

The Problem of Evil and the Kingdom

By

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Revised in 2006

“No prophesy ever came from the choice of a human being; it always comes from a person’s being led by the Holy Spirit to speak from God.” 2 Peter, 1:21

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Part One

Philosophical Preliminaries

Note: This book makes reference to various other books that I have written, notably *The Modes of the Finite*, a 7-volume comprehensive treatise on the whole of philosophy.

The books referred to may be found on the internet web site www.fundamentalissues.net and may be read there or downloaded and printed for personal use. (This book is also on the site.)

CHAPTER 1

SOME PERSONAL REMARKS

This is an attempt to confront the very real difficulty that the Problem of Evil presents to Christians, who hold that God is love, and that Jesus is the human embodiment of God's love in the world. You can make a philosophical argument that the problem of evil does not argue against the "philosophical God," and I have done so, for example, in *Modes of the Finite*. But this allows God, so to speak, to be a monster from our point of view, not the loving, intervening, salvific God Christianity speaks of.

True, using the problem of evil to deny that there is a God solves nothing, because evil is a positive, irreducible irrationality in our apparently rational world. You can therefore, with Camus, simply accept that the world is absurd, and rejoice in the parts of it that *seem* to make sense; but you can't call that a rational or even a sensible position. It cannot make sense that things make nonsense, which is what this position ultimately boils down to; and so why take a position like that.

Far better to assume that somehow or other, things make sense. I have spent the past few years of my life examining the texts of the New Testament to see if a rational case can be made for saying that they are not factual reports, but either lies or delusions or (as is the current theory) writings decades later that took hyperbolic embellishments as facts. Those theories don't work; they make hash out of the texts as they actually exist. The only way a person can hold them, it seems to me from my investigations (see my *The Synoptic*

Gospels Compared and my *The New Testament: an Idiomatic Translation*), is if you assume *a priori* that the fantastic events did not happen because such events cannot happen, and that therefore any theory that rejects them as facts (however fraught with inconsistencies and contradictions) is to be preferred to any theory that admits their possibility, however simple and elegant.

There's no sense writing things that rational, sensible people are going to read unless you make sense. So I take it that there is a solution to the problem of evil that makes sense. And my solution involves accepting the fall of man (which I can conclude to from philosophical grounds), and what that implies with respect to the coming of Jesus and the announcement of the Reign of God.

Thus, a significant part of this study is what you might call an exercise in textual archaeology. It starts with the assumption that Jesus intended to be accepted as the actual political King of Judea (and through this the world); but he also knew that his claim as the successor to David would in actual fact be rejected, though it was really possible for it to be accepted, since it depended on free human choices.

But because of this real possibility (which was confirmed by his prayer in Gethsemani), his previous announcements about the nature of what his (i.e. God's) reign would be like would probably bear two meanings: (1) the sense we now take his statements, in the light of the crucifixion and resurrection, but also (2) the sense of what the world he was to govern would be like if he were accepted as King. My aim in this part of the study, then, is to dig out this second sense, if any, from what he said.

Hence, the basic thrust of this study is speculative: what would the world be like if Jesus had been accepted by the Jews as their King, the successor to David? From a casual glance at Scripture with the above idea in mind, there seems to be Scriptural evidence that what would have happened is that the effects of Original Sin—death, suffering, and loss of control—would have been

erased. This makes the crucifixion, in which our Master used our rejection of him to save us, a “contingency plan” on the part of God; and its result is that each of us works out his own salvation by sharing in the suffering and death of Jesus and only after this rising with him in glory.

The seeds of the position I have come to on this matter were sown in me years and years ago when I read in Romano Guardini’s *The Lord* that the crucifixion did not have to take place. That rang true, and made sense out of Jesus’ prayer and agony in the garden. The crucifixion “had to” take place in the sense that it *would in fact* take place; but there was a real possibility that it would not take place, and the control of what would happen lay in the free choices of the agents involved: the Jews at the trial, and Pilate.

Later, I undertook a translation of John’s Gospel into an English which I wanted to have sound the way I thought the Greek would have sounded to the original hearers. I performed it many times as a dramatic proclamation; and in doing so, I had to memorize it, and so became intimately familiar with it. But more importantly, I had, for performance purposes, to delve into what actors call the “subtext”: that logic underneath what is explicitly said which makes the next sentence occur to the author who has just written the present one.

As I put myself in Jesus’ place, it increasingly appeared to me as if Jesus was actually claiming that if we believed in him we would not die. Literally never die; he never gave the slightest hint that he meant this as a metaphor for living through death to another life afterwards—not even when his own students seemed ready to leave him, for instance, or when he was pressed by people who accused him of being crazy for saying such things.

Of course, if Jesus was actually claiming that, if he was accepted as King, he would abolish death, then he had a formidable task. He had to convince the Jews, first of all that he was the successor to David’s throne and Israel’s legitimate King; but secondly, that he was

not insane, that he was not speaking in figures of speech, and that the Kingdom which he would rule over would be a complete transformation of the world. And finally, he had to prove that he could make good on his promise. Not surprisingly, he failed. It was all too easy for me to play the part of his Jewish hearers when he said, “Amen amen I tell you, if anyone keeps what I say, he will never see death!” They answered, “Now we know that you’re crazy! Abraham died, and so did the prophets! And you say that if ‘anyone keeps what you say’ he won’t taste death forever! Are you greater than our ancestor Abraham? Who died! Or the prophets? Who died! Just who are you making yourself out to be?”

What led finally up to what I am about to write was the assault upon my faith by all of the agony and horrible things I see going on and even, in my own small way, experience in my own life and the lives of those I love. As a philosopher, I know that things are “wrong” because we see things in terms of what we would like the world to be like, and in an absolute sense they are what they are, and are value neutral in themselves. (We will see a good deal of this and its implications shortly.) But as a Christian I believe that God loves us enough to submit to the agony of dying so that we would be spared agony which we deliberately brought upon ourselves—and it is hard to reconcile that with the fact that we are still undergoing horrible torments, even though they are temporary and eventually “every tear will be wiped away.”

Why the wait? It is so much simpler to believe that Jesus did not in fact get up out of his grave, that all of this is a “meaningful legend” to make our lives more bearable, and that the whole Christian enterprise is just another one of those mythical versions of life that is supposed to reveal the beauty of the horrors we are living through. Christianity is, in this view, symbolism, not fact.

But if Jesus did not in fact come back to life, and come back bodily, if the historical Jesus was simply the wise guru and the fantastic events were legends attached to him, then the whole thing

is a waste of time, and any mitigation of the horrors is wishful thinking that should be abhorred by any reasonable person. Why? Because it simply makes these horrors “meaningful” *as if* ultimately they would make sense; it is an attempt to explain them by wishful thinking, not by any evidence that the suffering of our lives actually *does* resolve itself into something that we would actually choose as better than any alternative if we saw the whole picture.

But if it did happen, then again, why the wait? Why *do* we die, why are we ourselves crucified? It’s the age-old question. And it was in this context, that during a sermon by Rev. Edward Bruggeman, the thesis of what I am now writing occurred to me. It wasn’t meant to be this way. We wouldn’t be going through this struggle if the human race had been sensible enough to accept Jesus. The Kingdom of God that Jesus announced never occurred as Jesus announced it, because Jesus was rejected as King; and the result was that all of subsequent and prior history is different from what it would have been if the Jews and the Gentiles of the time had been like Mary and said, “Let it be done.”

All of subsequent and *prior* history? Yes. The whole evolution of the universe would have been different if that one event had been different, because God is eternal, and that one event, which didn’t have to happen, colored everything that *did* happen, both before and after it.

There are thus two great failures of mankind in the world: the first one, the Fall, brought it about that suffering exists (presumably both before and after this tragic event); the second brought it about that our redemption from the first failure occurs *through* the suffering that was brought about by the first, and was not a simple redemption *from* it.

I make no pretense that this is new ground I am breaking. Speculation like this went on in the early Church and in the Middle Ages. I do, however, have a somewhat different philosophical base that I am working from: specifically, that there is no objective

meaning to “good” and “bad” (though there is to “right” and “wrong”). My hope is that this investigation can shed some light on the problem of suffering.

In fact, as I look at it with the germs of this new point of view, I think I begin to understand what was called the “problem of evil,” and can see a new way in which it makes sense, at least to me. I am writing this in the hope that—at least after I die—someone will read this and also find peace.

CHAPTER TWO

FREE CHOICE AND NECESSITY

First, then, there are some preliminaries that have to be discussed. At the outset, we must get into several philosophical questions: the difference between the fact that something “has to happen” because a fact is a fact, and so has to be the fact which it is, and that something has to happen because there are no real options except one. If the crucifixion didn’t have to happen in this latter sense, this opens up the possibility that, though the crucifixion was prophesied, it was still possible for it not to occur.

Then we will have to discuss the relation of God to the world he created; how it can be free, and yet how he has control over it; also the relation of eternity to time, and how the future can affect the past (which we know actually has happened, as in prophesy).

The final philosophical preliminary will be an examination of what “good” and “bad” are, to show that from God’s point of view there is simply limited reality, and that God has no ideals which “ought” to be realized.

Passing from there to Theology, the first thing we will have to do is examine whether the “Jesus of history” was or was not identical to the “Christ of faith”: that is, if the fantastic tales of walking on water and so on actually happened or not. There is no point in trying to say what Jesus was claiming about the kingdom he was to rule over if what we have to go on are reports made over a hundred years after he died, full of all sorts of additions and interpolations from people who had no contact with him.

On the assumption that we can make out a case that what the

Gospels report was what happened, I will then try to examine the Gospels from a point of view which does not use hindsight. That is, what would the open-minded, attentive listener (one who *had* “ears to hear”) have understood Jesus to mean from what he was saying? What would Jesus himself have meant on the assumption that he intended eventually to have his claims as the Prince accepted, and would actually take the throne of Judea (that is, that the kingdom would be an actual political kingdom)?

I intend to begin with John’s Report, since that is not only the one that gave me the basic insight I mentioned, but seems clearest in revealing that Jesus (a) knew from the beginning that he was the Prince, the descendant of David, (b) that he knew that he was God, (c) that he was gradually revealing what his proposal for the future of Israel was, (d) that he explicitly said that those who accepted him would not die, and in a context where he distinguished that from dying and coming back to life, (e) that his miracles had the definite function of proving that he was capable of doing whatever he said he could do.

In the light of this, I would like then to examine the Synoptic Gospels, to see how this intention of Jesus gives a different meaning to things like the analogies of the Kingdom and the Sermon on the Mount, which seems to have been the first manifesto of the new kingdom; and why the stories were necessary precisely so that people would hear and *not* understand.

