotten is a first born, though not every first born is an only son. Firstborn does not mean him after whom came others, but him before whom no child is born (*Omnis unigenitus est primogenitus: non omnis primogenitus est unigenitus. Primogenitus est, non tantum post quem et alii, sed ante quem nullus*—*Adv. Helvidium*, 10); but in vain, and Lucian’s argument continued to be repeated: “If he is the first, he is not the only child; and if he is the only child, he is not the first” (*Demonax* 29). It was natural that the Protestant Reformation should adopt Luke’s words as a battle cry against the Catholic veneration for Mary; but even the rationalists, whose historical-philological observations are often excellent, have not interpreted the term in its strict historical-philological sense, preferring instead the reasoning of Helvidius. Only a few, and Loisy among them, have had any doubts about it. Today the battle is over, and Helvidius and his followers are certainly not the victors. In the year 5 B.C., that is, a few months after the birth of Mary’s “first born,” a Jewish bride died in childbirth in Egypt. In her epitaph she is pictured as saying among other things . . . “Destiny has led me to the end of my life in the birth-pangs for my first-born son....” (prwtotokou. . .tednou). The inscription was published by C. C. Edgar in *Annales du Service des Antiquités de l’Egypte*, under the title “More Tombstones from Tell el Yahoudieh,” t. 22 (1922), pp. 7-16, and was reprinted in *Biblica*, 1930, p. 386. Contrary to the reasoning of Helvidius and his followers, the death of this young mother proves that her first born was also her only child, as in the case of Mary.

It might be well here to recall the analogous but much easier passage in Matthew 1:25, which, speaking of the relationship between Mary and Joseph says: “And he did not know her till she had brought forth her firstborn son.” The phrase “did not know her” is the same euphemism we have met before (§230). The conjunctive adverb “until,” *ewz*, corresponds to the Hebrew *‘ad*, which points only toward the completion of the action discussed in the clause it introduces and in no way refers to any subsequent state or action. There are examples of this in both the Old and the New Testaments (*Gen.* 8:7; *Ps.* 109 [110]: 1; *Matt.* 12:20; 22:44; 28:20; 1 *Tim.* 4:13). Hence Loisy himself correctly notes that in this passage Matthew is concerned only with the birth of Jesus, in which the intervention of any father is denied, and he is not implying anything with regard to subsequent events.

[←68]

The whole story of Herod's life is woven of facts such as these, if we are to believe the account of Flavius Josephus, in *Wars of the Jews*, I, 431-664; for the last-named crime, see *ibid.*, 489; *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVI, 230-231.

[←69]

Rabbi Aqiba, before dedicating himself to the study of the Torah and becoming one of its most celebrated doctors, had also been one of the “people of the land,” and this is what he used to think then: “When I was one of the ‘people of the land’ I thought: If I had here a Scribe, I would bite him like a donkey! His disciples said to him: Rabbi, you mean to say ‘like a dog’! He answered: No, because the former breaks the bones with his bite; the latter bites but does not break the bones” (*Pesahim*, 49b). Rabbi Aqiba died in A.D. 135, but even before his time his teacher. Rabbi Eleazar, declared: “If we were not necessary to them [the “people of the land”] for trade, they would murder us” (*ibid.*).

[←70]

This "good will" (*eudokia*) is the divine good will (Hebrew *rason*) toward men. Other codices have "good will" in the nominative; that would make a division into three verses, as follows:

"Glory to God in the highest  
and peace on earth:  
good will to men!"

But a division of the thought in three verses is irregular, while two give us a perfect parallel (glory-peace; in the highest-earth; God-men); besides the conjunction and would be more appropriate at the beginning of the third verse than the second, or would be necessary at the beginning of both.

[←71]

The scrupulously careful collection we have already quoted, Strack and Billerbeck's *Kommentar*, Vol. II, p. 139, cannot list a single passage in all rabbinic literature which takes into account these two quotations from Isaias; apparently that "light of the Gentiles" irritated the eyes of the spirit, and since it could not be extinguished, the rabbis looked away.



[←72]

Alessandro Manzoni, 11 Cinque Maggio, vv. 57-60 [Translator].

[←73]

Herodotus says that the word *magi* was the name of a tribe of Media, and it may be that in his day the *magi*, with their special laws and privileges, did form an exclusive caste or kind of clan. But the name is certainly older than that. In the *Gathas* the term *magavan* and in the Avesta, *mogu* (old Persian *magu*), occur frequently as adjective forms of the noun *maga*, “gift,” and they mean “sharers of the gift”; now, since the *Gathas* use the term “gift” to mean the teaching of Zoroaster, evidently the “sharers of the gift,” the *magi*, are those who believe in Zoroaster, namely, his disciples. In fact, early and reliable Greek authors, like Xanthos, Hermodoros, and Aristotle, agree that the *magi* were disciples of Zoroaster and define their teachings as “a very clear and useful” philosophy. They consider that Zoroaster himself was the first *magus*. We have to come down to later writers, especially Bolos of Mendes, the founder of the Neo-Pythagorean and naturalistic school of Alexandria, to find the *magi* pictured as astrologers and sorcerers and therefore confused in part with the Babylonian Chaldeans and in part with the Egyptian magicians. Later, however, in Babylonia even the *magi* turned Zoroaster into an astrologer. For this whole subject, cf. G. Messina, *Ursprung der Magier und die zarathustrische Religion*, Rome, 1930; idem, *I Magi a Betlemme e una predizione di Zoroastro*, Rome, 1933; idem, “Una presunta profezia di Zoroastro sulla venuta del Messia,” in *Biblica*, 1933, pp. 170-198.

The theology of the *magi*, as revealed in the *Avesta*, hinges on the belief in the dual principle of Good and Evil and the eternal conflict between them, between Ahura-Mazda, the “Wise Lord,” and Anra-Mainyu, the spirit of evil. One phase of this conflict is of particular interest to us and that is the idea peculiar to Mazdeism of the *saushyant*, or “helper.” This concept occurs in the oldest parts of the *Avesta*, the Gathas, and grows in definiteness and detail in the later sections and in Middle Persian literature. In the beginning, this “helper” (one or more) is a real historical personage actually existent, but later the mission of the “helper” is assigned to three future persons who are to be born of the seed of Zoroaster and whose work will be accomplished in recurring periods; the most important of the three is the last, called par excellence “the Helper.” There is a certain basic optimism in this concept because the struggle between Good and Evil will end with the triumph of the former, thanks to the intervention of the “Helper.” In Persian thought, the history of man and the world unfolds through a period of twelve millennia, divided into four groups of three thousand years each. In the first two groups all is peace, but in the third begins the struggle of Evil against Good (the mythological period), and in the fourth Zoroaster appears (historical period) to announce the doctrine of Ahura Mazda, he himself being the first “helper,” assisted by other “helpers,” that is, believers in the same teaching. It is to be noted, however, that the term *saushyant* is a future participle. Now, in the later sections of the *Avesta* the idea of future time received greater emphasis under the influence of other concepts, and the term came to be applied particularly to a specific eschatological personage, to whom were transferred earlier mythological features. This personage is Astvat-ereta, a descendant of Zoroaster, and his mission is implied in his name, which means “truth incarnate.” He will be the *saushyant* par excellence because his work will assure the final triumph of Good over Evil and restore mankind to its primeval state of happiness. Later Persian texts mention the other two “helpers” who are descendants of Zoroaster and then present the third and last, who also is descended from Zoroaster but will be born of a maiden “whom no man shall approach” (Theodore bar Konai). The advent of the last “helper” will mark the resurrection of the dead, the general judgment of mankind, and the restoration of the inviolable kingdom of Ahura-Mazda with the triumph of Good.

These concepts, which were known outside Iran and even to the Christians (especially the Syrian writers who lived near Persia), led to the belief that Zoroaster had prophesied the Hebrew Messiah. But even earlier than this, Jewish writers had begun to link the Persian *saushyant* with the Hebrew Messiah, for from the time of Cyrus the Great (d. in 529 B.C.) Judaism had been in direct contact with the Persians. The so-called *Oracles of Hystaspes*, only a few fragments of which have come down to us, clearly reveal the tendency to interweave biblical concepts with Persian ideas, a tendency which most likely stems from some Jewish writer trying to bridge the two worlds of thought.

Historically, therefore, it is entirely probable that toward the beginning of the Christian Era the knowledge of the Jewish expectation of a Messiah-King was common among the magi in Persia, that this foreign expectation became identified with the Persian expectation of a *saushyant*, or “helper,” and that some of them were interested in one way or another in the appearance of this great personage. (For further information and references to the ancient texts, cf. the writings of G. Messina, cited at the end of the preceding note.)

[←75]

The minute surveillance exercised by Herod's secret police over the people of Jerusalem and their hatred for his disguised spies is evidenced in *Antiquities of the Jews*, XV, 284-291.

[←76]

A thousand was the numerical basis for divisions of the population in ancient times.

[←77]

The rationalists, of course, treat the episode of the Magi as pure legend. Several of them think its source was the voyage to Italy made by Thiridates, King of Armenia, to pay his respects to Nero, which is mentioned by Pliny (*Natur. hist.*, XXX, 2, 16), Tacitus (*Annal.*, XV, 24, 29), Suetonius (*Nero*, 13), and described in full by Dion Cassius (LXIII, I, I ff.). But there is not the slightest resemblance between the two journeys, for that of Thiridates is sumptuous, pompous, and theatrical even to his reception in Italy (read Dion Cassius) while that of the Magi is in complete contrast to it. The only similarity— and it resides in one word alone —is that, as Pliny says, Thiridates “brought magi with him” who, however, are here pictured unfavorably as masters of the occult arts. Besides that, the journey of Thiridates took place in the year 66, and news of it spread through Syria, across which he traveled, and Italy, which was his destination, but it interested Palestine not at all. Hence, to begin with, it would be necessary to prove that the story of the Magi was written after 66 and that Thiridates’ voyage was widely known throughout Palestine. Until these two points are proved, even apart from other difficulties, the afore-mentioned hypothesis must be considered entirely arbitrary and fantastic.

[←78]

On this point, too, the apocrypha and the popular imagination of later generations have run away with themselves and have set the number of victims at from three thousand to one hundred and forty thousand; the last estimate was suggested by passages in the *Apocalypse* 7:4; 14:12.

[←79]

For the Old Testament, see the alleged quotation in *Esdra*s 9:11, which is also attributed to the “prophets” (plural) and is not to be found in any one prophet. For the rabbinic writings, cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, Vol. I, pp. 92-93.



[←80]

Of these two epithets, *Mark* uses only *Nazarene* (four times); *Matthew*, *John*, and the *Acts* only *Nazorean* (eleven times); *Luke* uses both (the former twice and the latter only once, in 18:37). Nevertheless, *Matthew* (21:11), *John* (1:45), and the *Acts* (10:38) also refer to Christ as “Jesus of Nazareth” although the only adjective form they use is *Nazorean*; hence for them *Nazorean* means “one from Nazareth.” Philologically speaking, the Hebrew *Nasrath* or *Nasrah* (§228), Greek *Nazareq* or *Nazara*, would regularly give *Nazarhnoz*, *Nazarene*, which is the form used least. The form *Nazorean*, *Nazwraioz*, would seem to be derived from a name like *Nasor(ath)*. Now it may well be that this last is the usual name for Nazareth as pronounced by the Galileans, who had a dialect of their own (cf. *Matt.* 26:73 with *Mark* xxxx14:70). The form *Nazorean* may have prevailed over the more regular form *Nazarene* by analogy with similar names borne by the followers of various currents of Jewish teaching when Jesus' disciples came to form one such current (cf. *Acts* 24:5). For the Essenes also there are two forms, 'Essaioi and 'Essenoi for the Herodians, 'Hrwdeioi and 'Hrwdianoι, while later we find fixed forms like *Amorean*, *Saborean* which are analogous to *Nazorean*. We do not have enough information to settle the philological question definitely. Some scholars, however, in their determination to discover that Christianity existed before Jesus (§§215ff.) have used this uncertainty to suppose that there existed a sect of Nazoreans of different origin and tendencies.

[←81]

Cf. the meaning, based not on the etymology but on a certain apparent assonance, attributed to *Abraham* (*Gen.* 17:5) and *Moses* (*Exod.* 2:10), and to place names like *Babylonia* (*Gen.* 11:9), *Galgai* (*Josue* 5:9), etc.