Then I would like to discuss the Passion and the predictions of the Passion as how God coped with the actual second rejection of his grace by the representatives of mankind in the leaders of his Chosen People and the vicar of the ruler of the rest of the world, Pilate.

The thesis here is that Salvation History is the solution to what might be called two Divine Dilemmas posed by the two rejections of grace by mankind’s legitimate representatives.

The first dilemma was this: the initial rejection of grace by the one who was the progenitor of the human race could not simply be

ignored; and yet it was unjust to say that because Adam sinned, every single one of his descendants, if put in his place, would have committed the same sin, and so deserved a like expulsion from the face of God. The dilemma was solved by having Adam pass on to his descendants a rebellion of the animal aspect of humanity from the spiritual aspect (even to a final separation in death), which, though it made sin more likely, at the same time made redemption possible because the human was not, like Adam, in full control of information or his own impulses. No one's total personality is wrapped up in his sin, as we now exist; and so, unlike Satan, it is possible to transform us to a Godlike spirit once again without totally annihilating us.

The second dilemma was the rejection of the transformation back to the state Adam was in, which again could not go unacknowledged, but which did not mean that every person, either in Judea or in the pagan world (think of John himself or Joseph of Arimathea and Longinus, for example) collaborated in the rejection, still less that every future person would have joined the Jews or Pilate. And the solution to this dilemma was to leave death and suffering intact, but now to use this death and suffering as a uniting to the death and suffering of Jesus on the cross, so that (a) the salvation of mankind was won by Jesus' suffering, (b) Jesus prolonged himself by diffusing his life into others through the Eucharist, making them cells in a social body which was literally his body, and (c) the redemption bought on the cross was and is applied to each human being through and in the suffering of the cells of that mystical body, instead of having it simply vanish. And *Revelation* tells us that when that mystical body has all of its cells complete (and when the waste has all been sloughed off), then the condition of eternal bodily life without suffering will finally occur.

Thus, in one sense we are being punished for each of the rejections we gave God in our representatives: we are weak and lack complete control over ourselves, we suffer, and we die. But in each case, that punishment is itself the key to our restoration into a state

of happiness and companionship with God: in the first case, because our weakness allows for the possibility of a change of mind, and in the second because the very suffering and death become redemptive, and the irrational takes on meaning.

The first thing, then, to clear up is whether the crucifixion had to happen. Here we must distinguish between the necessity that is a restatement of the Principle of Identity (A is necessarily A; a fact is what it is and can't be anything other than what it is) and the necessity that implies powerlessness over what a fact *is to be*.

Thus, I am now typing these words into my computer. Given that I am in fact typing them, it is impossible for me not to be typing them (i.e. impossible for me to be typing-them-when-not-typing-them). This is the necessity of a fact to be what it is, and simply acknowledges that facts are facts.

But this does not by any means imply that it is impossible for me to refuse to type the words. That is, typing these words depends on my choice, which is self-determining, and at any moment I may choose to stop typing. (I did in fact stop typing just after I wrote the word "determining," because something caught my eye out the window as I was thinking how to phrase the sentence.) This does not deny the first kind of necessity, of course, because *if* I choose to type (and carry out my choice) *then* it is impossible for me to type-while-not-typing. But it is possible for me not to type at all.

So in the sense in which I have *control* over what I am doing, it is even at this moment possible for me not to be typing; even though, since I am exercising my control and actually typing, it is not possible for me not to be typing (since I am in fact typing). These are two different senses of "possible," that is all.

That "necessity" connected with a fact's being what it is should not really be called a "necessity" at all, because there is really nothing necessary (in the sense of inevitable) about it; and to say that it is necessarily the case that if A is A, then A cannot not be A, uses "necessary" in a trivial instance as if it meant something other than

that A is in fact A.

Hence, the fact that the crucifixion occurred does not mean that the crucifixion *had to* occur. It may be “necessary” in this trivial sense and not inevitable at all; and in fact it depended, clearly, on the free choices of the Jews and of Pilate. They *could have* chosen to free Jesus; and in fact, Jesus gave both of them an opportunity to do so by the way he gave or did not give his testimony; and the evangelists depict Pilate as wavering.

I am not going to try to establish here that we do in fact make free (that is, self-determining) choices. A person who denies this needs more than having certain philosophical points clarified. I refer him to my *Modes of the Finite* for a discussion of the subject of free choice versus determinism. For purposes of the present discussion we will simply take it as true that human choices have real options open to them and that any one of the known options can be chosen. In other words, we have control over which option we choose; nothing makes it inevitable that we choose one option over another; and so in that sense the option we choose does not have to be chosen.

Therefore, there is nothing in the actual situation of the crucifixion that indicates that it was inevitable; and the fact that Jesus prayed for it not to happen “if it is possible” indicates that he saw that in some sense it was not a foregone conclusion. Granted, there are other interpretations for this (e.g. that he knew it was inevitable, but was terrified of it); but his prayer certainly supports the contention that he thought the worst could be avoided.

CHAPTER THREE

GOD AND FREE CHOICES

But this doesn't address the difficulty arising from the fact that God knew from all eternity that the crucifixion would occur, and even inspired the prophets to predict beforehand that it would occur; and Jesus himself predicted that events connected with it (such as Judas' betrayal) would have to occur "to fulfill the Scriptures"; and after the Resurrection explained to the students on the road to Emmaus how all these things "had to happen."

None of this, however, necessarily implies that we are talking about anything other than the necessity of a fact. If I look back at what I wrote above about my typing-while-not-typing I *recognize now* both that (as a fact) it had to be what it was, even though (as under my control) it didn't have to be that way.

So the statement of Jesus after the Resurrection is easily explained as that same kind of statement. This is the way it was. Since it was this way, it couldn't have been any other way.

It would seem, however, that the prior prediction of what would occur would have to preclude freedom. But this actually involves a different version of the same confusion of the two kinds of necessity. We tend to think that, since the future has not occurred yet, it has no "necessity of a fact," and is in reality indeterminate (and therefore under our control), whereas the past has happened, and so cannot be otherwise than it is and cannot be affected by what we do now. I have heard even intelligent philosophers speak this way,

trying to justify freedom on the grounds that the free choice determines what was before the choice indeterminate (the future); but that the past can't be affected by a choice. because it is already determinate.

There are actually several confusions here. Let us clear them up one by one. In the first place, what in fact will happen will in fact happen. That is, it is not the case that I will both get up at six o'clock tomorrow morning and not get up at six o'clock. The future is not "indeterminate" in the sense that somehow both of those statements are true, nor in the sense that both of them are false. Only one of them is true, and one of them is false. I do not now *know* whether I will get up at six o'clock tomorrow morning or not; but I *do* now know that I either will or I won't; so what I don't know is *which* of the alternatives will be realized in fact.¹

So the future is "indeterminate" only in the sense that it is now unknown by me which of the alternatives will occur, not in the sense that (a) both are somehow "there," or that (b) now it is possible that neither will occur. If I don't get up at six tomorrow, then it is necessarily false that I get up at six tomorrow; one or the other of the alternatives *must* be realized, and the other *must not be*, because tomorrow the fact will be the fact, and A is A, whether in the past,

¹I might point out that those who want to hold that the future is indeterminate because it is future run into difficulties with Relativity Theory when talking about events at a distance, at least; because what is future from one standpoint is past from another, and there is no absolute standpoint from which it can be decided which is objectively correct. Hence, the same event would be both indeterminate and determinate. Obviously, there is something fishy here.

present, or future.²

Hence, the future is determinate *in itself*. What will be will be. It is determinate with the “necessity” of a fact, however, and not with the necessity of inevitability. I will or will not make the choice to get up at six o’clock, and I will or will not carry out my choice. If I choose to get up and if I carry out my choice, then my actual getting up will be contingent upon my choice, which (as free) could have been different from what I actually chose.

But this is exactly the case with my getting up this morning. I chose to get up at six thirty this morning, and actually got up at that time; and as it happened, I lay in bed between six fifteen and six thirty, contemplating whether I should get up or not (I could have waited until six forty-five and still got to work on time). So it was a fact that I got up at six thirty, *and* that I freely got up at six thirty. The fact that I now know what actually happened does not alter the contingency of that fact in the least. It *could have* been different from what it was; it *was not in fact* different from what it was. Similarly, the time I actually get up tomorrow morning *could be* different from what it in fact will be, but *it will not in fact* be different from what in fact will happen. The time, whether past, present, or future, has no bearing on the determinateness of the event, nor on its contingency.

But if *God* knows what will happen, doesn’t that knowledge make the event inevitable? Not in the least. It can be shown that God knows events as they actually exist. If the event *is* a free event (such as choosing to get up), then if God’s knowledge of it made it inevitable in the sense that the options open to me are not real, then

²As I read this over on the morrow, I can now report that I got up at six fifteen, and so it is false that I got up at six o’clock. This, of course, means that “I will not get up at six o’clock” was *in fact* the true statement when I made it yesterday, even though yesterday I had no way of knowing this fact.

in the first place, *no* choice is ever free, because clearly God knows every single choice of every supposedly “free” being, and God’s knowledge of the choice removes any real option except the one which he knows is a fact.

But in the second place, this means that I am essentially deceived about my free choices, because I cannot in fact choose any of the options except the one which God knows is a fact. In that case, I can’t help my choices any more than I can help my height or the color of my skin; and so I cannot be held responsible for my choices any more than I can be held responsible for my height or skin color. In that case, it is unjust for God to punish me for any sin I commit, or reward me for any virtuous act I do, because there was no alternative open to me; it only *seemed to me* that there was an alternative. And since I can’t be undeceived from my notion that my free choices are free, then this deception is built into my nature and inescapable; and so God has created a creature in such a way that he as creator has deceived him in the very essence of what he has created.

Clearly, that line of reasoning creates more difficulties than it solves.

Far more sensible is to say that God can make the same kind of distinction that we finite creatures can make: he knows (eternally, to be sure) which option I *in fact choose* at any given moment in time. But he also eternally knows that this option which I choose *could have been* a different option, because I had the power to choose any of the known options—and therefore that the option I chose *is dependent on my choice for its specification*, not dependent on God’s knowledge of it. Hence, God knows what my choice is, and that I am the one responsible for the choice.

This also applies to God’s creative activity. God creates the whole universe in one single act, since God *is* nothing but one single act; and this “creating” means “causes every act in the universe to occur as the finite act which it is,” because each finite act depends on

God—the non-finite activity—for the fact that it is finite, as I point out in *Modes of the Finite*.

But this does not mean that finite acts don't also depend on other finite acts; God causes them to exist as they are, and they exist as really dependent on other acts. For instance, the words you see on this page exist as dependent on what my fingers are doing at the moment—which means that if my fingers were doing something different, the words would be either different or nonexistent. But the words *as finite realities* depend directly on God, because nothing else can cause them to exist as finite existences. But God causes them to exist as they are, and as they are, *what sort of* finite existences they are (the *specification* of their finiteness) depends on my action.

Now then, God eternally causes my free choices to exist *as free*, and hence as dependent on themselves for their determination. *His* causality does not determine them, because then they would be externally determined and not self-determined; and so they would be a contradiction in terms: self-determined acts which are determined by something other than the self.

Still, he obviously could prevent them from occurring if he did not exert his causal activity. That is, just as I could prevent your free choices from occurring if I knocked you unconscious, so God's causality on the free act (making it finite) means that the free act (which, to be sure, is *specified* by the choice itself) can't occur without it; and so if God withholds his contribution to the act, he can still prevent its happening (should he want to do such a thing). In that sense, God has control over the self-determining acts of his creatures, without meaning that his control determines what the act is to be. There is more to it than this, but for a more complete discussion, see *Modes of the Finite*.

The upshot of this, however, is that neither God's knowledge nor his causal contribution to the free choices of his creatures makes those choices inevitable; if the choices are free, they are self-determining, and this entails precisely the opposite of

inevitability. God's control over them (supposing, as one must, that he wills free choices to be free and not determined from outside) would be exercised in manipulating the non-free elements of the situation by putting a person into circumstances in which the person *in fact* will freely make the choice God wants him to make.

That is, God's control over our free choices could be exercised in a way differing only in degree from the way we ourselves manipulate each other: if you know a person's character and you want him to do something for you, you present him with "an offer he can't refuse." You know he *can* refuse it; but given his character, it is unlikely that he will in fact do so. The only difference between this and what God can do to control our choices is that he knows that it is not only unlikely that the refusal will occur, but that it will not in fact occur, because he knows every event that in fact happens in this world.

CHAPTER FOUR

ETERNITY AND TEMPORAL EVENTS

Let me say that this does not mean that God *does* manipulate us in this way; merely that he *can* do so and still leave us completely free in our choices. But the fact that he knows what *will* happen brings up the second confusion, which is connected with trying to think of eternity in terms of time. Time, as I point out in *Modes of the Finite*, is a relationship between processes, and processes necessarily involve limitation (in both kind and degree). But since God has no limitation on his activity, then time-words do not apply to him; and this “timelessness” of God’s activity is what has the name “eternity.” Eternity, then, is to time as colorlessness is to color. “Eternity” does not mean “no time” any more than “colorlessness” means “no color,” in the sense of “blackness.” Nor does “eternity” mean “all time,” which would be the equivalent of saying that “colorlessness” means “all colors,” or “whiteness.” Just as “colorless” does not mean “no color” or “all colors” or “some indefinite color” or “this color” or “that color” but that color-terms simply do not apply to what is colorless, so “eternity” does not mean “always” or “never” or “an unending ‘now’” or any other term that applies to time.

Hence, with God there is no “before” or “after” or “now” or “then.” Everything in time is present to God in the sense of “not absent,” but *not* in the sense of “at the present moment.” God does nothing *before* he does anything else; but this does not mean that he

does everything *simultaneously* either. All these are time words which do not apply to God's activity any more than color words apply to clear glass. The *effect of* God's creative activity spreads out in time, and God's eternal knowledge encompasses all time; but God's own act is one single act with no relation to time, any more than the fact that he creates limited beings makes him somehow limited.

That is, God creates things with "time-tags" on them as well as "color-tags" and "location-tags"; and the created things have these characteristics. Thus, God eternally creates (we must use a tense if we use a verb) me as existing from 1933 onward until I die, at which moment I too will drop my time-characteristic and enter eternity (timelessness). This time is a characteristic *I have*, not a "something" I am *in*. It is a relation with a definite set of other beings, nothing more. Just as I am an American, meaning that I have the spatial and social relationship with other Americans, so I am a twentieth-century man, meaning that I have relationships with the Americans of my century and not with those of the nineteenth century or the twenty-second.

What all this implies, of course, is that God knows the future *in the same sense* as he knows the past; everything that is now happening or has ever happened or ever will happen is known by God in his one single act of knowledge. And this act of knowledge also includes what *would have* happened if some event³, either in what is to us past,

³I once had a discussion in *Communio* with W. Norris Clarke, who held (or seemed to me to be holding) that God could not know what would have happened but did not happen, because God could only know what is real, and what would have happened is not real. I pointed out that this made prophesies (inspired by God) impossible, because frequently they say, *if* you do X, then Y will happen; if you do not, then Z will happen. Clearly if God could not know unrealized possibilities, then he could not predict both outcomes, since only one could be real. Anyhow, it is absurd to say that God is more ignorant than we are, since we can sometimes know (even with certainty) what *would*

present, or future, had not happened. When I say past, present, and future, I am speaking from our point of view. What is future to me at the moment (your reading this), of course, is present to you; so “present” is a purely relative term. For God there is no such thing as past, present, or future.

Hence, God’s knowledge of what will happen is no different from his knowledge of what already has happened; and his causal activity on what will happen is also no different from his causal activity on what has happened.

Now God not only causes the world to exist, and gives it its laws, and by his creative causality cooperates with every finite act that occurs; it is also the case that he sometimes intervenes in his world in an extraordinary way, causing events (through creatures, generally) that the creatures themselves cannot cause by their own nature. Not that such events are *contradictions* of their nature; they are *beyond* the capabilities of the nature; God supplements the creature’s nature sometimes.

That is, God not only causes the universe to exist and cooperates with its activity as it acts according to the laws built into each thing, but also actively intervenes in this universe he has created and sometimes (when it is disposed properly) “lifts” it above what it is capable of merely by the laws of its own nature. Supernatural events do occur, even in the non-human world. The emergence of life (which sustains itself stably at a physically unstably high energy-level) is a case in point. The lesser cannot produce the greater; but the leap from non-life to life happened in the course of evolution; and therefore God intervened to make the otherwise impossible possible.

happen if some real event did not happen.

CHAPTER FIVE

GOODNESS AND BADNESS

There is, of course, nothing to prevent God's doing this, since absolutely every act that ever occurs is God's creature, and so occurs just as God wills it to occur. So if he chooses to enable something to do, with his help, more than it can do by nature, then the being can act beyond its own natural capacities.

But I just said that *absolutely* every act that occurs occurs exactly as God wills it to occur, which would certainly seem to imply that God wills sinful acts to occur, and they occur just as he wills them to occur. But how can God will that a sin occur? And how can the whole thesis of this study then be sustained, that the crucifixion and suffering and so on is God's "contingency plan," which certainly seems to imply that he would rather have had the world different from the way it became because of the free but perverse choices of his creatures?

This is another thing that I explore at length in *Modes of the Finite*, but which we must go into here in order to avoid confusion.

Let me first dispose of the notion of "the permissive will of God" as usually understood. The idea in this concept is that God chose to create a world in which beings are free, and make free choices. Given that he chose such a world, he must *allow* those beings to make the choices they make (because otherwise they would be free-and-not-free) even when the choice is not what he would wish it to be. He is, on this theory, constrained to cooperate with the

perverse choices and their necessary consequences (though he could manipulate the non-necessary ones), or he contradicts himself as a creator of free creatures.

One of the confusions here lies in the notion that God creates the *creature*, the substance or thing or complex body, and then the creature “performs” its acts by its own power. But what God creates (causes) is *finite activity*, both the complex set of finite acts which constitute the body (as well as the act that knits the body into a functioning unit) *and* each and every act the body performs, because each and every act is a finite act, and as such is in itself a contradiction as activity-which-is-less-than-what-it-is-to-be-active, or activity-which-contains-non-activity-as-defining-itself (whichever formulation you wish to take). The only thing which can make sense out of such an activity is God, the act which is equal to what it is to be active. This is also treated at length in *Modes of the Finite*.

In *this* sense, we are the absolute slaves of God. There is absolutely nothing we can do that is not directly caused by God to be the finite act which it is. Even the act of rebelling against God is caused as that finite act by God, and couldn’t have existed unless God *actively* willed it to exist.

Hence, God cannot simply *permit* my act of rebellion against him, as if I could do it by myself and he could have blocked it but refuses to. I absolutely cannot act at all unless God actively cooperates in the act, as I said. There is no question of God’s “permitting” an act which he would rather not have happen; he must actively *will* the act in order for it to happen.

I hasten to reiterate that God’s causal act does not *determine* the finite act which he causes; the determination of the act is due to the fact that it is *also* caused by finite causes, and its relation to them is what specifies what finite act it will be (or, in the case of a free choice, its specification is due to its own nature and not to whatever influences may affect the choice). So God “makes the choice happen” as the act which in fact it is; and it is the act of determining

for itself what it shall be. God wills it to be exactly what it is: *this* act as determined by itself, influenced to a greater or lesser degree by whatever the free being allows to influence it. See *Modes of the Finite*. God does not and cannot “permit” the choice; because if he only permitted it, there could be no choice. The creature is not capable of creating even a free choice.

The second confusion in God’s supposed “permissive will” is that God has some kind of ideal of the way some creature or set of creatures “really ought to be,” and that the actual reality of the creature falls short of God’s notion of its “true reality.” But how can this be? God’s notion of what a creature is is identical with his act of creating that creature, because God is only one single, simple act. When God has a notion of what a creature’s *true* reality is, then that *is* the creature’s reality (and that idea contains every single act that the creature performs, because all of these are caused in causing the creature); otherwise, the “true reality” would be false, and then in what sense is it the creature’s “true” reality? Since God knows the creature eternally, he knows eternally that this is what the creature is, and that it never lives up to its supposed “true reality”; and so its “true reality” is not only false but eternally false. But then God has an idea of what a being “really is” that is unreal and eternally known to be unreal. That doesn’t make sense, unless the “really” of what the being “really is” means something different from the ordinary meaning of “real,” in which case why use the term? And if you don’t use the term, in what sense does one say that this nonexistent ideal *ought* to be real?

The solution to this problem, as I point out in *Modes of the Finite*, is that when we say something “ought” to be a certain way, we do so on the basis of comparing the facts with an ideal that *we* have somehow conceived. Now this ideal cannot be something we have observed, because clearly, as an ideal, no actual being measures up to it fully. So the ideal must be something we have *constructed* by using observations and combining parts of them and omitting other

parts from the compound. Thus, for instance, an ideal human being would probably be handsome or beautiful, with regular features and body, be strong and agile, intelligent and wise, kindly, articulate, modest, etc., etc. We take people we have observed, eliminate from them the characteristics we think are inconsistent with being human, such as petulance or physical defects, combine them with other people who have characteristics we like, eliminating the aspects of them that we find inconsistent; and thus come up with a human being who has all the positives and none of the negatives about humanity. We then use this construct as a norm for evaluating how “human” some real human being is.