[←82]

Shortly before, the same Matthew (2:15) has seen in the whole Israelite people a prefiguration of the Messiah Jesus and applied to his return from Egypt the words of God to his people: “I called my son out of Egypt” (*Osee* 11:1).

[←83]

For age (Vulg. *aetate*) the Greek has *hlikia* which elsewhere ordinarily has the meaning given; here it must instead mean "stature," the normal development of the body which accompanies age, since Luke has just told us that the Child was twelve years old (2:42). *hlikia* is used in this same sense in *Luke* 19:3.

[←84]

For the theological aspects of the question, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theol.*, III, *quaest.* 12, a. 2; *quaest.* 9, a. 4.

[←85]

The place is supposedly El-Bireh, about eleven miles north of Jerusalem, but this is a very late tradition. In 1485, Francesco Suriano wrote: "Similarly the fortress called el Bir, where the Virgin Mary knew she had lost her son and she went about weeping among their kinsmen and their friends seeking him; and there is a beautiful church made entirely of cut stone" (*Trattato di Terra Santa e dell'Oriente*, p. 138). This is one of the earliest testimonies we have in favor of the tradition, and since it is so recent it has little value.

[←86]

This seems to be the meaning of the Greek *en toiz tou patroz mou* (cf. *John* 19:27); it is the interpretation favored by the early Fathers, especially the Greeks. The Vulgate text may perhaps be completed as follows: in his [aedibus] quae patris mei sunt. [The English renderings are divided on this point. — Translator.]

[←87]

Many commentators, on the contrary, maintain that these things took place near the Jordan, even the calling of Nathanael, who was sitting under a fig tree. But the mention of this homely custom seems to indicate that the incident took place near Nathanael's house, which was in Cana of Galilee.



[←88]

For all these details and their respective rabbinic testimonies, cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *Kommentar*, Vol. II, pp. 372-400.

[←89]

*Judges* 11:12 (cf. the Greek of the Septuagint); *2 Sam.* 16:10, 19:22; *4 Kings* 3:13, 9:18; *2 Par.* 35:21, etc. For the Gospels cf. *Matt.* 8:29; *Mark* 1:24, 5:7; *Luke* 4:34, 8:28, where the expression always contains the idea of refusal.

[←90]

It is self-evident that this is chiefly a philological question and requires a knowledge of Semitic languages which its various interpreters often lack. Among the explanations without foundation, proposed in the past or even in our own day we may list: What is there [in common] between me and thee?" — "What [does it matter] to me and to thee [if the wine runs short]?" — "Why are you concerned with me [with my mission]?" etc. Recently much attention has been given the very frequent Arabic interjection, *ma lak (malek)*. Literally this means "what is it to you?" but actually it is used with many meanings, especially with some like the English, don't worry, or I'll take care of it." The meaning of the Arabic expression, however, does not correspond exactly to that of the Hebrew.

[←91]

I have already mentioned the fact that John and the Synoptics differ in time sequence. The former puts the driving of the hucksters from the Temple at the beginning of Jesus' public life, the latter put it at the end (§163). Many scholars have considered it impossible to reconcile the two narratives and have decided that Jesus drove the traders from the Temple twice, that is, on two different occasions. In my opinion this happened only once and at the beginning of the public ministry as John explicitly indicates, accurate chronologist that he is. If the Synoptics transfer this one incident to the end of Jesus' public life it is because it fits in with the subject they are treating at the moment and especially because their summary expositions, which frequently ignore the actual time sequence, make explicit mention of a stay in Jerusalem only once (while John mentions at least four separate visits to Jerusalem) and therefore group the episode of the traders with the other facts they record of Jerusalem.

[←92]

Some of the early documents, representing substantially the current of thought that stems from Tatian, transfer Jesus' conversion with Nicodemus to the last Pasch. There are a few reasons in favor of this (for example, *John* 4:54 seems unaware of statements in 2:23 and 3:2, which would seem more natural at the end of Jesus' public life), and some modern scholars also have favored the transposition. But the chronological transition between chapters two and three is clear enough (cf. also the references in 7:50 and 19:39), and hence the transposition would seem to be arbitrary and imprudent.

[←93]

The expression “from above” is in Greek *anwqen*, which can also mean “again,” as the Vulgate translates it (*denuo*); but in this case it is preferable to take it in the first meaning, which it seems to have as John himself uses it in 3:31; 19:11, 23.

[←94]

The Vulgate and a few Greek codices add here, "who is in heaven."

[←95]

The part from here to the end of the passage is considered by some scholars not to belong to the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus but to be a series of reflections on the part of the Evangelist. This is possible but not certain. Nor is this uncertainty surprising since we are dealing with an author who is as subjective as John and who elaborates his material so much. There is a similar instance shortly after this (*John* 3:31-36), where it seems more probable that the passage consists of the Evangelists own reflections.



[←96]

The reading a Jew is suggested by most of the reliable Greek manuscripts and is the one preferred in the critical texts. The Vulgate has the plural Jews. Some critics propose reading Jesus instead of Jew, but this is an arbitrary and tendentious suggestion.

[←97]

The passage which follows (3:31-36) is probably a series of reflections on the part of the Evangelist (cf. §289, n. 2).

[←98]

The expression used in the Synoptics is significant in this regard. They say that John was “delivered up” (paredoqh, *Matt.* 4:12; cf. paradoqhnaï, *Mark* 1:14), or betrayed.

[←99]

After the brief observations on the [preceding] page, it is clear that the town from which the woman comes can be none other than (Balata) Sichem, and this would be even clearer if time and space permitted us to go into the archeological reasons for this opinion. Sichem, though in decay, was still inhabited in Jesus' day. Before the recent excavations made there (from 1927 on) it was commonly believed that the city was the modern village of Askar, and this belief was favored somewhat by the resemblance between the two names Sichem and Askar. But Askar is about a mile away from "Jacob's well," and since there is a good well in the town itself, it would be difficult to understand why the woman took that long walk to get water. The similarity between the two names does not prove anything, it being one of the many instances we have of a new settlement deriving its name from the former home of its inhabitants. After the time of Jesus, when (Balata) Sichem was entirely abandoned and deserted, the inhabitants moved to the place where the modern Askar now stands, and the new settlement kept the name of the old. It seems certain, in fact, that Balata Sichem was then called *Sychora*, which later became Askar.

[←100]

The exponents of the myth and allegory theories think otherwise. According to them the five husbands of the Samaritan woman were the five idolatrous divinities worshiped in the past by the Samaritan nation, here symbolized by the woman. Their proof is based exclusively on the passage from 2 [4] *Kings* 17:30-31 (which Flavius Josephus also uses. *Antiquities of the Jews*, IX, 288). But the passage in question lists five races, from the fusion of which rose the ancient Samaritans, and in addition seven or eight divinities which they adored (the number varies in the Hebrew version and the early translations). Hence there really is no parallel here, because the woman would have had to have seven or eight husbands and not five, which is the number of races. And what divinity would the sixth husband represent, the one she had at the moment? At the time of Jesus, the Samaritans were not idolators but adored the same Yahweh as the Jews, although there was a schism between their worship and that of Jerusalem (§4). Aside from all this, the passage used as proof is one of the many in the Bible which contain a long string of odd names, and no particular importance was attached to it in early times so far as we know. Why, then, should anyone in the first century after Christ fashion a special allegory on just this particular passage, which in addition furnishes no basis for the invention? No such allegory would have had any definite purpose. If the author of the fourth Gospel was an unknown mystic of Asia Minor—as the allegory theorists would have it—he would be much more concerned with combating the worship of Diana of Ephesus (cf. *Acts* 19:24) and similar idolatries than with engaging in any polemic against the monotheistic Samaritans of far-off Palestine. Allegorical interpretations of this kind make one think of that presented by A. Jeremias (1916), who found an allegorical significance in the fact that there were three hundred and eighteen servants of Abraham (*Gen.* 14:14) and that there were also three hundred and eighteen bishops who condemned Arius at the council of Nice. Now undoubtedly this method of reasoning is a kind of science, but it is not historical criticism— it is cabalism.

[←101]

The Evangelist, conscious that his Greek readers do not know very much about things Jewish, adds at this point the explanation: that is to say, Christ.

[←102]

The Greek calls him basilikoz, hence “royal official,” either civil or military; the Vulgate has *regulus*, which would be instead basiliskoz. The royal court to which he was attached was without question that of Herod Antipas.

[←103]

The term is a technical one. Since fishing with large nets required a great many men and tools, a certain number of fishermen formed a company; one furnished the boat, another the nets or other implements, and another his labor; The profit was divided among the “partners” in proportion to their particular contribution. They are mentioned in the Hebrew text of *Job* 40:30 (*habbarim*).



[←104]

A substantially similar maxim is ascribed in the Talmud (*Yoma*, 85 b) to a certain Rabbi Jonathan who flourished about A.D. 140. But it is much more restricted in meaning than Jesus' saying, for it says that the Sabbath rest can be violated to save a man's life. Substantially, then, it merely confirms what the afore-mentioned Hasidim had already established. Jesus establishes a much broader criterion, quite apart from the danger to life.

[←105]

The first of these two names may be an epithet derived from the Aramaic *taddayya*, breast, if not a corruption of the proper name Theudas; the second derives from *leb*, *libba*, “heart.” Would the name in both cases be equivalent to broadchested (or greathearted)?

[←106]

It is to be noted that Jesus spent the night in prayer and chose his Apostles on the mountain (cf. *Mark* 3:13; *Luke* 6:12-13), that is, on the higher part of the mountain less accessible to the multitudes. According to Matthew, the Sermon was given “up the mountain” (5:1), but after Jesus, “coming down with them, . . . took his stand on a level stretch (*epi topou pedinou*)” according to Luke (6:17). It is easy to imagine this level place on the slope or at the foot of the hill, which Matthew includes in the generic term “mountain,” and so the two pieces of information complete each other. (On the contrary, the mythologist and allegorist scholars find in them a clear contradiction which is enough to deny that the episode ever took place.) The level place indicated by tradition fits both designations very well.

[←107]

This criterion is commonly accepted today by scholars but it is in no way a discovery of modern criticism. Note the following passage: "I have already indicated that we must not search too insistently for consecutive order in the writings of the Evangelists, for they did not intend to set things down in the order in which they were done or said by Christ. This is particularly clear in his discourses, in which they neither report all that he said, nor quote him in the order in which he spoke, being satisfied to cite the principal elements of his teaching." Thus wrote Maldonatus (in *Matt.*, VII, 1) in the sixteenth century when "criticism" was not yet born and the first orthodox Protestants were introducing the most rigidly literal method of interpretation.

## [←108]

Among the many examples we might cite, here are three which closely resemble the passages under consideration:

“Cursed be Chanaan!  
A servant of servants  
shall he be unto his brethren!  
“[Bless, O Lord, the tents of Sem  
and let Chanaan be their servant] \*  
(*Gen.* 9:25-26).

“Cursed be the land of Meroz,  
said the angel of the Lord:  
curse the inhabitants thereof . . .  
Blessed among women be Jahel  
the wife of Haber the Cinite,  
and blessed be she in her tent!”  
(*Judges* 5:23-24.)

“Cursed be the man that trusteth in man,  
and maketh flesh his arm! . . .  
For he shall be like tamarisk in the desert,  
and he shall not see when good shall come....  
“Blessed be the man that trusteth in the Lord,  
and the Lord shall be his confidence!  
And he shall be as a tree that is planted by the waters,  
that spreadeth out its roots towards moisture....  
(*Jer.* 17:5-8).

\*Rendering based on the author’s reconstruction of the original— Translator.

## [←109]

A few observations on the two recensions. —The “poor” are the Hebrew *‘aniyyim*, that is, the “wretched,” the “lowly,” either because they have nothing or because they are at the very bottom of the social scale. Luke leaves out Matthew's qualifying “(poor) in spirit” (§145), which restricts the beatitude to those “poor” who accept their condition and are content in spirit; those to whom it is burdensome and unwelcome are not “poor in spirit.”

Instead of the more generic term “mourn” (*penqountez*) in Matthew, Luke uses the specific “weep” (*klaiontez*); cf. *Isa.* 61:2.