The point that I am making here is that the ideal is not something objective, even if each element of it has existed in some (defective) object. In what sense, then, can we say that this ideal “ought” to exist? The fact that I can construct something that I would *like* to see existing does not give this construct an objective reason for existing, still less a reason for its existing in preference to any really existing thing.

The fallacy lies in assuming that “goodness” is something “out there” that is discovered, and not the simple fact that what *is* “out there” in a given case measures up to this preconceived ideal that we for some reason are using as the standard to which the facts are to conform. I don’t think anyone would question that something is thought to be good when it measures up to what you think it ought to be; but what can “what you think it ought to be” be but this ideal that you have made up? As I said, there’s no way we can get the ideal from observation, so it must be constructed subjectively. And that, of course, is why one person’s ideal temperature for a room is seventy degrees, and another’s is sixty degrees, why one person’s ideal human is meek and humble and another’s is aggressive and assertive.

As I said, I argue this at length in *Modes of the Finite*, so I am not going to pursue it further here. The point that is relevant for our purposes is that, since God does not know things by the indirect

route of being affected by their action on his senses, but knows them by knowing his creative act of causing them, he does not have ideals of how a given thing “ought” to be. What God knows a thing to be is what that thing is. For God, there is no “good” and “bad” at all, only limited reality.

It is therefore not possible to “disappoint” God in any sense, not only because we have no power to do anything that he does not actively have a hand in causing, but also because he has no preconceived plan for what “should” happen. In the first place, God’s knowledge is eternal, and so no idea of his of anything is *preconceived*. Secondly, God’s knowledge is creative, and so his “preconceived” (i.e. eternal) idea of a given object *makes* that object be what it is; and, since there is absolutely nothing in that object which can thwart his idea of it (since absolutely every aspect of it is a finite act, and must be caused to exist as it is by his creative act), then absolutely everything about any object exists exactly as God wills it to be, and God has only one will.

What this means is that God is eternally and absolutely satisfied with me as the sinner which I am. If he wanted me in any sense to be different, then I would *be* different, because (a) he has only one will, being simple, and (b) I can’t put up any resistance which would prevent him from fulfilling his will absolutely exactly, because that very resistance as an act would have to be actively willed by him—in that one act of will by which I and everything about me, including my acts, are what they are.

Now these conclusions rest on the only valid evidence for saying that there is a God at all, not on what one might “feel comfortable with,” as I also show in *Modes of the Finite*. God is what he is, and we are what we are, and if we don’t “feel comfortable with” this, then this doesn’t alter what the facts are in the least. You can’t make sense out of the world if you start by denying some of the facts that can be known because you don’t see how they can be made to fit together to make sense.

CHAPTER SIX

THE HYPOTHETICAL WILL OF GOD

The reason I say this is that it seems to make impossible the very thesis of this whole study. How can the way the world is be a “contingency plan” if there wasn’t a “master plan” which for some reason got thwarted?

The answer lies in what is behind some of the more profound understandings of what was unfortunately called the “permissive” will of God: there is a *hypothetical* will of God. That is, on the assumption that God not only knows what *does* happen but what *would have happened* if some actual event did not happen, then this knowledge (which is identical with God’s will because he is simple) is also God’s will for what would have happened. That is, if God knows it would have happened, then clearly if it *had* happened, God would have had to will it (because in itself as finite it would have been impossible without his creative act, which is identical with his will).

So, for instance, God knows what the world would have been like if our progenitor had not sinned; which means that, on the hypothesis that he did not sin, God’s will for the world would have been thus and so.

In *Modes of the Finite* I gave no evidence that there is or could be such hypothetical knowledge and hypothetical will on the part of God. Is there any? Nothing conclusive, I suspect, because in order to establish such a thing conclusively in philosophy, we would have to have the hypothetical event actually occur, in which case it would be part of the real and not hypothetical world.

It would seem, however, that evolution, as *not* following the path that you would expect from the Second Law of Thermodynamics (in which the tendency of the more organized is to become less organized), indicates that God is intervening in the world by manipulating the chance element of the bodies that interact in the world. I mention this in *Modes of the Finite*. But it is difficult to see how this could be done to achieve a definite result if God were not aware of what the possibilities are in the organism he wishes to “lift beyond” itself. Let us take the virus-like particle that is going to be capable, with a little genetic alteration, of becoming something like a bacterium, which sustains itself at a super-high energy level by taking in energy from the environment. The complex inanimate particle (which is inanimate and whose equilibrium is its lowest-energy condition) has *one* particular genetic alteration which will support the organizing activity of a living organism (which then has an additional high-energy equilibrium which for a while at least overrides the ground-state one). But this is one possibility out of billions of possible alterations which will do nothing but destroy the particle.

Since there are so many other possibilities which are going to lead to nothing but setbacks, the laws of probability would say that the particle in question has in practice no natural chance to get into that configuration. But the event actually happened. It seems to me that this indicates that God had to know what *would* have happened in all these other configurations, and that *this* one out of all the other billions of possibilities had to have the circumstances in which it could occur by some manipulation of the convergence of natural forces acting on it. How else could the one event have been selected, since chance can’t really account for it—or if you argue that it could because it is statistically possible, remember that a whole unbroken string of billions of events *each* as unlikely as the one in question had to occur in order for evolution to have taken the path that it took. If any one of these excessively improbable events did not occur,

evolution would have stopped at that point and started backward.

But if philosophy gives hints but still leaves it possible to say that God does not really know what does not but could happen, confirmation that God has such knowledge comes from Scripture, which sometimes talks about what would have happened. God tells Abraham that he will destroy Sodom and Gomorrah; but then says he *will not if* as few as ten virtuous men can be found in the city. Apparently they couldn't be found, so the city was destroyed. The city of Nineveh in Jonah's time *would be* destroyed if the people didn't repent; they repented, and the city was not destroyed. Jesus laments on how he *would have* gathered the people of Jerusalem under his wings, except that they would not come; he makes the terrible pronouncement that it *would have* been better for Judas if he had never been born—and so on. Scripture is replete with what might be called “contingency-predictions.”

Hence, we can take it that God not only knows what actually happens, but what would have happened under various actually unfulfilled conditions.

If we add this type of hypothetical knowledge (and hypothetical will) to what was said above about good and bad, then we can correct some of the false implications in what is called the “permissive will” of God. Since “good” and “bad” are due to the *human* type of knowledge that conceives ideals and compares the fact with them, then we can say that *God has no preference of one possible world over another.*

That is, God knows what the real world is, and also what the real world *would be* under various conditions; but he has no notion that one of these states is *better* than any other. He recognizes, of course, that *people* in the world would regard one human condition (say, a condition without suffering) as better than another; but from God's point of view, each is equally acceptable, because from God's point of view, each is only limited reality, and (a) any limited reality is *ipso facto* less than it could be, and (b) there is no ontological

demand in it that it be limited *only* to one given degree rather than another. Any limitation it can have is obviously a limitation it can have; and so there is no real contradiction in its being limited in this way or to this degree.

For instance, the human body is capable of existing without the capacity to see; and so there can be blind people. From our point of view this is bad, because we compare ourselves with what most (even “practically all”) people can do, and God looks on the being as he is, with the limitations that he has. We have eyes only in the front of our heads, however desirable it might be to have an extra eye on the back of the head; but no one complains about this because we regard it as a limitation, not as a deprivation of what we “ought” to have. But a deprivation, in the last analysis, is merely a limitation that does not occur in most instances of the kind of body in question; and by what law of nature is it that a being *must* be limited only to the degree that the “normal” body of this type is limited?

And this, as I point out in *Modes of the Finite*, is where the fallacy lies in Augustine’s definition of “evil” as “privation of a due good” (i.e. lack of an existence or activity that is somehow “owing” to the being). The act is “due” to the being *only from the human point of view*, the point of view from which you compare the being with the average of its class. As an individual, it is simply limited existence.

Therefore, there is no reason for saying that “God permits evil so that he can draw greater good out of it.” This *could* not be the case, if there are people in hell (and at least the devils are in hell). If you say that the world is better off for the people’s being in hell, then how can any temporal advantage compensate for eternal frustration? I point out to my classes that it isn’t worth it to tell a little lie to save the whole world from dying in excruciating agony. Suppose it takes a million years of the minor frustration of the liar in hell to equal the days of agony before one person dies; so that after a million years, the liar has suffered as much as the suffering he has saved this one

person from because of his lie. There are, let us say, a billion people in the world. Then when the liar has suffered in his minor way for a billion times a million years, then he has equaled the suffering he has saved the world from by his lie. From then on, he has *increased* the suffering in the world, because the suffering added to the world by his suffering is greater than any suffering he has saved the world from. So any eternal suffering, however insignificant, is always greater than any temporal agony, however terrible or widespread.

You might say that the person is better off in hell because he chose the suffering he brought upon himself; but by whose standards is he “better off”? I know that when I sin, what I choose is (a) to do what will in some respect bring me suffering but (b) what in another respect will bring me pleasure or fulfillment, and (c) I choose the fulfillment *minus* the suffering, even though (d) I know that the choice is unrealistic because I can’t have the one without the other. The point is that, though I did choose the suffering, I didn’t *want* it by my self-contradictory choice; that, in fact, is the essence of immorality: to make a choice that one *knows* is unreal and to will the unreal to be real, knowing that it won’t be real just because one wills it. But it is absurd to say that I think I am *better* off in having the suffering which I actively *didn’t want* in the choice which entailed it.

Nor am I ontologically better off for trying to violate my own reality. True, I have exercised my choice; but I could have exercised it consistently, and actually made myself ontologically better off. But I choose to be better off by doing something which I knew would make me *worse* off; so I not only make myself worse off, I knowingly do so.

No, there is no way you can twist and turn and make any “objective” sense out of a person’s being better off for being in hell. He got what he asked for (but didn’t want), that’s all. There *is* no “objectively greater good” that comes of this. And of course, there can’t be, because “good” means only that the object in fact agrees with my preconceived idea of the way it “ought” to be, which means

that the *basis* of goodness is always subjective, not objective.

The reason I am harping on this is that it goes against the grain so much. The factual element in goodness (that the object *does in fact* agree with my subjective standard) blinds us to the fact that the standard itself is subjective, and the goodness isn't "out there" except in the sense that the *relation* to the standard actually obtains. But the "goodness" is not a "property" the object possesses, any more than existence is a property or truth is a property. In fact, goodness is just truth looked at backwards, since truth occurs when my idea of an object (in the sense of my concept of it, not my sensory impression of it) agrees with what the object actually is. The truth-relation and the goodness-relation are the same relation; it is just that in the truth-relation the object is the standard the idea has to "tune itself into" and in the goodness-relation the idea is the standard that the object is supposed to conform to. Truth, then, is objective (even though it has a subjective pole), because the standard is the object; and goodness is always subjective (though it has an objective pole) because the standard was created by the subject.

What is the upshot of this? That there is no necessity for God to "bring greater good" out of the evils that happen in this world, because from God's point of view there *is* no evil, because *God has no standards*. For God, what is is.

What then of the Law? The Ten Commandments? Are not these God's standards for our behavior? Not really. What they are is a spelling out of the various ways in which a person can act at cross-purposes with himself. For instance, we *are* creatures, and so are always dependent on God for everything we do, and can never be God's equal, still less greater than he. Therefore, it is inconsistent to act as if we were equal to or greater than God. We must *worship* God, which is to say, acknowledge our absolute dependence on him and only him; and so any person who *chooses* to be independent of God is frustrating himself in that very choice.

Again, any person who steals is in effect saying "What's mine is

mine (because I am human) and what's yours is mine (so I want you not to be as human as I)." But taking an object and so *wanting* it to belong to you doesn't make it belong to you and you know it. And so on.

And since, as I point out in *Modes of the Finite*, our choices, as spiritual, are eternal acts, then making one of these self-frustrating choices means eternally setting up a goal for oneself that in part cannot be achieved because it contradicts itself; and so making a choice that violates one of the Commandments means choosing one's eternal frustration.

So the sin is the punishment. The Commandments, then, are not what God "would like" us to do or "would rather" have us do. They are simply his laying out the facts for us: "If you want to frustrate yourself eternally, then do one of these ten things." And if, knowing this, you choose to do it, God is not disappointed in you. If frustration is what you want, God is perfectly happy with your frustrating yourself eternally.

The notion that God only allows evil in order that a greater good may be brought out of it actually implies that God would not create a universe at all. Why is that? On the assumption that goodness is something objective (and that being and goodness are convertible terms), then God is infinitely good. Now if you add a finite good (a creature) to infinite goodness, you have not increased the amount of objective goodness in the universe. Hence, a universe with nothing but God in it is infinitely good, and a universe with God and any number of finite creatures is no better than the universe with God alone. But if God permits evil only in order that a greater good may come from it, then this implies that he would prefer that evil not exist (or "occur," if you prefer the term, since evil doesn't *exist* as such), and only allows it because he has to in order to achieve the greater good.

But there is an alternative for God: that there be a world which is the greatest of all possible goods, without any evil in it at all—the

universe that contains no creatures whatever. Hence, if goodness and evil are objective, and God (who is good) allows evil only for the sake of having the universe with the greatest amount of good in it, then there are no creatures.

I will therefore take it that God has no ideals, no preferences, even though he knows hypothetical universes. So if he gives us a chance to fulfill ourselves and we deliberately reject it and choose our own frustration, then his *active* will for us and his *only* will for us is our frustration; even though *on the hypothesis* that we made a different choice, his will for us *would have been* our complete happiness.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE LOVE OF GOD FOR HIS CREATURES

It would seem that we might be able to say this based on God's existence and even on his goodness (i.e. that his existence, as infinite, doesn't fall short of what anyone who knows what he's talking about would expect it to be); but if God loves us, then doesn't this act of love mean that he wants us to be happy in what you might call a more aggressive sense than merely going along with our choices?

Let us explore what is meant by saying that God loves us.

Certainly if God's love could be the love of *affection*, he could be said to want us to be happy and not merely be satisfied with whatever we choose. But as the name implies (from "being affected"), this kind of love is a characteristic of finite persons only, who can have a lack in their being which is filled up with others' activities (or the knowledge of others' reality). God, as infinite existence, lacks nothing of what it is to be; and hence he cannot be unfulfilled in any sense if some creature doesn't happen to be this or that way.

But then is God completely indifferent to us? No; but his love for us is not like the love we have for each other, because in our case there is always something of a lack or a need that the beloved satisfies in us. *Indifference*, as I point out in *Modes of the Finite*, is unaffected by what happens to some other object or person, but indifference will not do anything for (or against) this object of its indifference. *Love*,

however, chooses to act for the benefit of another *when the lover has nothing to gain from the other*. If the lover has nothing either to gain or lose, then the choice is one of *perfect love*, because then the beneficiary of the act is purely and simply the other and not the self at all. Perfect love, in other words, is a choice which is absolutely selfless, where the self's interest enters into the act not at all.

And this, of course, describes the relation God has toward anything he creates. He has absolutely nothing to gain from anything any creature can do (which must be the case, since he has to cause the finite act which he is supposed to “gain” from); nor does he have anything to lose from what the creature does, since as infinite, he cannot be affected in any way by anything outside himself. He doesn't even get any “fun” from creating creatures, as if he'd be enjoying himself less if they didn't exist; nor does he get any satisfaction in seeing them happy in heaven with him, because he is infinitely happy without any creature's ever being in heaven with him, and he can't be any happier than infinitely happy.

By the same token, he can't be in any way disappointed or dissatisfied in seeing any creature suffering on this earth or suffering eternally in hell, because (a) he has no “stake” in the creature's welfare, and (b) as incapable of being affected, this would make his existence (his “fulfillment”) dependent on his own creature, which has absolutely nothing in it that did not depend in every respect on his own creative activity. The cause cannot be the effect of its own effect, as I point out in *Modes of the Finite*. Any time when the *object which is doing the causing* (what I called there the *causer*) is affected by what the *object which is affected by it* does in response, then this is because the causing object has more about it than just the activity by which it is the cause. But God is just one single act.

So God, in creating us (and each of our acts) has no personal investment in us whatsoever. Therefore, it would seem, his act is an act of absolute love.

But we must not be too hasty here; it could be an act of

absolute love or an act of total caprice. That is, when you ask the question, “Why did God create us?” there can be no answer except “Because he can.” There is nothing in his nature which would demand that there be a universe, still less that there be a universe of a certain type—or God would be dependent in his existence on the creatures he creates, and so would not be God. Then why *does* he bother to create us? Because his infinite activity is such that it can cause finite activities. So the “motivation” for God’s creating, if you will, is—as it must be—his own activity, not ourselves.

So from God’s point of view, his act of creating is a *purely gratuitous act*, an act of caprice, as I said above, not serious at all in the sense of goal-oriented. Of course, a purely gratuitous act which from the point of view of the recipient is good is what has always been called a “grace.” God bestows his grace on us, in the first instance by causing us to begin to exist, and in the second instance by cooperating with every single act we perform, making it the finite act which it is. Everything we are and everything we do is the grace of God, and is an expression of God’s absolute and infinite love for us.

But this should give us pause. It means that all the disasters that happen to us and even hell itself are the grace of God bestowed upon us, and the expression of God’s absolute and infinite love for us. Not in the sense that “we’ll be better off for them,” because they’ll “strengthen our character” or something (which can’t be the case in hell), but in the sense that they *are* God’s absolute gift to us, given because God can do so, with absolutely nothing on his part in the way of gain or loss.

But—and this is the crux of the matter—if God wills suffering and death and hell, how can this be called “love,” if what happens to the creature is evil and not good? Here is the quandary which this study attempts to address. If absolutely everything that happens to absolutely every creature is *actively* willed by God (as it must be, because without his active cooperation, the finite act

producing the event can't act), this means that absolutely everything that happens to absolutely every creature is the result of an act of God who has absolutely nothing to gain or lose by the act, and so is God's grace.

But this in turn means that absolutely everything that happens to absolutely every creature is good for the creature—and so there is no such thing as bad. But in that case, there is no such thing as “good” either. Why? Because if it is *in principle* impossible to call anything “bad,” the term has no meaning; and since “bad” is the correlative of “good,” its correlative has no meaning either. That is, “goodness” is then absolutely identical *in every sense* with “existence,” and you are saying absolutely nothing more by saying “X is good” than by saying “X happened.” In this case, why use a word that *seems* to mean more?

A qualification must be introduced here. As I will say later, goodness is in principle possible in a world in which no badness exists, under the following conditions: (a) if the world can change, and intelligent creatures in it can develop, then they can foresee their future states and work toward them as goals. The goals would then be “good” when achieved, because the actual state would then match the chosen state. But (b) these goals would have to be guaranteed, so that it would be impossible not to achieve them, because the condition of having a goal which could not be achieved would necessarily be recognized as “bad.” In the case of a world in which all chosen goals would ultimately be achieved, the transitional condition before the goal was actually attained (the condition of progress toward it) would not in any meaningful sense be “bad.”

But this condition is not really relevant to what I am saying here, because we are talking about what God *does* to creatures; and since *he* has no goals for them, there is no meaning to either “bad” or “good” from his point of view. That is, if you call all that he does “good,” then from what point of view is it so? Not the creature's, it would seem, if he evaluates it as bad.

But there is no “objective observer” to give it the “proper” evaluation, because *there is no objective meaning to “good” and “bad.”* That is, since “good” only means that the facts match someone’s preconceived idea of the facts, with the preconceived idea taken as the standard, there is precisely nothing to establish who has the “right” standards and who has the “wrong” ones. But “right” in this context has to mean not “morally right” but “not mistaken” or “true,” which in turn means that the idea matches what the objective *fact* is. But the standard is made up; it never matches a fact; the fact is supposed to match *it* or it isn’t a standard. Hence, there precisely can be no standard for judging which standard is “correct”—except conceivably God’s; but as we said, he *has* no standards.

So that means that you can’t call what God does to creatures “good” *unless the creature affected by his actions evaluates it as good.* But in that case, God’s act of creative causality can’t be called “love” either; because “love” implies that the act (which doesn’t benefit the agent) is looked on as “good” or “beneficial” to the recipient. Clearly, this must be good *from the recipient’s point of view*, since the agent is totally unaffected by the act. But if *everything* is an act of love on God’s part, then “doing harm” loses its meaning. There is no act which you could now call a “harmful act,” if every act of God in this world is an act of love.

Where are we? Either there is to be no meaning to the words “good,” “bad,” “benefit,” “harm,” “love,” or “hate,” or the meaning must be defined by creatures and not God. This is just a way of saying what I spoke of from a different angle above: from God’s point of view there is no “good” or “bad”; God does not have ideals from which to compare the reality. All I am saying now is that if you assume that there is *any* objective meaning to “good” and “bad,” then everything turns out to be good, even the most horrible action (such as being raped, cut up, and eaten by a crazed killer), in which case it becomes otiose to use the word. In other words, if

goodness is objective, then “goodness” and “badness” mean nothing at all.