The “meek” (*praeiz*) are not those of sweet and gentle nature, but the lowest members of society, the *tenuiores* of the Romans, the abject poor; the whole expression is taken from Ps. 36[37]:11, which says that these “meek” (Hebrew *‘anawim*, almost synonymous with the preceding *‘aniyyim*; Vulgate, *mansueti*) “shall inherit the land.”

The pure of heart are not only the chaste in thought and affection but more generally all those free from spiritual guilt, the innocent before God; the phrase comes from Ps. 23[24]:4, which says that the “clean [pure] of heart” (Hebrew *bar-lebab*) may enter the holy place of Yahweh.

The “peacemakers” (*eirhnopoioi*) are the peaceful not only in the passive sense of those who enjoy peace, but also in the active sense, i.e., those who effect and bring peace.

The eighth and ninth beatitudes in *Matthew* (10-11) have the same subject, and to both of them the sanction in verse 12 refers.

[←110]

The expression “salt of the earth” does not mean salt extracted from the earth but the salt which is to preserve the earth, or mankind, against corruption just as it literally preserves flesh meat and is sprinkled on the sacrifices offered in the Temple (*Lev. 2:13*). When this salt loses its strength, because it has been wet or adulterated in some way, then it must be thrown out of the house, that is, into the street, where all the refuse from a Palestinian house eventually lands.

[←111]

The “light of the world” is analogous to the “salt of the earth.” The “city set on a mountain” is believed by many to be Safed, a town clearly visible from the shores of the lake, being about 2700 feet above sea level. But this is sheer conjecture, and any city or town so situated can prove the truth of these words. The “measure” was the Roman modius, a dry measure equivalent to about nine quarts. It would have been very possible for the usual small terra-cotta lamp to have remained lit beneath it.



[←112]

“To destroy” (Katalusai, to resolve by throwing down, to destroy completely) in opposition to “fulfill” (plhrwsai), i.e., to destroy part, retain part and add somewhat, perfecting the whole. — “The Law and the Prophets,” the two first and most important of the three sections into which the Hebrew Scriptures were divided; -they denote practically the entire Bible. —The letter iota is Greek and was unquestionably introduced by the Greek translator of Matthew (§120), but the original Aramaic could not have been anything but yod, the smallest letter in the Hebrew square alphabet (then already in use); “tittle” (keraia, “little horn”) is one of those tiny flourishes that distinguish one Hebrew letter from another that resembles it. Here these signs represent the respective precepts, and not so much their letter as their spirit. In this precisely did the *fulfillment* proclaimed by Jesus consist as well as the difference between him and the Scribes and Pharisees.

[←113]

The *judgment* (or *tribunal*) of verse 22 as well as that in verse 21 is the local Jewish court (§61); from now on a simple outburst of anger, which is a predisposition to murder, will be sufficient to bring a man before this court. —Raca is the Aramaic *reqa*, “empty,” or in this case “empty (-headed)”; this insult will be denounced to the supreme court, the Sanhedrin (§59). “Fool” is to be taken in the moral and religious sense, hence “impious,” “atheist.” This insult makes the offender liable to Gehenna, which was the Valley of Hinnom (*Ge-hinnom*) directly south of Jerusalem; since it served as the dump heap of the city, great fires were always kept burning there for hygienic reasons, to consume the refuse, and that is why it symbolized the place of torment in the next world (§§79 ff.).

[←114]

The “opponent” is the plaintiff who is claiming damages in court. —The “penny” is the little Roman coin worth one fourth of the *as*; it was worth much less than our penny.

[←115]

Just as in verse 22 the angry outburst is considered a predisposition to murder, here the impure glance is considered an act of adultery, though not actually committed. The rabbinic writings also contain many passages similar to this, but they are often of a later date and may be due to Christian influence. *Kalla*, I, says: "Whoever looks at a woman with [impure] intention is as one who has had intercourse with her" (similar comparisons follow which are very crude); other texts in Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 299 ff.

[←116]

At the beginning of this passage the formula: "You have heard that it was said to the ancients . . ." is very much abbreviated; but the whole subject is treated again in 19:9 (§§479 ff.), and that is probably its historical context.

[←117]

The Jews contemporary with Jesus greatly abused the matter of the oath, and in reaction to such abuse the Essenes forbade any oath whatever (§44). Jesus, without being an Essene, approaches their point of view. The last words “from the evil one” (ej tou ponhrou) may be either neuter (“evil”) or a masculine noun (Evil personified, or the devil). There is no practical difference between the two.

[←118]

“An eye for an eye,” etc. was the *lex talionis* (*Lev.* 24:19-20) common throughout the Orient (Code of *Hammurabi*, etc.) and even in early Roman times (*The Law of the Twelve Tables*, which contributed the name *talio*); it could be considered a principle of justice but not of charity. —The verb “forces thee to go” (*aggareusei*) referred to a custom of Persia, from where the expression comes. The ancient Persians had official couriers or bearers to carry dispatches throughout their immense empire and sometimes they requisitioned men and animals for that purpose. The bearer was the *angaros*, and to “requisition” for that purpose was *angariare* (cf. Herodotus, VIII, 98). In this sense, the meaning is clear (for a practical example, see §604).

## [←119]

The precept, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor,” is in Lev. 19:18, but what follows, “and hate thy enemy,” is not to be found in any passage of the Old Testament. *Exod.* 23:5, prescribes certain forms of assistance to one's personal enemy. Nevertheless, these precepts referred only to acts toward one's “neighbor” (Hebrew, *reʿa*), namely, an Israelite, and they might be extended at the most to include the “stranger” (*ger*) who was living in Israelite territory and had become, as it were, an associate of Israel (Lev. 19:33-34; *Deut.* 10:19); but the *goyim*, the non-Israelites, were not included at all, and therefore were not “neighbors.” While the Old Testament contained no explicit command to hate them, it had ordered those religious wars of extermination (*herem*), from which it was only too easy to deduce a general precept of hate (*Exod.* 17:14-16; *Num.* 25:17-18; *Deut.* 7:16; 23:3-6; 25:17-19). Judaism in Jesus day had so interpreted them and regularly treated the surrounding Greeks and Romans as *goyim*. Even earlier this had been the norm applied in practice not only to non-Israelites but also to those Israelites from whom some injustice or injury had been received. The *lex talionis* was applied to them instead of the precept, “Love thy neighbor.” In the Old Testament we find sentiments of this kind expressed by an Israelite toward one of his “neighbors,” on whom he is invoking the just chastisement of God:

“ . . . Set over him one who is godless,  
Let an accuser stand at his right hand;  
When he is judged let him go forth guilty,  
Let even his appeal be held a crime;  
Let his days be few, and another take his office;  
Let his children be fatherless  
And his wife a widow;  
Let his sons be vagrants and beggars,  
And seek their bread far from their ruined home.  
Let the usurer seize all that he has.  
And strangers plunder the fruit of his labors.  
Let none show kindness to him  
Nor anyone have pity on his orphans,  
Let his race be rooted out  
And in one generation let their name be forgotten....  
He loved cursing: it has come upon him;  
He would not have blessing; it is far from him.  
He clads himself with cursing as with a garment,  
And it has come into his entrails like water,  
And in his bones like oil:  
So let it be to him as the robe in which he wraps himself  
And as the girdle that ever clings around him....”

(Ps. 108 [109], tr. George O'Neill, *Psalms and Canticles*, Milwaukee, 1937. Cf. *Acts* 1:20).

Invectives of similar violence among pagans are barely to be found in the metrical imprecations of Archilocus and his imitator Horace.



[←120]

The “justice” in the first verse is reminiscent of the Hebrew *sedaqah*, meaning “justice” and also, at the time of Jesus, “almsgiving,” a work characteristic of the “just man.” In this passage, however, it has a broader meaning and refers to “good works” in general while almsgiving is specifically mentioned in the following verse. —None of the ancient documents testify to a custom of sounding a trumpet when alms were distributed either in the synagogue or elsewhere; hence we must consider it a metaphor denoting the abundant publicity which accompanied the distribution. —The expression “they have had” (apocousin) may be clarified on the basis of its use in Greek papyri. The verb meant “to give a receipt” to a buyer who had paid, and the substantive derived from it (apoch) designated the written certificate that the price had been paid and that the seller “had received it.” Like him is the hypocrite who gives alms for vainglory.

[←121]

The Jews habitually prayed standing, but here the expression “standing” has practically the meaning of “standing well in view,” as the following verb “may be seen” indicates, expressing the true aim of the performance. The “room” was some nook or small secret room, because the houses of ordinary people consisted of one large room only (§243). The more separate and secret the place, the more suitable it is for prayer according to Jesus.

[←122]

The verb here translated as “multiply words” is in Greek *battaloghshte*, a word which is extremely rare and variously explained. According to some it derives from the Aramaic *battal* (*ta*), “vacuousness,” “vanity,” and would mean “to speak vain things”; according to others it derives from the name of *Battos*, a famous stammerer, and means to “stutter,” to “jumble words.” There is not much difference between the two meanings, but the first seems to be favored by the phrase which follows, “by speaking much.” The pagans’ verbosity in prayer is attested by many passages in ancient writers. It is enough to cite the one from Terence (*Heauton.*, 879 ff.): “Oh, please, wife, stop pounding away at the gods with your thanks—unless you rate them by your own brilliance and think they don’t understand a thing if it isn’t repeated to them a hundred times.”—I have set Luke’s version of the Lord’s Prayer beside that of Matthew in order that the conspicuous differences between them may be seen at a glance. Luke seems to have more exactly recorded the historical circumstances in which the prayer was dictated, if not its contents (§442). There is abundant controversy over the meaning of the adjective “necessary” which modifies bread. In Greek it is *epiusion*, which the Vulgate translates *supersubstantialem* in *Matthew*, and *quotidianum* in *Luke*. Origen (*De Oration.*, 27, 7) asserted that the adjective was not used by the Greeks, either cultured or plebeian, but examples of it were later found in popular texts. Of the many etymological explanations recently offered for it the most likely seems to be *epi-ousia* “for subsistence,” “necessary.”

[←123]

For fasting among the Pharisees, see §77. In contrast to their ostentation, Jesus here recommends dissimulation, without, however, at all disapproving the fast in itself.

[←124]

The ultramundane sanction which is the basis of the whole Sermon on the Mount (§319) seems more apparent here where it speaks of man's most tangible good, wealth. But it only seems more apparent for it is just as essential in the matters previously treated.

[←125]

Luke sets this passage too (verses 22-23) in another context (11:34-36) and his treatment seems more appropriate. Here it is not connected with what precedes or with what follows; in fact, the subsequent verses would naturally follow what precedes this particular passage.

[←126]

Mammon, in verse 24, is a Hebrew and Aramaic word (*matman*, *mamona*, transcribed into Greek *mammwnaz* and *mamwnaz*), and although there is some discussion concerning the derivation of the Aramaic form, its generic meaning was undoubtedly “wealth” (even among the Carthaginians, according to St. Augustine, *lucrum Punice mammon dicitur*). Here riches are personified and contrasted with God, but it is certainly not necessary to suppose—as some fanciful modern writers have done —that there existed a pagan divinity called Mammon. —“Stature [age],” in verse 27, is *hlikia*, for which see §260, note 28. Here it can hardly mean “stature,” for to add a cubit to one’s stature is not a “least thing,” as Luke says in the parallel passage (12:26). The least thing would seem to be to prolong one’s life, that is, one’s “age” by one cubit, but this too is impossible. —The lilies of the field in verse 28 were not the lilies that grow in our gardens or hothouses; they were much smaller but very bright little flowers which blossomed abundantly over the hillsides of Galilee in the springtime. When they were dry, they were used to heat the “oven,” the small kitchen utensil in which the bread was baked.

[←127]

In this chapter there is less continuity and the transitions from one subject to another are more sudden and more frequent (note the transition from verses 5-6 6-7, 11-12, 14-15, etc.). Hence it is more than likely that we have Matthews own "order" here (§114).