That leaves only the alternative that “goodness” and “badness” are defined by the creature’s standards, as I said above; and a given event or act is “beneficial” or “harmful” insofar as it results in *what the recipient sees as leading him toward or keeping him from being his freely-defined self*. By *this* criterion, not everything that God does for his creatures is good. God sometimes brings harm on his creatures.

We can only address the issue of suffering if we are completely honest with the facts. We must not throw up our hands and say, “There is a great mystery here,” and simply bow our heads to accept it. If God claims to be a God of *love*, then there must be a sense in which this is *true from the point of view of every creature who can distinguish benefit from harm*. But this “benefit” and “harm” depends on the creature’s free self-definition; and if we can’t figure out a way in which it is in fact always going to work out that creatures (even those in hell) will *recognize* that everything that has happened to them is their *benefit*, not their harm, then the claim that God is a God of *love* contradicts itself.

That is, if we can’t resolve the dilemma on how “goodness” as *subjectively* defined by the creature can turn out to be how he regards everything that God has done for him, we are stuck with the “philosophical God” I have been describing so far, who is infinite existence, and who causes to exist every finite act that exists, but whose acts simply cannot be regarded in the light of “good” or “bad” or “love” or “hate.” In other words, “benefit” and “harm” are words we can use about *our attitude* toward acts which affect us, and they imply nothing whatever about whether harmful acts “ought not” to happen to us. There is no meaning to say that a given disaster “ought not” to happen to me beyond the fact that I don’t like its happening.

So if God brings this disaster on me (as he did on others, for instance, in the hurricanes that devastated so many lives in Florida,

Guam, and Kawai this year), then I can *wish* it didn't happen, but I can't say it *shouldn't* have happened, or that he shouldn't have done this to me. By the same token, there is no reason why he couldn't send me to hell to eternal torment without my doing anything to deserve it. It would be perfectly consistent with the "philosophical God" I am describing to do this, since he has absolutely nothing to gain and nothing to lose from anything that happens to me—and I obviously can't bargain with him and say, "If I do what you want, then you can't make me suffer eternally." The suffering is only that I don't happen to like what is happening to me; there is no ontological contradiction in its happening.

If God is not a God of love as defined above, there is no justice either, because anything that happens to me is "just," since I am only the clay and he is the potter, who even made the clay in the first place. If he chooses to make the dish and then crack it, how is the dish to complain that this isn't fair?

Of course, we can *seek* justice from other human beings; but since some are powerful and many are weak, why should the powerful give up what they have in order to be "fair" to the weak who have nothing to give in return? If everything is, from God's point of view, caprice, and we have no guarantee that what *we think* is benefit will happen to us (and this is the only meaning to "benefit"), then of course, what a person faces after he dies (because it can be proved that we will not stop existing with death—see Modes of the Finite—is as much subject to caprice as what happens to us here on earth, where those who are honest suffer more often than not and those who are dishonest sometimes suffer and often prosper.

We are, then, if God is not a God of love, in the world of Qoheleth ("Ecclesiastes") where nothing makes sense if you think in terms of "good" and "bad" and "benefit" and "harm," and all there is is existence; what happens happens.

Then why does every fiber of our being fight against this? My

soul cries out that life *does* make sense, that being honest *must* lead to happiness, that what happens to me *is* rational and leads to my fulfillment, that the acts I do for others *do* make a difference and in fact *will* benefit those others, according to their own definition of benefit, and they will see that any harm they thought I had done to them was actually the best thing that could have happened to them in the circumstances. This *must* be the case, or the God who created us is not only not a loving God, he is a God of infinite cruelty. Philosophically, there is nothing against God's being a God of infinite cruelty, because "cruelty" is just another of those words which has no ontological significance, and simply means that, according to *my subjectively set standards* this act of God's is evil and should not have been done.

On the other hand, if God *is* a God of love, then Dmitri Karamazov must ultimately realize that his indictment of God is foolish. He said that he didn't care if "greater good" was brought out of a girl's being locked in a closet, screaming in terror for an hour to be let out; *no* good that could come from such an act is worth having that act happen. It must somehow be the case that *according to his standards*, when he sees the whole picture, he would have to say, "Very well, God; I realize that this very little girl herself, looking at her life, cherishes this hour in the closet as one of her precious moments; I see how *she thinks* that nothing better could have been done to her at that moment, and if she had it to live over, would not let that hour pass without its terror. I am content. You are a God of love."

Either this statement will ultimately be able to be made in every single case, or Christianity is false and should be repudiated. And we should be able to *predict how* that statement will be able to be made in every case (or at least state the principle on which it can be done) or we have compelling evidence against Christianity which overwhelms the evidence we have from the Reports' supposed historicity. Jesus died to prove God is a God of love, and that all

ultimately will be well; and he presumably rose to confirm the truth of his prediction. That *must* mean that *each* person's standards will confirm that God is indeed a God of love and has manifested his love in that person's life. Even those in hell must be able to say this. Otherwise, the Resurrection did not happen, or if it did, it was another capricious act.

This, then, is the function of the thesis that started out this investigation. We can either assume that pure reason reigns, and God is the "philosophical God," who can be a complete monster from our point of view and still be perfectly consistent with himself (still "infinitely good" in that "ontological" sense of the term), in which case we have no guarantee that *our* lives will make sense in the sense that we will actually ever be able to achieve our ambitions—or we can assume that what the Bible tells us about God is true, that he *is* what the "philosophical God" is *but* that he creates the world *in such a way* that he is "good" and "loving" in the *meaningful* sense of the words; and so everything will be well and all manner of thing will be well. Circumstances have so been arranged from eternity that absolutely all of the ambitions of each one of us will be realized, and that there is infinitely more in store for us, because we have been given an ability to participate in God's own life.

So God's creative attitude toward me is, "Thy will be done." That is, my life is so arranged that *my* freely set goals determine my reality, and whatever I want for my life is what I will eternally be; and all the events of my life, including the setbacks and horrors I have experienced, are the necessary steps, given that the world is what it is (and that God is not going to violate the laws of the world), without which I could not have achieved the goals that I set for myself. Only in this way will I be able to look at my life, once I have reached eternity, and accept all of it as good. And if it is not good from my point of view, it is not good from any point of view, because "good for me" doesn't mean anything except from my point of view. No one knows what is good for me but I, because I and I alone

define what “good” means in my case.⁴ I think I have to add that the evil choices I make (i.e. those self-contradictory ones that involve a deliberate attempt to gain by what I know is the path of loss) will not disappear but be redeemed. That is, harm I have deliberately done to myself will not be *undone*, but in this case (if I love God and repent), good—perhaps even a greater good—will be *brought out of* it. The only time that something like this will not happen is the case of the unrepented sin; no good can be brought out of this, because in this case the harm itself is *defined* as the benefit. That is, the act is recognized as harmful (in some respect) by the sinner (according, of course, to his own standards); but he chooses it because in some other respect it promises a fulfillment that he wants to achieve through it or in it. Hence, according to his standards, what he recognizes as a harm is defined by him as a benefit; and, of course, in this case nothing can be done to “bring good” out of the harm, since it already is good in the only meaningful sense of the term. If before the person dies, he recognizes his folly and then repents, God can then use the act to allow him to achieve his (now

⁴To those who would argue that the events of my life and the damage I have done will not make any difference to me after I die because I will be so absorbed in the bliss of the Beatific Vision that I simply won't care, I have three replies: (a) Then with Dmitri Karamazov, I will reject the Beatific Vision, if it deprives me of interest in the fellow creatures I love. (b) Jesus, who on any sane reading of the Bible had to have had the Beatific Vision his whole life long (he *is* God, after all), nevertheless wept over Jerusalem, and certainly was concerned for his people. (c) The saints have showered help on earth long after they died, indicating that the focus of their concern was not solely the contemplation of God. Since you are doubtless reading this after I am dead, the very fact that you are doing so is further confirmation that I have not ceased to care about you, because I see no realistic hope of anyone's reading it during my lifetime; and yet if it is true, I cannot be myself unless others have a chance to see it.

sensibly redefined) goals; and that was what I said above. The person then recognizes how the act fits into his life and was integral to what he ultimately chooses to be.

So God does not exactly erase the sin as an act by the Redemption; he simply erases its sinfulness. The damage has been done, and the act has not disappeared out of our lives; it is just that the damage aspect of it has been converted into a benefit, because the goal has changed, and it leads to the new goal, not away from it.

But what I am going to contend is that the universe *would*, without the Fall, have evolved in such a way that no living being (which has its life to some extent under its control, and so is “for itself”) would have to sacrifice itself for another; still less that any sentient being would experience pain (which reports harm to the organism); and no human being would ever be able to suffer unless he deliberately chose to violate his own reality (presumably sin and its consequences would still be possible in individual cases; but the consequences would never occur without the sin, and the consequences would never extend beyond the sinner).

This is in principle possible. There is, for instance, no carnivorous animal that cannot survive on vegetables, in the sense that all the nutrients that are needed by any carnivorous animal are found in vegetables. If we add to this things like milk, which mammals give to each other without suffering any harm, and we assume that all the nutrients even in vegetables could be found in things like their fruit, which does not destroy the plant itself, then it is at least in principle possible that there could be a world much like ours that could—with just minor shifts in evolution—exist with no harm’s coming to any creature.

Given, however, that the Fall in fact took place, the whole of evolution leading up to it and away from it shifted in such a way that the human race would be capable not only of sinning but of changing the personality of the sinner away from the sin without utterly destroying the personality. This, however, demands a

weakness in the human, which had to be prepared for in the constitution of the human body and mind.

At the point of the Fall (at the time of the test, we might say), evolution had been brought to a point where it was still *possible* for the future of the world to go on in the way involving no harm; but since the Fall in fact occurred, then the past of evolution as well as its future turned out to be the “right” one by which the human being had the weakness necessary to insure that his sin did not take over his whole personality and redemption from it was possible.

And at the point of the Redemption, since the Creator of the universe was actually present, who demonstrated that he could still the winds, cure the sick, and bring the dead back to life, it was also possible that the world from then on could be restored to the condition it would have been without a Fall at all; but at that point came the Second Fall, the rejection of Jesus by his own people. And this meant that the past and the future of the universe, the whole economy of salvation, was to involve pain, suffering, and death, in imitation of the life of the Redeemer himself.