## [←128]

This verse is a typical logion (§98) and it is difficult to understand its connection with the present context because we do not know exactly to what it refers. The early Church based on it the *disciplina arcani* for the veneration of the Eucharist (*Didache*, IX, 5; cf. Tertullian, *De praescript.*, 41), and the Byzantine liturgy today still calls the fragments of Eucharistic bread "pearls." But as it stands in Matthew, this could not have been the meaning for those listening to the Sermon, who have heard no mention of the future Eucharist. Modern scholars have proposed numerous theories, but many of them have been unfounded and not a few mistaken. The verse can mean in general only this: do not pass on the teaching of Jesus ("what is holy") to people who are unworthy to receive it ("... dogs ... swine") and ready besides to profane it and use it for evil ends ("... turn [against you] ..."). Recently I. Zolli (17 *Nazareno*, Udine, 1938, pp. 148-155) revives and develops an already existing theory, which supposes that "what is holy" (Hebrew *qadosh*) is an ambiguous translation of the Aramaic *qadasha* (pl., *qadashayya*), which means "ring (of gold)." Besides, in the original Aramaic, "pearls" would have been, not *margeliyyata*, but *harozayya*, that is, "necklaces (of pearls)." On the basis of this, he redivides the verse according to a series of assonances:

*la tittenun qadashayya dilkhon qome kalbayya wela teremun harozayya dilkhon qome harizayya*

(do not set your rings before dogs and cast not your necklaces before swine.)

[←129]

Compare this aphorism, which sums up the Law and the Prophets, that is, all Holy Scripture, with the other pronounced by the great Hillel (§37). Note, however, that Hillel's precept is a negative one, i.e., do not do to others the evil you would not have done to yourself (cf. also the *Didache*, I, 2) while Jesus makes it a positive precept to do the good to others which we desire for ourselves. The positive precept had already been set forth as the "teaching of wisdom" in the Jewish *Letter of Aristeas*, 207, assigned to about 200-150 B.C. Note too that the "therefore" here has no logical connection with the preceding verse, and that Luke (6:31) puts this aphorism immediately after Matthew's 5:42.

[←130]

The expression “that day” has an eschatological meaning and refers to the time of entrance into “the kingdom of heaven” of the preceding verse. A secondary connection between this and verse 19 may also be seen in the expression “is cut down and cast into the fire,” which, though it refers immediately to the tree, may contain an eschatological allusion. The entire passage is divided by Luke between 6:46 and 13:26-27.

[←131]

For obvious reasons we have cited only a few. A full list is to be found in Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 189-474.

[←132]

John's question is today the subject of varied interpretations because it apparently contradicts what he has already testified concerning Jesus. For the radical among modern scholars, the contradiction does not exist because they do not consider the preceding testimony of John historical; they think that he is just beginning at this point to suspect that Jesus is the Messiah. Theirs is the usual method, as easy as it is arbitrary, of rejecting embarrassing texts. In Tertullian (*Adv. Marcion.*, IV, 18; cf. *De baptis.*, 10) and in a few other early writers, as well as in some of the conservative Protestants, we find the idea that John at this time began to have some doubts that Jesus was the Messiah. This opinion is contradicted by John's whole life up to this point. Many of the Fathers and numerous modern commentators consider John's question merely an expedient to make his disciples go over to Jesus and convince them that he was the Messiah. The explanation is undoubtedly a true one but it contains only part of the truth. Recent studies, which reveal with increasing clarity the gradual way in which Jesus manifested himself as the Messiah, particularly favor the explanation given above, which, while it in no way excludes John's desire to make his disciples join Jesus, takes into account both the gradualness with which Jesus revealed himself as the Messiah and the anxiety which that gradualness excited in John.

[←133]

According to the *Koran* (15, 6; 68, 51) Mohammed was also called *majnun* by his enemies, and the same was true of Noah (*Koran*, 23, 25; 54, 9), Moses, and the other prophets.

[←134]

Another hero of mediocrity, Don Abbondio, later reasons in very similar fashion: It's no use: when they are born with that madness in them, they always have to make so much fuss. Does it take so much to be a gentleman all one's life as I have been? —It is true that Jesus was teaching people not only how to be gentlemen but also how to do penance; yet Don Abbondio has an answer for that too: Penance —when you have the right attitude you can do your penance quietly at home without all that carrying on. . ." (Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi*, Chap. 23). At heart, human nature stays pretty much the same across the centuries.

[←135]

The pertinent passages are quoted in §147, note 13, as an example of the relationship between one Synoptic and another.



[←136]

The reading, “of the Gergesenes,” seems due to a correction made by Origen (*in Joan.*, VI, 41), but the text of *Luke* originally must have had “of the Gerasenes” (or “of the Gadarenes”). Origen, however, seems to be following a local tradition (§348) which he thought tallied with certain passages in the Old Testament, like *Gen.* 10:16; 15:21; etc.

[←137]

It seems, however, that the same rabbis did not cherish a blind faith in these prescriptions, for we find in the Mishna, “The best of the physicians deserves Gehenna” (*Qiddushin*, IV, 14).

Much, even too much, has been written on the double discrepancy here (§147). Some have made a distinction between light and heavy sandals, and others have supposed that the “staff” permitted in Mark is the kind to be leaned on while traveling and therefore different from the one prohibited in Matthew, which was more of a club carried for self-defense. The double distinction is certainly admissible, but even if we do not accept it on the grounds that it is a little overnice, the discrepancy in question should not, in all reason, arouse such a disturbance except among those who worship the letter. Anyone who remembers that the Evangelists derive from the early catechesis (§110) will perhaps prefer the explanation given by Maldonatus, which concurs with the criteria of St. Augustine: “Each (Evangelist) effectively conveys the same meaning through these opposing words. For each intended to show, quoting not the words [this against the worshipers of the letter] but the thought of Christ, that Christ ordered the Apostles to possess nothing but what was needed by them at the moment.” This meaning common to both the Evangelists was, according to Maldonatus, expressed by Matthew with the formula, “Do not take even a staff,” because every poor man possessed at least one staff, and by Mark with the formula, “Take a staff only,” because when one had only a staff, he had the barest necessity, in keeping with the exclamation of Jacob: I had with me only my staff (*Gen.* 32:10—in *Matt.*, 10, 10). If we accept this explanation, we may discuss which of the two formulas, both expressing the same thing, is closer to the phrase used by Jesus. In any case, this discrepancy is one more example of the fact that the Evangelists were not afflicted with that servile literalism which the Protestant Reformation ascribed to them but which the modern radical critics themselves do not recognize (§112). In conclusion we must agree with St. Augustine when he says of these discrepancies: “The meaning is one; and it is the better brought out the more its expression is varied, so long as the truth is held to” (*De consensu evangelist.*, II, 27, 61).

[←139]

It would have been a pleasant novelty if no modern scholar had denied the historicity of the gospel account of John the Baptist's death; to avoid this some very few have denied it on pretexts which may be reduced to the following: it would have been degrading for a Herodian princess to dance at a banquet; to order the beheading of the prisoner in the course of the banquet would have been an unheard of and extremely improbable act of cruelty; hence the whole account is forced and untrue. Certainly, it is very gallant to defend the honor of the Herodian princesses, but the student of reality will perhaps listen instead to Josephus who records, and not without reserve, the depravities of those princesses, for example of the real sister of Herod the Great, also named Salome (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, I, 498; *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVI, 221 ff.), to cite only one example. As for the unheard-of cruelty of ordering an execution during a banquet, we do not need to search the Oriental writers; it is enough to read Cicero, who says of L. Flamininus, the brother of T. Flamininus: "When he was consul in Gaul, he was asked by a harlot [note by whom] to execute with the ax one of the prisoners sentenced for a capital crime"; and the request was granted, but "personally I could never condone a lust so flagrant and so degraded as that which joins with personal shame the disgrace of the empire" (*De senectute*, XVII, 42; the same story with some variations is found also in Plutarch, *Flamininus*, XVIII). If that could happen among the Romans, much worse could happen among the Orientals. Herodotus (IX, 108-113) gives us an extremely cruel anecdote concerning the Persian Xerxes, in which it also appears that Xerxes swore to give a woman anything she asked for and that this time too the promise was kept however remorsefully.

[←140]

The passage is in *Isa.* 61:1-2 (and 58:6), but in the Greek text of *Luke* it is cited in the Septuagint version, which differs somewhat from the Hebrew. Jesus, however, undoubtedly read from the original Hebrew text as prescribed for the liturgy of the synagogue (§67).

[←141]

The "attendant" of the synagogue or *hazzan* (§64).

[←142]

I have already pointed out how this episode is recounted in Luke at the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee while the other two Synoptics place it at the end of that ministry (§299). The latter sequence seems preferable to that of Luke, who may well have fused into one, two separate sojourns in Nazareth. But that this violent expulsion from the village happened after Jesus had been publicly preaching for some time in Galilee is attested by the fact that the Nazarenes base their arguments on the miracles he has already wrought in Capharnaum. Now, these miracles had not yet taken place at the beginning of the ministry in Galilee when Jesus had returned but a few days before from Jerusalem. Hence, we might borrow what St. Augustine says of St. Luke in connection with other instances and conclude: "Luke himself is seen to have anticipated this event, taking occasion to recount in this place what happened much later... But these events are not recounted in the order in which they occurred, as we have elsewhere shown, and as none other than Luke himself shows in this very place" (*De consensu evangelist.*, II, 44, 92).

[←143]

The Italian name is attested in 1345 by *Nicolo da Poggibonsi*: "Going up to Nazareth, at about a mile and a half from the town, there are two mountains which are quite high, where Christ fled when he was driven forth from Nazareth. For the people of Nazareth bid Christ perform some miracles in Nazareth such as he performed in Capharnaum. And Christ answered that they were not worthy. Then they thrust him forth from the city above named. And Christ fleeing up into the mountain, they followed him to cast him down a great precipice, which is there in the midst; and . . . they could not see him. And as the people came down from the mountain, the Virgin Mary came, greatly affrighted for fear of what was befalling her most sweet son Jesus Christ; so that when she saw the people that were coming down from the mountain, being so much out of breath and filled with fear, she leaned against a niche in the mountain.... And there is a beautiful monastery, and within it a church and it is called *Santa Maria della Paura*, and in it live black Christians, Nubians" (*Libro d'Oltremare*, I, 268).



[←144]

This freedom of arrangement, precisely with regard to the gospel parables, was already pointed out in a writing attributed to St. Augustine: “Occasionally indeed one or other of the Evangelists has woven together things he suggests were said at different times. For each of them arranged the narrative he took up not altogether according to the order of events, but according to the association made by his memory” (*Quaestiones septemdecim in Matth.*, qu. XV).

These general rules, self-evident as they are and confirmed by observation, were set forth after Aristotle by Quintilian: "Allegories of this sort are frequently employed in a discourse, but rarely a complete one: for the most part obvious elements are mixed in with them.... And that is by far the most attractive sort of discourse in which is blended the appeal of the three types: parable, allegory, and metaphor" (*Inst. orat.*, VIII, 6). There would be no point in stating principles so well known as these if they had not been vigorously denied precisely in the case of Jesus' parables. I have already mentioned Juelicher's work on the evangelical parables (*Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*, 2 vols., 2nd Ed., 1910) which Loisy considered "definitive" (§211). The fundamental thesis of this Work is as follows: the parable and the allegory are literary forms which are mutually exclusive and cannot be fused or blended in any way; the parable is always clear and never requires any explanation while the allegory is not a popular form but one which is used by and appeals to the cultured and to scholars (the exact opposite of what Quintilian says: "But the allegory quite often proves useful in everyday speech and among those of limited talents"); hence Jesus, since he was speaking to the common people, used only the parable exclusive of any allegorical features; if there are any allegorical features to be found in the evangelical parables today, then they have been added by the Evangelists or the first Church tradition, but they must be trimmed away before we can arrive at Jesus' real thought. These rules for parable and allegory have actually been belied long in advance, at the time of Menenius Agrippa, of Abimelech (*Judges* 9:8-15), and even earlier; they have been formulated in modern times for purely practical reasons. There had to be some excuse, of whatever sort, for cutting up Jesus' parables as preserved for us in the Gospels, in order to pick and choose among the jigsaw pieces and reject those which did not fit preconceived theories. This performance was justified besides with a reason which, when presented by those particular scholars, had all the earmarks of ridicule (§364, note 4). Juelicher and Loisy are still followed today in this regard for the same practical reason, but only by an occasional rare laggard in the field of criticism.

[←146]

All three Synoptics set this dialogue immediately after the parable of the sower, which is the first of the day of parables, but modern commentators quite rightly agree that the order here is artificial and not chronological. The Evangelists appropriately set at the beginning of their report of this teaching in parables the dialogue which illumines them all. But it could not have taken place on that day nor after the first parable, because on that day Jesus spoke from a boat to the crowds thronging the lake shore and so it would have been impossible for the disciples to ask him this delicate question privately (cf. *Mark* 4:10), and because after one parable only they would not have asked Jesus why he spoke in parables. Hence this is another of the numerous instances where the Evangelists arrange their material independently of the exact chronological sequence.

[←147]

The Fathers and early commentators come back repeatedly to this question of the “that” and consequently of the purpose of the parables, using it as a basis for the study of grace, free will, and predestination. Best of them all is the reflection of St. John Chrysostom, who maintains that the purpose of the parables is to enlighten, not to becloud, the mind and who points out with perfect good sense that if Jesus “had not wished to instruct and save them [the Jews] then he should have kept still and not talked at all even in parables; instead he stimulates them by speaking things veiled in shadow; ... as a matter of fact, they could have approached and questioned him just as the disciples did” (*in Matth.*, horn. 45 [46] 2; in Migne, *Patr. Gr.* 58, 473). — Juelicher has gone off in the opposite direction entirely. He considers the conversation between Jesus and the disciples regarding the use of parables a sheer invention on the part of the Evangelists, who had to find an explanation for the obstinacy of the Jews in rejecting Jesus' teaching and so attributed to his use of parables the intention to blind and confuse his hearers, inventing to that end this particular conversation. The real motive behind the hypothesis is the need of a pretext for shredding Jesus' parables in order to satisfy preconceived theories, as I have said already (§360, note 2), and there is nothing strange about this. What is utterly strange, however, and irritating besides is that Juelicher poses as Jesus' advocate and defender, saying that with this performance he means to save for the imperishable crown of Jesus its most beautiful gem, namely, the intention to enlighten and not to blind through parables (*Gleichnisreden*, I, 148). When we remember that Juelicher is an extremely radical critic who goes systematically about destroying the traditional figure of Jesus, these words sound very much like a sneer; to worry about the most beautiful gem after he has thrown away the crown and cut the head off his hero is neither very sensible nor in very good taste.

[←148]

This is the peasant shrewdness described by Horace when he mentions the hired peasant who bought the field where he had found a treasure:

“O si urnam argenti fors quae mihi monstret! ut illi  
Thesauro invento, qui mercenarius agrum  
Illum ipsum mercatus aravit, dives amico  
Hercule.” (*Sat.*, II, 6, 10-13.)

[←149]

The observation, however, is tainted with malice aforethought and completely spoiled by the thesis it is intended to support. For Loisy the multiplication of the loaves is mystic allegory (though it is recorded by all three Synoptics) symbolizing the doctrine in Jesus' subsequent discourse on the Bread of Life, but neither the multiplication of the loaves nor the discourse is historical fact. As usual this begs the question.

[←150]

John (6:17) specifically names Capharnaum as their destination; but since in Mark quoted above (6:45) Jesus, standing in the meadow east of Bethsaida orders the disciples to go "ahead of him to Bethsaida" (eiz to peran pros bhfsaidan), some have supposed that there was another Bethsaida on the western shore of the lake besides the Bethsaida-Julia east of the Jordan. But no such city is ever named in antiquity nor is there any reliable documentary or archeological support for supposing its existence. Jesus' command to sail ahead of him to Bethsaida (if indeed these words are just as he spoke them and not a note or gloss), does not necessarily indicate the final destination; it is easily explained as referring to the general direction they were to take away from the meadow since this was a "retreat"—the disciples having passed near Bethsaida-Julia on their way to this place. The above hypothesis would set the supposed western Bethsaida in a cove on the lake shore at Khan Miniyeh near the Mount of the Beatitudes and Tabgha (§316). Tabgha owes its name to the Byzantine epithet "Heptapegon" ("seven fountains"), the name of the ancient watering place Flavius Josephus calls "Capharnaum" (Wars of the Jews, III, 519). When in the Byzantine period it began to be difficult and dangerous for Christian pilgrims to visit the places on the eastern shore, they mentally transferred them to this region which was considered Jesus' favorite and which was already associated with the near-by Mount of Beatitudes; among these transfers was Bethsaida. No little confusion resulted from this as the following passages from Suriano (§261, note 29) show: "Likewise, the city of Bethsaida, or indeed Tiberias (!), in which were born Peter and Andrew, and it is called *Midine el Tibene* (in Trattato di Terra Santa e delle Oriente, p. 139). — "Likewise, the city of Bethsaida, or indeed Gennesaret (!), in which were born Peter and Andrew: the which is on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.... And similarly, where Christ raised from the dead the daughter of the ruler of the synagogue (!) there was made a church in memory of the miracle...." — "In this city also are the baths: the water in which is so hot it cooks eggs, and the baths are not used at present" (*ibid.*, p. 144). — "Also, the city of Tiberias, which in ancient times was called Gennesaret" (!), etc. (*ibid.*, p. 145).

[←151]

The infinite discussions on this discourse which arose at the time of the Protestant Reformation belong now to history. The interpretation of the early Protestants, that the “bread of life” was a symbol of Christ's Redemption and teaching, has been abandoned in modern times by the outstanding Protestant scholars (although it found some support even among Catholics in the sixteenth century). Modern radical critics have rid themselves of the discourse with directly opposite treatment. They agree that it unquestionably refers to the Eucharist, but that very fact proves it is an invention either of the Evangelist or his original catechesis and that Jesus never uttered it. In other words, the only point on which today's radicals and those of four centuries ago agree is, as usual, that tradition must be wrong. Beyond this, namely, when it comes to the reasons why it must be wrong, they disagree completely.



[←152]

To the reasons already mentioned (§177) for rearranging the order here (chaps. 4, 6, 5, 7) we may add the following, which are clearer at this point. There is not a regular transition from chapter 5 to chapter 6; in fact, chapter 5 ends with events which took place in Jerusalem, and chapter 6 begins by saying that Jesus went “to the other side of the sea of Galilee, which is that of Tiberias,” which would naturally suggest that just before this he has been “on this side” of the same sea, that is, in Galilee and therefore not in Jerusalem. To confirm this, the beginning of chapter 7 — “Now after these things Jesus went about in Galilee, for he did not wish to go about Judea because the Jews were seeking to put him to death”—connects perfectly with the end of chapter 5, where we are told of the threats and the disputes of the Jews against Jesus at Jerusalem. This inversion of chapters 5 and 6 seems to have been adopted in antiquity by Tatian and in the Middle Ages by various commentators, and it is common enough among scholars of every persuasion today. If the leaves containing chapter 5 (or 6) were accidentally out of place in some very early manuscript it would explain the order we have today.

[←153]

In Josephus the almost constant form of this name is Bexeqa, from the Aramaic *be(th)zetha*, “house of the olive grove,” probably because the site of the new quarter was formerly occupied by an olive orchard. In *John* 5:2, the name appears variously: Bhqsaida (Bethsaida!), certainly a mistake; Bhqesda, from *beth hisda*, “house of mercy”; Bhxaqa suggesting *biz’atha*, “cleft,” i.e., the moat in front of the walls of the Old City; Bhqxaqa the usual form.

[←154]

John 5:3; note that the last phrase, “waiting for the movement of the water,” is wanting in some authoritative early documents. Even more numerous are the more reliable codices which omit altogether (or have some important variation of) verse 4: For an angel of the Lord used to come down at certain times into the pool, and the water was troubled. And the first to go down into the pool after the troubling of the water was cured of whatever infirmity he had.” See the critical editions for evidences for and against the entire passage.

[←155]

St. Augustine makes one of his usual highly intelligent observations *a propos* of this: “Notice that the Jews understand what the Arians do not understand. For the Arians say that the Son is not equal to the Father, for which reason their sect has been cast out of the Church. Notice that they who in their blindness put Christ to death still understood his words. They did not understand that he is the Christ, nor that he is the Son of God; yet they understood that in these words of his, a Son of God is referred to who is the equal of God” (*in Joan.*, tract. XVIII, 16).

[←156]

Mark wants to keep the Hebrew word Corban (lacking in the Greek text of Matthew [15:5] which we possess today), but for his Roman readers he adds “that is, offering.

[←157]

It is not impossible, though unproved, that Magedan represents a misspelling of Magdala (§303), and that *Dalmanutha* derives from an Aramaic gloss (*delamena-watha*, an equivalent of the preceding eiz ta meoh) which got into the text and supplanted the place name (Magdala?).

[←158]

It is perhaps worthwhile to cite some of the rabbinic prescriptions, with or without spittle, which were very efficacious in diseases of the eye. "In keeping with tradition, the spittle of a father's firstborn has a curative power [for the eyes], but the spittle of a mother's firstborn has no curative power (*b. Bathra*, 126 b)." The story is told of Rabbi Meir that on one occasion, to settle a quarrel between a husband and wife, he pretended he had something wrong with his eyes. Hence the wife, pretending to cure him, spat on his eyes, which was precisely what the husband wanted (*Sotah*, pal., 16 d). In cases of cataract, spittle was not necessary: "For cataract, take a scorpion of seven colors, dry it in the shade and grind one part of it with two parts of antimony; put three small spoonfuls of the mixture in each eye" (*Ghittim*, 69 a). And there are other much more complicated remedies.

[←159]

That is, "son of Jona." Elsewhere (*John* 1:42, Greek text; 21:15) Simon Peter is called "son of John." "Jona" (Hebrew *Jonah*) cannot be considered a shortened form of "John" (Hebrew *Johanan*); perhaps in transcribing it into Greek the shorter form 'IanaZ was exchanged for the longer, IwannaHs, but the matter is far from clear.



[←160]

Cf. "Sublime Porte," or "High Gate," the official title of the government of the Old Ottoman Empire.

[←161]

This custom, in the specific reference to the shoulder, is attested in *Isa.* 22:22: “And I will lay the key of the house of David upon his [Eliacim’s, as chief steward of the royal household] shoulder; and he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut and none shall open.”

[←162]

In Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 741, where many other examples are also listed.

[←163]

The Diodati version of the Bible in Italian, circulated by the British and Foreign Bible Society, still treats this passage (*Matt.* 16:13—17) in the summary as follows:” <sup>13</sup>[Jesus], having drawn from them [the disciples] through Peter, the confession of his identity and office, <sup>17</sup>comforts them, and declares the power and efficacy of their ministry.”

[←164]

Several of the early commentators thought this passage predicted the Transfiguration, which they supposed followed chronologically (cf. §402). Actually, the passage refers to the realization of “the kingdom of God”; for a discussion of this point see §§525 ff.

[←165]

This lack of water, mentioned by Josephus in the passage cited, proved a tremendous obstacle in the building of the great basilica erected there in 1924 under the direction of the architect A. Barluzzi, who had continuous camel caravans bringing it up from the plain below.

[←166]

*Matt.* 17:20. In the parallel passage in *Mark* (9:29), Jesus answers: “This kind [of unclean spirit] can come out by nothing but prayer,” which also occurs after the above-quoted answer in Matthew; but according to the codices it was not originally in the latter Gospel. The reply as recorded by Matthew reappears somewhat modified in other context in *Matt.* 21:24; *Mark* 11:22-23; and *Luke* 17:6. It is probable that in the early catechesis, Jesus’ complete reply was given as Matthew has it with the addition of the verse we have in Mark. On the other hand, Jesus could easily have used the simile in the reply in Matthew or some similar comparison several times as he insisted on the necessity of faith.

[←167]

*Matt.* 11:21-24. Luke (10:13-15) has this passage in a different context, which does not seem so reasonable from the chronological point of view, for at that time, Jesus had already left Galilee.



[←168]

The legend is attested in 1172 by the German Theodoric (*Libellus de locis sanctis*, p. 101), and it is repeated, in 1345, by Nicolo Poggibonsi: “Nearby... there is the town of Corozim, where must be born and proclaimed the Anti-Christ” (*Libro d’Olttramare*, I, 292).

[←169]

One way in which the correspondence between *John* and *Luke* has been worked out is as follows:

Luke	John
9:51	7:10
13:22	10:22-39
(17:11) 19:28	12:12

Other ways are based on other supposed conformities.