CHAPTER EIGHT

EVIDENCE FOR THE FALL

Theologians nowadays are not terribly keen on accepting the Genesis story of the creation and fall of Adam, which is ironic, because, as I point out in *Modes of the Finite*, there is pretty good philosophical evidence that something like what the Adam legend states must have happened.

My argument there goes this way: First of all, any living body has control to a greater or lesser extent over its own energy. It is not, like inanimate bodies, the prey of forces acting on it, but defends itself against destruction and maintains an energy level too high to be explained by the physics and chemistry of the system. And the higher one goes in life, the greater becomes the internal control of the body over its own energy and its freedom from external determination.

Now our life is essentially that of an embodied spirit: a being whose body is organized with an act which is spiritual (i.e. has no quantity, and so can “double” itself without being two acts), but which by nature has a “dimension” of itself (one of its “doublings”) that in fact is limited quantitatively, and is the energy unifying the body.

But since this unifying energy is in fact a spiritual act (i.e., it is one “dimension” of a spiritual act), then it can’t go out of existence. So we are bodies organized with an immortal spirit, whose nature it is not only to be consciousness, but also to be the energy organizing and controlling a body. It is therefore contrary to this act’s nature to

exist without organizing a body; and hence the natural state of the human being is to be an immortal *body*.

Furthermore, this spiritual act organizing the body is one and the same act as the mind and our consciousness. Clearly, the human body is so constructed that choices are supposed to control what it does; and, in distinction from animals, instinct (emotions and drives) function as providing information as to what is apt to be beneficial or harmful to the organism. But since emotions and drives do not know what the person's goals are, then they cannot be the controlling factor in the human being, who sets goals for himself based on the factual information available to him (including *the fact that* he feels a certain inclination towards or away from a given act).

This subordinate role for emotions and drives, then, implies that the emotions *should not* be able to take control of the person in spite of the person's choice; it is clearly contrary to the human being's nature to have them do so. This is all the more true since the emotions are not "the body" and choices "the mind," *pace* what St. Paul said on the matter; the emotions are one aspect of one and the same mind that makes the choices. How did the mind get divided from itself?

It should also be noted that the human being, when confronted with alternatives he is aware of, *cannot avoid* making a choice, because he must at least choose not to choose among the alternatives—and that, of course, is a choice. But a choice always involves setting up a goal to be achieved; and so the human being is condemned to determine himself by choosing. But in that case, it is contrary to his nature if the main determinant of his life is circumstances over which he has no control. Circumstances could, perhaps, be challenges to the person's ingenuity; but they should not be able to block him from achieving his goals, or he in fact does not have control over what he is to become, and yet cannot avoid acting as if he were in control. This makes no sense.

So what we would expect from a body whose unifying energy

is one “dimension” of an immortal spirit is this: (a) The person would gradually acquire knowledge of what sorts of life were open to him, and what sorts of life contradicted his given limitations. (b) He would not be able to be harmed against his will; any harm done to him would have to be with his willing cooperation. (c) The person would make choices setting up what would be a complex goal for his life, and would develop until every one of the (sub)goals was fulfilled, whether this took a year or a thousand years. (d) The person would never grow old in the sense of losing his powers, but would develop them to the extent he chose and then keep them from then on intact. (e) The person’s emotions would attract him to certain acts or repel him from others; but if he decided not to follow the emotional prompting, then the emotions would shut down and not attract or repel him any further. (f) Finally, when all goals were achieved, the person would close off his energy and exist forever in his fully developed state, presumably in a condition in which all of his conscious life would be present to him eternally.

That is what would be expected—in fact demanded—of a being whose nature is to be an embodied spirit. Clearly, that is not what we are. We are often thwarted in achieving our goals by circumstances that we have no control over, we are often harmed against our wills, we do not by any means have control over our emotions, and we grow old and die.

Then what happened? It seems to me that something like the Adam legend must have been an actual fact. Since in the course of evolution, it became possible for an animal’s body to sustain an actual spiritual soul, God must have given the first embodied spirit a good deal of control over his genetic structure, so that he could choose what sort of animal the human being was to be; and all humans thereafter would be born with bodies of his design.

Nevertheless, this creature, though he had much wider latitude in choosing what his body was to be than we do, would have limitations placed on his choice, because the body would have to be

one which could sustain and be controlled by an immortal spirit; hence, his choice of what the human species was to be like had certain constraints put upon it.

I now suppose that this Adam refused to accept these limitations, and wanted absolute freedom to make of his body (and that of his successors) whatever he chose. And God, to reveal to him what he was doing to himself, made his own nature insofar as it was “bodily” (i.e. the physical nature and also the nature as sentient, where the conscious act has a necessary energy-“component” as one of its many “dimensions”) rebel against that same nature insofar as it was spiritual. And this rebellion was such that the bodily aspect of the human being would completely desert the spiritual, and the body would die, leaving the spirit as nothing but the eternalization of the consciousness that was acquired during the time it was embodied.

In the divine economy, this rebellion did not have to happen, but in fact did happen; and so evolution occurred as it in fact did occur, with animals evolving in such a way that beings suffered death and violence, instead of an evolution that would have occurred in which all the beings of nature would cooperate with each other in non-destructive ways. It should be noted that it is only on this planet that we find life using other life by destroying it; it is quite conceivable that on other planets the kind of evolution I speak of actually has occurred. There is nothing in principle impossible in its happening. Who knows if there are not on other planets other Adams who made the proper choice and who live the kind of life I described above as what one would logically expect of an embodied spirit, and who live in a natural universe that cooperates with them and with itself?

Parenthetically, one might ask if there would be good and evil on such a planet. There could be. In the first place, “good” would refer to the goal to be achieved by one’s choices. That is, people would still be able to imagine themselves as different and to set up this imaginary self as the “real true” self to be achieved. The only

difference with the way we now are is that there would be a guarantee that that self *would* be achieved. So “good” would have meaning. “Bad” would have meaning only for those people who deliberately chose a goal that was self-contradictory, because then, of course, the goal they chose could never be achieved, and their state would be that of frustration. Presumably, however, this would occur only in individual cases.

But to return to our fallen human being, instead of destroying Adam, the loving God made this internal rebellion into a radical weakness in the human being’s nature, such that it was now possible for the creature to be redeemed from sin, because the sin would always be at least partly due to weakness.

And so the very nature of the consequences of the rebellion carried within them the seed of the rescue from those consequences, while at the same time being the punishment for the rebellion itself. It is *through* our weakness that we achieve a condition which would not have been possible without it. That is, the thesis of this study is that if Adam had not sinned, we would be in a condition in which the companionship with God that we will enjoy would not have occurred, since it is *through* our weakness that God becomes human to redeem us, and as a result, we actually share in the life of God himself, which is something that our nature cannot do, but which it can receive because of the condition it has placed itself in by the very rebellion that weakened us. A greater good has been brought out of this “happy fault” (or perhaps more accurately “fault that was a blessing.”)

Before going on to an investigation of the Scriptures, let me try to make clear what I am saying.

The result of the two rejections of God’s love has put us in the following situation:

For those who ultimately reject God (by rejecting their own reality in setting up self-contradictory goals that they refuse to give up), God and everything else is seen as evil, because they cannot

achieve their goals, and consequently want someone to blame. They are, however, what they want to be, as far as that is possible; and what God has done for them in his love is to give them as much of what they want as can be done, and so to minimize the suffering they endure because they refuse to be the limited beings that they cannot help being. But since after they die, they are fully aware of the self-contradiction in their choice, they know that they have no one to blame but themselves for the condition they are in, however much they might complain; and so they realize that they would not have things any other way.

For example, suppose that Richard Wagner the composer was unrepentant as the rotten person his biography seems to make him (and we may pray that he is not), and therefore is in hell, he is suffering the consequences of his betrayals of others for his own selfish purposes; but his music is performed and appreciated by millions of people; and one can presume he knows this and derives some solace from it. He is, in other words, frustrated in part, but not totally so; and this is hell, because he has eternally refused to change from the person who wanted the self-contradictory goals, and would rather suffer the fire of desiring them with no hope of fulfillment than to accept reality for what it was and be totally content.

As I say, we may pray that, before he died, he saw this possibility of accepting his limitations and opted for it, and so is not in hell now at all; but even if he is in hell, he would rather be as he is than either non-existent or the “contented” being he rejects. God is good. He is as good to him as possible, given what he wants. And he *does* have the satisfaction of having millions of people hear what he had to say in his operas. And so not only he but the world is better off for his life, however rotten it may have been in some respects.

That is, those in hell, as C. S. Lewis imaginatively portrayed in *The Great Divorce*, and I have expanded on (stolen the idea of) in *Parables of the Mansion*, realize that they have the alternative of being content and giving up the impossible goal, or keeping the goal

and being discontented; and they prefer the life of discontent to the other. But that means that *from their point of view* God is good, because he has bestowed on them exactly what they wanted. It is just that he could not give them a contradiction, and they know this; but he gave them everything that was compatible with their existence.

Those who are willing to accept God and their redemption through the crucifixion will, after dying, discover that their lives were so constructed that the goals they chose for themselves could not have been reached except through the suffering that they endured; and that the harm that they inflicted on others, deliberately or indeliberately, will have also been the only way those others could reach their freely chosen goals.

But I am also saying this: If Jesus had been accepted as King, the world would have been transformed in such a way that it would be possible for a person to reach his goals without suffering. It might be, in that case, that there would at any crossroads of life be three alternatives open to a person: (1) a path, attractive in some respects, that would lead a person away from being able to achieve his goals; (2) a path that would ultimately lead to the goal, but would involve suffering; or (3) a path that would lead to the goal without suffering. Possibly the second alternative would not exist; but if it did, it would be such that one would know what it entailed, and might choose it (as being more efficient at reaching the goal, for instance).

My contention is that, because of the rejection of Jesus as King, the world has been so constructed that the third alternative does not exist for any person. It is simply not possible, given this world that has evolved, for a person to reach his goals in life without taking up his cross and uniting himself with the redemptive suffering of Jesus.

I will also conclude, I think, that ultimately the physical world will be transformed, and we will live eternally on the transformed earth; the “New Jerusalem” will not be a state of mind, but the same earth that is remade, and which does not have the light of the sun as we now know it to shine on it (since the sun is emitting light by

losing energy and cannot be eternal). The final state of the earth, then, when history is complete, will be a divinized version of what would have been had Adam not sinned in the first place: a place greater than Adam would have had because the sin actually led to opportunities that would not have been there had it not occurred.

God as philosophy argues to him need not bring greater good out of evil; but God as he has revealed himself to us will in fact bring greater good out of *all* evils, with the single exception of those souls who have defined “good” in a self-contradictory way and made it in principle impossible to be satisfied. And even in their case, what *can* be satisfied in them (what is non-sinful in their ambitions) will be. God is good.