[←170]

I have already pointed out that the Fathers and early Catholic scholars recognized this narrative method in the Gospels long before the advent of modern critics (§378). The following passages from St. Augustine are pertinent: "It is possible that [the gospel writer] here records not something which took place at this later time, but something he had neglected to introduce before" (*De consensu evangelist.*, II, 17, 39). — "For we need not suppose that this must have occurred subsequently to the event after which it is recounted. Rather are we to understand, no doubt, that he has here set down something previously left out... For what difference does it make where any of them inserts an episode, whether in its proper order or by way of supplying an omission or of anticipating a later development, so long as he neither contradicts himself nor another evangelist in the telling of this or any other event?... For the order in which individuals will recall even the events best and most exactly known to them is beyond human control" (*ibid.*, II, 21, 51). — "But anyone can see it is an idle question, in what order the Lord pronounced these words, since we are bound to learn also on the most excellent authority of the Evangelists that no falsehood is involved in anyone's presenting a discourse in an order different from him who first uttered it—since whether the order was thus or so makes no difference as regards the substance" (*ibid.*, II, 39, 86).

[←171]

After the phrase “bid fire come down from heaven,” some codices add: “as Elias did also.” Others add after, “rebuke them”: “You do not know of what manner of spirit you are! For the Son of Man did not come to destroy men’s lives but to save them!” These words are now commonly considered an interpolation of Marcionite origin and therefore are not included in modern critical editions. In any case, their basic concept is implied in “rebuked them.”

[←172]

Cf. Justin, *Dialog. cum Tryph.*, 8 and 110; other references in Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, p. 489.

[←173]

*Jer. 2:13*: the Hebrew text has been amended on metrical grounds.

[←174]

*John* 8:25: *thn archn o ti kai lalw umin* (;). The phrase is extremely difficult and variously interpreted (some even consider it a question) by the early commentators. Cf. the philological observations of modern commentators.

[←175]

The canal had been built by King Ezechias about 701 B.C. Cf. G. Ricciotti, *Storia d'Israele*, Vol. I, §§486-487, for the reasons and circumstances of its construction and for the recent archeological findings made there.



[←176]

*Jer.* 23:26; cf. his whole long invective against false prophets (23:9-40).  
There are examples in the other prophets also.

[←177]

The case of this passage may be viewed as almost the direct opposite of that of the adulteress (§424-§425), but not quite. If we could prove that the account of the latter was of Synoptic origin then we should have a Synoptic text handed down only in the fourth Gospel but not deriving from John. On the other hand, this passage of Jesus' expression of joy, which is omitted in the fourth Gospel is given to us by the Synoptics and is of Synoptic origin.

[←178]

This has been absolutely necessary because the holdups continue even in recent years. Among the many times I have traveled that road, I did so twice (in 1931 and 1933) shortly after large parties had been held up and robbed with some bloodshed, evidences of which were still visible. The increased vigilance of the police seems to have cut down the number of robberies.

[←179]

The association was familiar to St. Jerome; . . . locum Adommim, quod interpretatur “sanguinum,” quia multus in eo sanguis crebris: latronum fundebatur incursibus (Epist., 108, 12). And in his edition of the Onomasticon of Eusebius (25): Adommim . . . et graece dicitur avabasiz purrwn, latine autem appellari potest “ascensus ruforum” sive “rubrantium,” propter sanguinem qui illic crebro a latronibus funditur . . . ubi et castellum militum est ob auxilia viatorum. Huius cruenti et sanguinarii loci Dominus quoque in parabola descendentis Jerichum de Jeroslyma recordatur. (For ancient Addomin, cf. *Josue*, 15:7.)

[←180]

Manzoni, *I Promessi Sposi*, Chap. 22, with reference to Cardinal Frederic Borromeo, where, however, the application is somewhat different.

[←181]

It should also be noted that Matthew (9:32 ff.) gives the cure of a demoniac who is dumb only, like the one in Luke, right after the cure of the two blind men (§351). Since all the other circumstances dovetail perfectly, it would seem that we have here only one incident, narrated once by Luke and twice by Matthew. The reason for Matthew's repetition lies in the arrangement of his material. The cure is recounted the first time in a whole group of miracles (chaps. 8-9), and the second time to introduce the dissension with the Pharisees. Mark, on the other hand, merely reports the discussion without the cure.

[←182]

Rabbinic testimonies are to be found in Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., Vol. I, p. 649. The clearest is that of Eleazar ben Azaria, about A.D. 100, whose opinion was: "One day and one night make one *'Onah* (a period of twenty-four hours), and a part of one *'Onah* counts for a whole *'Onah*" The Greeks had a similar expression in *nucqhmeron*, "night-and-day" (cf. 2 *Cor.* 11:25).

[←183]

Here Luke (11:49-51) adds a passage which Matthew (23:34-36) gives in another context. Matthew's seems the better setting chronologically; cf. 518ff.



[←184]

Rabbinic texts in Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 910-913

[←185]

Cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. II, pp. 199-200.

[←186]

The chief differences in the parallel passage in Matthew are as follows. The host is a king who has prepared a wedding feast for his son. The king sends several servants to his invited guests a first and a second time with no results; the second time, in fact, some of those invited lay hands on the servants, maltreat them, and kill them. Then the king sends out his armies to destroy the murderers and bum their city. Finally, he sends other servants through the highways to invite people of every kind and sort, and these new guests fill the banquet chamber. In this version, the historical allusions are even more clear and emphatic. The king is the God of Israel; the servants are the prophets who have been killed; the armies which kill and bum are the Roman legions, which in 70 bum and destroy Jerusalem; the wretched who fill the banquet chamber in place of the original guests are the Gentiles who enter the kingdom of the Messiah in the place of the unwilling Jews.

[←187]

” The Most-High made this world for the many, but the world to come for the few” (4 *Esd.* 8, 1). —  
“Many were created, but few will be saved” (*ibid.*, 8, 3). — “Those who perish are more numerous  
than those who will be saved” (*ibid.*, 9, 15).

[←188]

It cannot be reasonably supposed that the reference here is to the two and a half years of Jesus' public life (§177). Two of these years already belonged to the past, while the whole context here indicates that Jesus is speaking of the future.

[←189]

There are any number of opinions we might quote in this regard, not a few of which are only general and rhetorical. Instead, let us take this of an eminent critic of classical literature, who, comparing the parable with the masterpieces of the Greeks, says: "In literary excellence this piece of narrative is unsurpassed. Nothing more simple, more direct, more forceful can be adduced from among the famous passages of classical Greek literature. It is a moving tragedy of reconciliation" (J. C. Robertson).

[←190]

An Egyptian papyrus of the second century A.D. contains this fragment of a letter written (with colossal errors in its Greek script) by a youth to his mother: "I wrote you that I am naked. I beg you, mother, be reconciled to me! I have been punished in the manner I deserve [or rather: in every manner]. I know that I have sinned.... Don't you realize that I would rather become blind than to acknowledge that I still owe any man an obol? . . . Come yourself . . . etc. (in *Aegyptische Urkunden aus den konigl. Museen zu Berlin . . . Griechische Urk.*, Vol. III, 846). The writer of this letter, then, is an Egyptian prodigal son, one of the many there have been in every time and country. Naturally, there is no relation between this young man's repentance and that of the prodigal in the parable; there is merely the similarity in their respective states of mind.

[←191]

Some of the reliable Greek codices do have this request here, but it is certainly carried over from the preceding passage. Critical editions rightly omit it in conformity with most of the codices and versions.



[←192]

Luke does not record the Pharisees' argument, but it can be reconstructed closely enough, and with more than plausibility, on the basis of Jesus' answer (*Luke* 16:15-16).

[←193]

If Dives had “five” brothers, the only natural conclusion to be drawn from the statement would seem to be that there were six sons in all in his family, but this appears to some a very superficial deduction. Really perspicacious criticism, which has detected the hidden significance of the “five” porticoes of the pool of Bezatha (§162, §384) and the “five” husbands of the Samaritan woman (§294, note 10), could not possibly leave this other “five” alone, and so it has discovered that Dives' “five” brothers are the “five” books of the Law (Loisy). What could match more perfectly than the two “fives”? The only difficulty is that with the same method and for the identical reason, one can discover many other things arranged in groups of five, like one's fingers or toes, for instance. Here again, criticism is confused with cabala (§294, note 10).

[←194]

The Greek word is rather rare, and the corresponding verb is used to designate “observations” especially of the stars (cf. the Vulgate, *cum observatione*). The meaning, therefore, is that no one will be able to calculate the coming of the kingdom of God as one may the phenomena of the stars, for example.

[←195]

The Old Law did not consider the possibility of the woman's taking the initiative in divorce, but at the time of Jesus, due to Graeco-Roman influences, this was becoming more common. In the dynasty of Herod the Great, we have, in addition to the example of Herodias (§16), also that of Drusilla who left her husband Aziz-of Emesa to marry the Roman procurator Felix (*Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, 141-143; cf. *Acts* 24:24).

[←196]

This is the famous episode of the Levite of Ephraim, narrated in *Judges* 19:1 ff. Since polygamy was practiced at that time, the woman figures in the episode as a *pileghesh*, “concubine,” actually a “wife” of second rank. In the Hebrew text (19:2) the reason for the separation is: *wattizneh ‘alau*, “and she committed adultery against him.” But certainly, there is a copyist’s error in the verb; it would seem necessary to correct it according to ancient versions to read: *wattiz ‘aph ‘alau*, “and she became angry with him.” In short, it was one of the usual quarrels between husband and wife, which this time ended in a separation.

[←197]

So far as we know, there is only one instance in which a rabbi is addressed as “Good Master,” but it occurs in a late text (*Ta’anith*, 24 b), which continues with a play on the word “good,” using it five times in the rest of the passage. Cf. G. Dalman, *The Words of Jesus*, Edinburgh, 1902, p. 337.

[←198]

Most critical editions of the Greek text have for this sentence only, “Children, how difficult it is to enter the kingdom of God”; the phrase, “they who trust in riches,” is supported, however, by a number of ancient witnesses.

[←199]

6 In Strack and Billerbeck, *op, cit.*, Vol. I, 828.



[←200]

According to the rabbis seven things had been created before the world (two thousand years before, to be exact), and these, listed in various order were the Torah, penance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, the “Throne of glory,” the (heavenly) sanctuary and the .name of the Messiah; the Torah, or Law, lay on the knees of God, who was seated on the “Throne of glory.” Cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, 974-975.

[←201]

The division is just as clear in *Luke*, but not in *Matthew* (19:29).

[←202]

Luke lists also the “wife” among the things, left.

[←203]

See the whole *excursus* 20 of Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, Part I, pp. 484-500.

[←204]

Cf. what Renan has to say on this point in the first edition of his *Vie de Jesus* (1863) and in the thirteenth (1867), which is the definitive one (§206).

[←205]

“But he [the Cardinal Frederic Borromeo] convinced in his heart of what no one professing Christianity can deny, namely, that the just superiority of one man over other men lies only in his serving them, feared offices and dignities and sought to avoid them, not because he wanted to escape serving others, certainly.... but because he did not think himself sufficiently worthy nor capable of so lofty and dangerous a servitude” (*I Promessi Sposi*, Chap. 22).

[←206]

This Greek word is in both *Mark* and *John*; but the Latin renders it differently in the two places; in *Mark* with *spicati* (is it a copyist's error or is it due to the influence of *spica nardi*?), and in *John* with the simple transcription *pistici*.

[←207]

The Hebrew text of Zacharias does not refer to two different animals but to one only. The double mention is due simply to the parallelism which is an inviolable rule of Hebrew poetry. Note, too, that Matthew's quotation from Zacharias is shorter than the original passage in the Hebrew.



[←208]

It is a concept which recurs frequently in the Old Testament (cf. *Num.* 19:2; *Deut.* 15:19; 21:3; 1 Kings 6:7) as well as in Homer, the Roman authors (“The ox . . . that has not endured the yoke and is innocent of the curved plow”—Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, III, 10-11), and among other people.

[←209]

The curious information that Titus was proclaimed emperor immediately after the capture of Jerusalem, that is, while his father Vespasian was still living, is given both by Josephus (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, 316) and Suetonius (*Titus*, 5). Perhaps it was this which gave rise to the suspicion, mentioned by Suetonius, that Titus wanted to build himself a kingdom of his own in the Orient.

[←210]

Many ancient documents, including the Vulgate, invert the order here, making the first son the one who first refuses and then obeys, and the second the one who pretends to obey.

[←211]

This passage appears in *Luke* (20:15-16) with notable differences: What therefore will the owner of the vineyard do to them? He will come and bring destruction upon these vine-dressers, and will give the vineyard to others. —On hearing this, they said: 'God forbid!'" Note the last exclamation especially, which shows that Jesus' listeners had perfectly understood the allusion in the preceding parables.

[←212]

After the quotation from the Psalm, the parallel passage in *Luke* (20:18) has only: “Everyone who falls upon that stone will be broken to pieces; but upon whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder.” This occurs also in many codices of *Matthew* at the end of the parable.

[←213]

See the rabbinical norms in this regard in Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., Vol. I, pp. 884-885.

[←214]

In Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. III, p. 650.

[←215]

In Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 889, along with other even cruder testimonies.



[←216]

Rabbinic texts in Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV, pp. 452-465.

[←217]

Here occurs verse 14: "Woe to you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! because you devour the houses of widows, praying long prayers. For this you shall receive a greater judgment [of damnation]." But this eighth "woe!" is unanimously left out of the critical editions as a transfer from *Mark* 12:40.

[←218]

There is evidence that the Jews frequently made subtle distinctions and reservations in their oaths also in an obscene epigram of Martial (XI, 95) addressed to a Jewish poet who was born in Jerusalem itself; here are the last two lines:

“Lo, you deny, and you swear to me by the temple of the Thunderer: I do not believe you; swear, Jew, by Anchialus.”

This supposed god Anchialus probably represents the way a Hebrew formula for an oath (*'im...hai-e/*) was understood by the Roman ear.

[←219]

Some have thought that the father of this Zacharias had both names, Joiada and Barachias, and in fact an ancient annotation in one of the codices points out that this man was “of the double name.” But this theory clearly begs the question because it is based on the fact that we have two names here and that is precisely the fact that needs to be explained. As for the recent theory, just as unfounded and prejudiced besides, that the reference here is to that “Zacharias son of Baris” who was killed by the Zealots in the Temple between 67 and 68 during the war against Rome, see the notes to my translation of Flavius Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, IV, 335-344 (Vol. III, pp. 174-176).

[←220]

“.... opimum casibus, atrox proeliis, discors seditionibus, ipsa etiam pace saevum. Quatuor principes ferro interempti. Trina bella civilia, plura externa ac plerumque permixta . . . praeter multiplices rerum humanarum casus, coelo terraque prodigia et fulminum monitus et futurorum praesagia . . . non esse curae Deis securitatem nostram, sed ultionem.”

[←221]

An important passage in Josephus would indicate that a similar admonition had become traditional among the Jews at the time of the destruction of Jerusalem; he says: "There existed, in fact, an ancient saying of men inspired by God, according to which the city would be conquered and the most holy [place] would be burned in war, when civil war had broken out and native hands had profaned the holy place of God: the Zealots, though not denying their faith, offered themselves as agents to [fulfill] such prophecies" (*Wars of the Jews*, IV, 338). See the note to this passage in my translation of Josephus (Vol. III, p. 182).

[←222]

Neither of the other two Synoptics has “in those days.” Matthew (24:29) reads: “But immediately (Eugewz) after the tribulation of those days, the sun will be darkened, etc.” But it is also to be noted that Matthew arranges his material differently and just before this he has related that “as the lightning comes forth from the east and shines even to the west, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Wherever the body is, there will the eagles be gathered together” (cf. §475). Hence the words “immediately after the tribulation, etc.” continue the preceding thought, meaning that the sun will be darkened, etc., all of a sudden, unexpectedly. Hence the adverb “immediately” does not indicate in any way the time of the parousia nor does it signify that it will follow right after the “great tribulation.”

[←223]

A few authoritative radical critics, like Holtzmann, have carefully weighed the importance of this consideration, and have therefore doubted the authenticity of the passage. This at least is something, although it represents the usual summary method of questioning the authenticity of a passage because it contradicts a preconceived theory. It would be much more sensible to question the theory.



[←224]

The house where the Last Supper was held was undoubtedly demolished during the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 or 135. Contemporary Christians, however, must have carefully cherished the memory of the site, and as soon as possible they built there a “small church” which is mentioned by Epiphanius and which in the fourth century was incorporated into a large basilica, the Sancta Sion, situated on the western hill of the city. It had a varied history, and in the first half of the fourteenth century, Robert of Anjou, king of Naples, and his wife Sancia bought “with great expense and grave difficulty,” from the Egyptian sultan, Melek en-Naser Muhammed, the whole area of the basilica and the adjoining convent, reserving the right of *juspatronatus* for themselves and their successors, and they appointed the Franciscans its custodians. The latter stayed there until the middle of the sixteenth century, when they were expelled by a decree of Soliman II (for the ridiculous reason that the place contained the tomb of David) and the building was converted into a mosque. Hence rose the “question of the Cenacle,” restudied now and then since World War I and still open; in fact, the House of Savoy, as heir to the rights of the kings of Naples, claims the patronal rights they acquired.

[←225]

Discussions and texts in Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 837 ff.

[←226]

For this whole subject see Strack and Billerbeck, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 847 ff.

[←227]

The author has happened on occasion to be the recipient of a similar courtesy while eating with Ben Arabs in the desert. In truth, several reasons, especially hygienic ones, would have prompted him to forego it, but woe if one refused! It would be an insult as great as the intended courtesy.

[←228]

There has been a great deal of discussion as to whether or not Judas partook of the Holy Eucharist, and opinion has been divided from the time of the first Christian writers down to our own day. In reality, it is a question that can never be definitely solved because there are persuasive arguments on both sides. In any case, one worth absolutely nothing is the sentimental reasoning that it would have been unfitting for Jesus, in that act of instituting the Eucharist, to give communion to a sacrilegious person. Several of the Fathers have been moved by this reasoning, and have pictured Judas as receiving the Eucharist sacrilegiously. Apart from all pious sentimentality, however, there are the historical arguments which cannot be reconciled. According to *Matthew* and *Mark*, Jesus first denounces the traitor and then institutes the Eucharist; in Luke's account, the institution of the Eucharist is recorded first and then there is a (very brief) mention of the traitor; we get no help whatever from John because he does not relate the institution of the Eucharist at all. Which sequence are we to follow, that of *Matthew* and *Mark*, or the one in *Luke*? In other passages Luke's is preferable— often, but not always; this may be an instance where it is not, since for effect he begins the narrative of the Last Supper almost immediately with the institution of the Eucharist, postponing all the rest. The sequence in *Matthew* and *Mark*, both because it is given us by two of them and because it is more natural, seems preferable here but we cannot be sure about it.

[←229]

The two formulas, for the bread and the wine, are not recorded in exactly the same words by the three Synoptics and by Paul (*1 Cor. 11*), as we have noted elsewhere together with the reason for it (§122). The four testimonies may be divided into two groups according to their internal similarities: one composed of the testimonies of Matthew and Mark, the other those of Paul and his disciple Luke. Probably Paul and Luke have preserved the oldest form of the catechesis, and the combined quotations above derive mostly from them.

[←230]

What is missing is *Luke* 22:19b-20. This is the so-called western text, in opposition to the Alexandrian text which is the predominant form. All the modern critical editions give the part of Luke omitted in the codex Beza. For further evidences and discussions see the apparatus in the critical editions.

[←231]

This is the classic text with which the Arians tried to prove that the Son is not consubstantial with the Father. But it is clear here that Jesus is placing himself on the same human level as the Apostles, who are so needful of comfort. Hence, he speaks to them as man, in virtue of his human nature. This is the ancient explanation of the Fathers.



[←232]

Expert botanists have checked the age of the trees but are unable to assign them to a definite century. Quaresmio wrote in 1626: “. . . there is a garden, Gethsemani, having many and very ancient olive trees which are greatly venerated by Christian and infidel alike, for the inhabitants of this region believe that they are some of the trees which were standing at the time of Christ, and that they survived even after the city was besieged and captured by Titus” (*Terrae Sanctae elucidatio*, II, 122). This theory, however, prompted by piety or other motives, can claim no historical support, because it is certain that the entire countryside around Jerusalem was at different times literally stripped of every tree by the besiegers, so that in the last weeks of the siege Titus’ legionaries were obliged to go a distance of one hundred stadia (some twelve miles) from the walls of the city to cut wood for the earthworks (cf. *Wars of the Jews*, V, 107, 262-264, 523; VI, 5, 151, 375). It may be, however, that the modern trees grew out of the stumps of those cut down at that time, a phenomenon usual with olive trees.

[←233]

The name "Malchus" or "Malchus" (from the Semitic stem *MaLaK*, "to rule") is frequent in Josephus and was very common among the Nabateans. It is interesting that Peter should be carrying a sword, perhaps one of the two which the Apostles showed Jesus in the Cenacle, since this also involves the question of the holyday rest imposed by the Pasch (§537). It seems that some rabbis permitted carrying a sword on the Sabbath (cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, Vol. I, pp. 996-997). Or did Peter, and perhaps some of the other Apostles as well, consider it lawful to carry a sword for self-defense in keeping with Jesus' teaching that the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath (§308)?

[←234]

This episode is so “realistic” and so typical that to question its historicity seems inconceivable, and yet this, too, has been done. It has been stated (Loisy) that the episode is sheer fiction invented to show the fulfillment of the passage in *Amos* (2:16) which, in the Hebrew text, reads: “And the stout of heart among the valiant shall flee away in that day.” But in context this passage refers to an entirely different matter and it is enough to read it to see that it offers no basis whatever for inventing an episode like this of Mark. Only the determination to subordinate the documents to a preconceived theory can produce such hopeless conclusions as this one.

[←235]

Various scholars, as early as the sixteenth century, have supposed that this questioning took place before Caiphas, considering either that *John* 18:24, was to be translated “Annas had sent (instead of the aorist ‘sent’) him bound to Caiphas, the high priest,” or that the phrase (keeping the aorist tense) should be read right after *John* 18:13, where it occurs in the Sinaitic Syriac version and in Cyril of Alexandria. Though these reasons do have their value they do not seem convincing, especially because they remove in much too simple a fashion one of the differences between John and the Synoptics which are precisely his specialty. Hence, let us follow John’s text as it is, considering that here again his intention is to make the narrative specific and complete.

[←236]

The epithet in Hebrew was *geburah* (Aramaic, *geburta*), rendered in Greek with *h dunamiz*, which occurs in *Matt.* 26:64 and in *Mark* 14:62; to make it clearer to his readers, who were unfamiliar with Jewish terminology, Luke (22:69) adds “of God” (“at the right hand of the power of God”). This addition then crept into the Latin text of *Matthew* and *Mark* as well. To be guilty of the actual crime of blasphemy, it was necessary, according to *Sanhedrin*, VII, 5, to pronounce the real of God.

[←237]

Peter's denials are a favorite subject with scholars who are either prejudiced or have plenty of time to waste. The former would like to prove that the accounts of the four Evangelists contradict one another while the second would love to determine the smallest detail in each denial. It is sufficient to remind both groups that no one of the four accounts claims to be complete in itself nor excludes any one of the others. In reality there are three "groups" of denials, the first and second of which seem to be connected in a certain sense. Besides, there were also three "groups" of questioners each time, since even the portress who began her sallies alone was soon joined by other persons passing by. If we keep in mind these considerations the whole matter is very clear. Among these "groups" of words and persons each Evangelist chooses what he considers best for his own narrative without precluding the accounts of the other gospel authors.

[←238]

The first of these two reasons is suggested in *Matthew*, the second in the *Acts*. Besides, the *Acts* (1:18) would seem to indicate that Judas himself bought the field and so killed himself after the purchase. But this latter interpretation arises entirely from the condensed mode of expression: the purchase is attributed to Judas in so far as he furnished the Sanhedrists with the price.

[←239]

The whole courtyard extended beneath the modern convent of the Sisters of Sion, the Franciscan monastery of the Flagellation and the so-called "Arch of the Ecce Homo." This last name, however mistaken the "arch" part of it, shows that the early Christian tradition it represents had an excellent archeological basis. Note, too, that Josephus also uses the term *lithostrotos* several times (*Wars of the Jews*, VI, 85, 189), although with reference to the "pavement" not of the inner courtyard of the Antonia but the "outer court" of the Temple where it joined the Antonia.



[←240]

This conjecture seems justified by the incident which occurred between Herod and Vitellius, related by Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews*, XVIII, 104-105 (but cf. Dion Cassius, LIX, 27; Suetonius, *Caligula*, 14).

[←241]

Several modern critics suspect this episode, not for documentary reasons, but for the usual *a priori* considerations, which may be reduced to their unfailing desire to demolish the gospel narrative. Since this is the same old method, it is enough to point out that it is used here too.

[←242]

Some modern critics have denied the existence of this custom also solely because of their insatiable desire to contradict the narrative of the Evangelists, although all four of them record this point. Similar, if not identical, customs, are attested by Livy (V, 13) and Athenaeus (XIV, 45). An identical instance is recorded in an Egyptian papyrus of the year A.D. 85, in which the Roman prefect of Egypt declares that a certain Phibio deserves the flagellation but he will instead release him at the request of the multitude (in G. Vitelli, *Papiri fiorentini*, I, Milan, 1905, pp. 113-116, 11. 59 ff.).

[←243]

From the report in the Parisian review *Jerusalem*, 1933, May-June, p. 464.

[←244]

These details are neither fantastic nor exaggerated but have been gathered here and there from various hints and references in the Roman authors. It is enough here to quote Cicero's description, not of the flagellatio, but of the *verberatio* (which was not so vicious), to which Verres had subjected the Roman citizen Servilius in Lilibeum in Sicily. While Servilius is speaking in the tribunal in his own defense "he is surrounded by six very muscular lictors with a great deal of experience in beating and striking men. They beat him most cruelly with rods; finally, the first lictor Sextius, whom I have had occasion to mention so often, turned his rod around and began to bash in the poor wretch's eyes with utmost violence. The latter fell to the ground, his face and eyes streaming with blood; but despite all that, they continued to beat in his sides even after he collapsed until he said he would promise once and for all. Then, reduced to that state, he was carried out of there as if he were dead, and he actually did die shortly afterwards" (*In Verrem*, II, 5, 54).

[←245]

That the soldiers subjected Jesus to this is easily explained by their own character and the title of king which Jesus claimed. But this explanation seemed too simple for some scholars, anxious to complicate what is easy and display their erudition even when it is irrelevant. Hence, they found a number of hidden meanings in the mockery which Jesus suffered here. Some discovered in it the imitation of a Persian festival, that of the *Sacees* recorded by Berosus and particularly by Dion Chrysostom, during which a man condemned to death was mocked for a while as a burlesque king and was finally scourged and killed. Others had recourse to the customs of the Saturnalia, in which there was also a burlesque king, almost like a carnival king, who was afterward killed. Still others dragged in the mimes or clowns who played stock characters, or even some one historical personage of the time. Most frequently cited in the latter instance was the case of a poor imbecile named Carabas whom the Alexandrian mob, to show their derision of Herod Agrippa I, just become a king, carried around the city trussed up in royal robes with a papyrus crown on his head and a reed in his hand midst a burlesque retinue (Philo, *In Flaccum*, 5-6). All these analogies, learned but irrelevant, can be answered by the fact that similar things have happened in all times and among all peoples because they are prompted by man's very nature, and so in the present instance they prove nothing. But the one who really settled the problem was Solomon Reinach. This modern Israelite discovered that all the ancient Israelite authors had been mistaken but that he fortunately was able to correct them with every degree of certainty. Philo was mistaken in calling the idiot of Alexandria Carabas; no sir, that idiot was named Barabbas, like the prisoner pardoned instead of Jesus. All four Evangelists were mistaken in relating that Jesus was put to death instead of Barabbas; not at all, Jesus was put to death as Barabbas, namely, as the protagonist of a popular festival similar to the *Sacees* or the Saturnalia. Naturally, all of these "corrections" were dictated solely by the love of truth, not by any prejudiced apologetical intent. But though proclaimed by a Solomon, historical criticism has not found them wise, and very few have taken them seriously.

[←246]

It has been noted that “St. Andrew’s Cross” appears in documents only from the tenth century on, and even later in iconography; hence it has been concluded that this type of cross was never really used. This conclusion does not seem to be warranted. Josephus says that during the siege of Jerusalem, the Roman soldiers captured many Jews attempting to flee and, being extremely irritated by the useless resistance of the besieged, “for sport they nailed [to the cross] those they captured, some in one position and some in another (allon allow schmati), and there were so many of them that there was neither enough space for the crosses, nor enough crosses for the bodies” (*Wars of the Jews*, V, 451). Here the difference in position (schma) certainly depends on the shape of the crosses, which was varied for sport. But if “St. Andrew’s Cross” was not used, there remained only the other two, *immissa* and *commissa* (no other variations are possible), and with only two forms there certainly was no way to vary the position for sport, nor could Josephus have said “some in one position and some in another” since the position of the crucified on both these crosses was the same.

[←247]

The name *patibulum* derives from the fact that in very ancient times slaves were punished with a beam or bar used to keep the door shut; when it was removed the door opened (*patebat*). For similar punishments the primitive inhabitants of Latium had also used the *furca*, the fork-shaped support used to prop up the big farm carts. Hence even in much later times *furca* appears as a synonym for *patibulum*, although it originally meant something quite different.



[←248]

Note from the format editor. Death came from asphyxiation, see *A Doctor at Calvary* by Pierre Barbet.

[←249]

There was in Cyrene an ancient and prosperous Jewish community, which was in close contact with Jerusalem.

[←250]

Mark (15:23) speaks of “wine mixed with myrrh,” which seems the most correct expression. Matthew (27:34) speaks of “wine mixed with gall.” Perhaps this last was a generic term denoting any bitters, including myrrh. It may also be that the Greek translator of the Aramaic *Matthew* rendered *mora*, “myrrh,” for *merorah*, “gall,” perhaps echoing the Messianic *Psalms* 69:22 (Hebrew).

[←251]

This passage does not occur in various authoritative codices, including the Vatican; but most of the modern critical editions include it and rightly so. It is not impossible that it was suppressed in some ancient codices because it seemed to lend itself to heretical misinterpretations. Note the supreme mercy it expresses, and note also that it is recorded only by Luke, the *scriba mansuetudinis Christi* (§138).

[←252]

Cf. Strack and Billerbeck, *op. cit.*, II, pp. 264-269; pp. 1016-1165.

[←253]

There has been a great deal of discussion as to whether this list names four women or three, that is whether “Mary [wife] of Cleophas” is in apposition with “his mother’s sister” or whether she is a different person. The ancient Syriac version listed four women here; and that seems the more likely interpretation, because, among other reasons, if Mary of Cleophas had been the sister of Jesus’ mother she would not have had the same name.

[←254]

Matthew and Mark call this a “reed,” while John (19:29) says that the sponge was placed “on a stalk of hyssop” (usswpw peiqentez) which is a very odd reading if we remember that the hyssop is a tiny little plant, and the stem of even the largest of the species would be very slender and could never support the weight of a wet sponge. It is very probable that there was an error by dittography in the copying of the text of John and that this phrase should read instead ussw periqentez, that is, “on a [soldier’s] rod,” the pilum of the Romans. In that case, the term “reed” in the two Synoptics should not be taken in its strict botanical meaning, but in the more general sense of rod, stick, and so forth (cf. the English “cane” and “walking stick” used interchangeably—and there can be rods, canes, sticks, etc., of iron as well as of wood).

[←255]

“ . . dalle tenebre La diva spoglia uscita,  
Mise il possente anelito  
Della seconda vita.”  
(Manzoni, *La Pentecoste*.)



[←256]

John's account is paralleled in *Matthew* (28:9-10), where, however, the incident seems to have taken place at the women's visit to the sepulcher (cf. 28:1, "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary"); in reality, verse nine marks the beginning of a separate episode, that of Mary Magdalene alone at the tomb, although Matthew still uses the plural as he does in other instances (the "categorical plural"; cf. §609).

[←257]

To what modern town Luke's Emmaus corresponds is an old question, although it has been revived in recent years. Ever since the Crusades, at least four places have bestowed on themselves the honor of being the Emmaus of the Gospel: today, there are only two contestants left, Nicopolis and el-Qubeibeh. Before the Crusades the only place which claimed the honor was Nicopolis, and its tradition was largely a Palestinian one represented by such men as Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Hesychius of Jerusalem, Sozomen, and appearing as well in the itineraries of pilgrims. In addition, the name Nicopolis dates only from the third century A.D., but the town has at the same time kept the name *Amwas*, which clearly derives from Emmaus, while none of the other places has this toponymic argument in its favor. The difficulty about Emmaus-Nicopolis is that the distance between Emmaus and Jerusalem is given in two different readings of *Luke* 24:13: six uncial Greek codices and some of the minuscule ones say it is 160 stadia (about 20 miles), and almost all the other documents say it is 60 stadia (about 8 miles). How are we to explain this difference? Was the Greek letter which represents one hundred left out of the original reading, thus giving 60, or was it later added, thus giving 160? In ancient times there were several roads from Jerusalem to Emmaus-Nicopolis, which varied in length, being about 144, 152, or 160 stadia. The distance between Jerusalem and el-Qubeibeh today is almost eight miles (about seventy stadia). Another objection to Emmaus-Nicopolis is also based on its distance from Jerusalem: it has been pointed out that the two disciples could not make the round trip, about 320 stadia (almost forty-five miles) in one day. But this difficulty is not insurmountable, because on the return journey the disciples could have taken the shortest route (144 stadia, about twenty miles) and they might even have come on horseback. Their eagerness sustained them on this second trip, just as other motives helped the forced marches noted in *Acts* 23:23, 31-33, and in *Wars of the Jews*, II, 551-554.

[←258]

The explanation of the rationalists is quite different. They see in the twofold tradition evidences of the development and embellishment of the myth of the risen Christ. They consider the tradition of the appearances in Galilee the older, and the tradition concerning Judea the more recent. The first supposedly arose in the following manner: as soon as Jesus was killed, the Apostles fled in terror to their native Galilee; there their panic subsided somewhat, and they kept thinking of their Master. The more they thought the more difficult they found it to believe that he had actually left them. Completely absorbed by this idea (in reality it does not seem that Thomas was very much absorbed by it, and not even the others who went calmly about their fishing as they had before, but this is all part of the invention) —thus absorbed and possessed by this idea, then, they began to speak of the Master one fine day as if he were alive again, they persuaded themselves that he was, they imagined at times that they saw him, and so the resurrection was considered certain. In fact, when the Apostles fled up there to Galilee after the tragedy in Jerusalem, "the awakening and one might almost say the sudden reaction of their faith, which elicited the visions, created the belief in his resurrection" (Loisy). Once convinced of the "fact" of the resurrection, they later tried to confirm and perfect it by transferring the imagined appearances to the sepulcher, and so the tradition of Christ's appearances in Judea was born. — This is an excellent explanation, both from the psychological and the critical point of view. In fact, everyone knows that the faithful *grogards* of the Old Guard freed Napoleon from St. Helena at least a hundred times after 1815, and they had him risen from the tomb at least a thousand times after 1821; indeed, after Waterloo and the fifth of May, "the awakening and one might almost say the sudden reaction of their faith, etc., etc."

[←259]

Why this number, 153? Obviously because when the Apostles counted their catch, as fishermen usually did, they found they had 153. Ancient commentators discovered mysterious mystical meanings in the number, and since their explanations were didactic in purpose there is nothing to be said against them. For example, St. Augustine noticed that 153 is the sum of all the numbers from one to seventeen ( $1+2+3+\dots+17=153$ ), and hence it is the sum of the first ten numbers, representing the Decalogue, plus the seven successive numbers, representing the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that help man to observe the ten commandments. Others saw in it the conversion of the Gentiles (100) plus that of the Jews (50) plus the belief in the Trinity (3). Such were the mystical meanings the ancients found. Those modern scholars who see nothing but allegory in the fourth Gospel would have another fine opportunity to demonstrate their thesis in this number as they did in the case of the seven husbands of the Samaritan woman and the porticoes of the pool of Bezatha and the brothers of Dives (note 193), but they have not done anything about it. Or better, they have perhaps done too much, because so many and such absurd solutions have been proposed, that the most recent scholars have concluded, more reasonably, that the number represents a riddle. It is impossible not to discover a riddle when the sensible explanations are rejected.