It seems to me that only in this way can our suffering be compatible with a loving God.

What I want to do now is to see if the texts dealing with the New Treaty YHWH entered into with the human race are open to an ambiguous reading: the first dealing with the future Jesus hoped would be the case (but which he knew would not be), of what the kingdom would be like if he was accepted as King; and the second, a spiritual meaning which is the one that has been given it for the past two thousand years.

Part Two
Textual Preliminaries

CHAPTER NINE

CAN WE TRUST THE TEXTS?

A good deal of befuddlement has fallen upon Scripture studies in the last hundred years or so, from a source which, I think, is fundamentally alien to the whole Christian enterprise, even though there are plenty of devout Christians who try to turn it on its head and use it to bolster Christian belief. But the attempt, even when successful, has generated a good deal of confusion, because it more or less tacitly accepts the premise which undermines the authenticity of the texts as evidence of actual events; and if the texts aren't reports of actual events, then the whole thing is a waste of time.

That is, if Jesus didn't say what the evangelists claim he said, and if he didn't do the fantastic things they report him as doing, and if, particularly, he did not get up and walk out of the grave in such a way that people would recognize that this was a corpse which came back to life as he predicted, then Christianity and the claim of God to be a God of love is false. It is that simple, in the last analysis. Those who say that they would believe even if the bones of Jesus were actually discovered in some grave don't realize the implications of what they are saying.

Why is this? Because the God that can be argued to from reason is the "philosophical God" I spoke of in the preceding chapter, and this, as I was at pains to say, gives us no guarantee that the events of

the world—or of the life after death—will work out to be what we would like. In fact, the evidence from the events of the world leads rather to the opposite conclusion, and counsels, if anything, that we should be resigned to a world that is, from our point of view, absurd and often horrible.

Jesus allegedly offered us hope that this was not the case, because, allegedly, he claimed to be God, and therefore the anthropomorphic view of God was not only legitimate but literally true. But according to the Scriptures, he backed up this claim by rising from the grave. If that did not actually happen, then his claims are false, and all he is the wise guru, telling us nothing more than the Buddha did; it is his Christian followers who blew up his enigmatic statements out of all proportion and created “meaningful” legends about him which add nothing to our understanding of the way the world is.

What I am saying is that we must understand that what is distinctive about Christianity is *not* the values Jesus stood for—because you can find the same sorts of things in Confucius or the Buddha, or even in Stoicism and the ancient Roman religions—but in Jesus’ claim to be the One God and the facts about his life; and it is small wonder that those who are followers of Jesus because they like what he said in the Sermon on the Mount are also those who think that fundamentalists and Catholics are being stupidly arrogant when they claim that *their* brand of Christianity is the truth and that others should be converted to it.

And modern Biblical scholarship reinforces this view, because it speaks of what the “Matthean community” wrote (Matthew’s Gospel) in response to problems facing the community at the time of writing, based on what “it” remembered about what Jesus had said, and so on. So, for example, we have the notion that the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard was written to teach a lesson to the Jews who resented the fact that the Gentiles were receiving all the gifts of the Kingdom at the last moment, as it were, while the Jews

were given no special consideration for having been at the Lord's work for generations.

My problem with this is not that the parable can't be interpreted in this way, nor that some in the early community might actually have done so. My problem is that it tends, in a subtle way, to undermine the authenticity of the Reports themselves. It gives the impression that the Reports were responses to the needs of the community at the time of writing rather than attempts to get down the facts *before* they got distorted precisely by those needs of the community.

There's a difference, in other words, between the Reports as the answer to the questions, "What did Jesus really say? What did he do?" and as the answer to "What did all of this mean? What relevance does it have?" I have no quarrel with the answer to the second questions as being *contained in* the Reports; but if the focus of the Reports is not to answer the first questions, or if you can't distinguish from them when each is being answered, the Reports collapse as evidence of what actually happened.

That is, if you can't distinguish whether Jesus actually walked on water or whether the report of his doing so was a graphic way of presenting the commanding force of his personality, then you can't distinguish whether the Resurrection actually happened or whether the report of its happening was a graphic way of illustrating how this commanding personality lived beyond the grave and carried out his work through those most closely influenced by him. In the latter case, it is the *message* of Jesus that is important, and the supposed miraculous events of his life are merely a way of saying how important that message is.

But in that case, the message as we understand it is a lie, because it implies that Jesus is revealing that God is love and can do so because he *is* God, not because he's got some theory about God; and he has said that our sins are removed, when he has in fact no power to remove them. The whole of Jesus' message is a waste of

time if the events that surround the message are just imaginative ploys to make us pay attention to it.

I realize that there will be many people who say that I am being naïve and unsophisticated. My answer is that I think I am being more sophisticated than the sophisticates. “Meaningfulness” of the texts is not at issue here; the question is whether they have any evidentiary value.

And, in spite of the fact that I am not a Scripture scholar, I know from my own work on Aristotle and my wife’s work on Plato that a lot of the “very well accepted” theories about what these authors are saying are simply bunk. They are ingenious interpretations that find a “depth of meaning” in what the authors say that is sometimes in direct contradiction with what on the face of it the authors are saying; and when texts can’t fit into the Procrustean bed they have created, the commentators either allege corruption of the text or accuse the authors of contradicting themselves.

My own attitude toward a text is that, if it bears a *prima facie* sense, then (absent evidence to the contrary) this is the sense that the author intended. If that sense is what one would expect based on the context in which the work was written, then that confirms that the obvious sense of the text is the correct one. If the author alleges evidence to support the *prima facie* sense of what he is saying, then presumably that is the sense he intends.

The fact that another meaning of the text can be teased out of it if one takes a certain point of view, even if that meaning fits all of the facts, supposes that the author had a reader in mind so ingenious that he would totally ignore the obvious sense the text seemed to mean, and would spot what was “really intended,” which only the most clever of readers would ever hit upon. Any author who writes for that kind of audience has to have a screw loose, given the millions of ways one can be misunderstood. That I would be so clever as to be able to predict just which of the far-fetched tertiary or quartary meanings of what I am saying will be caught by the “proper” reader

and then actually make that the *real* meaning I was trying to get across is an indication that I shouldn't be allowed within a mile of any writing instrument.

In the last analysis, of course, deconstruction deconstructs itself, because presumably the authors of treatises on deconstruction don't intend those treatises to be deconstructed; because if they do, then what they are saying is that the treatise means nothing, but is simply a ploy to get them recognized as being brilliant, when in fact they have nothing to say. But if they intend their treatise to be taken seriously, then it for some reason has "a" meaning, the obvious one, and it is also for some reason supposed to be immune from deconstruction. But if *it* is supposed to be taken at face value, then why shouldn't any other work?

CHAPTER TEN

HYPOTHESIS

I will, then, apply what I called “psychological contextualism” to the documents of the New Treaty, beginning with the letters of St. Paul, which are the first documents we have dealing with Jesus and “the Way.” The object of this investigation is to find out whether the texts make more sense on the assumption that they are reporting as factual events (i.e. as the kind of thing you see, not as something “true” in the sense of “meaningful”) the fantastic things about Jesus, or whether the more reasonable sense to take them is that the fantastic events are ways of describing something that was not actually witnessed as described.

This second alternative is the one which I would like to eliminate, because clearly it makes it a waste of time to try to examine the texts to find out about what the Kingdom would have been like and whether the problem of evil has a solution along the lines I suggested. But it must be eliminated *only* if the only sensible reading of the texts is incompatible with it. That is, it is *a priori* the more plausible interpretation, and so is the one to be preferred unless it can be shown that it can’t be held unless the texts are distorted out of all recognition.

But how can we do this? If we suppose that the second alternative is true, then certain things follow from it, and so we can predict some things about the texts (things which, in fact, have been predicted and—I think—teased out of the texts by various

commentators). If these predictions are not verified by a sane reading of the texts, then we can take it that the second alternative is false, and the first one is what the writers intended, and is a description of what you would have seen if you had been there with Jesus.

What the second alternative implies, then, is this: If Jesus was a wise and enigmatic, powerful speaker and mysterious and compelling personality, but did not literally walk on water, raise dead bodies back to life, heal the sick with a touch, still the wind by a command, and come back from the grave, then these actions attributed to him must be legendary accretions, ways of illustrating his power of speech and forceful personality.

It would follow from this that the fantastic stories about Jesus would not be in the earliest information about him. His earliest followers would be deeply impressed by what he said and by the way he acted; but they would be most interested in the actual words, especially the enigmatic ones; and would be trying to get across to others the strange sayings of Jesus, reinforcing this with accounts of how compelling his actual personality was.

In other words, if Jesus was a sage in a way analogous to Confucius or the Buddha or Muhammad, then the earliest accounts of Jesus would be something like what we have of these personalities: collections of sayings, together with eye-witness descriptions of how wise, noble, and just the sage was. But the focus, it would seem, as it is in these cases and similar ones of wise men throughout history, would be on what was said. It is interesting that we have the *Koran* and the *Analects* and other writings of this nature (which don't pretend to be anything but the wisdom of the sage) to guide us in what the earliest accounts of Jesus would undoubtedly have been like, before he was called God and before the supernatural events were attributed to him to try to reinforce this deification which took place in order to reinforce the majesty of the sayings for people who weren't there to be influenced directly by Jesus' personality.

But we must also take into account the psychological context in

which the earliest accounts of Jesus would have been made. The story about his sayings would have been told first to Jews, because presumably the “historical Jesus” (if he was the guru, which we are supposing for the argument here) was speaking in a Jewish context to Jews. And we know several things about the mentality of Jews of the time: (a) They held fiercely that God was not at all like the pagan gods, who went around making pretty mortals pregnant. (b) They had enormous, even fanatical, respect for the Law and all of its commandments. (c) They considered themselves set apart and “chosen,” not like the Gentiles at all.

If Jesus were a wise man who was trying to wean the Jews away from (b) and (c) (as reports of what he said seem to indicate), then clearly he would be more or less in the position of Socrates, and would be strongly opposed by those in power; and so you could predict that the accounts of the crucifixion would probably be factual.

The earliest reports about Jesus, then, would be something like what Plato did in the *Apology* and in the early dialogues about Socrates: spreading the wise teaching of the master and keeping his memory alive because of his wise teaching. But the earliest accounts would almost certainly not have anything to do with a denial of (a), since the best way to alienate any Jew was to turn your hero into some kind of Achilles or Hercules, the son of a god who had sex with a woman. This would be to reduce YHWH to just a pagan god, and no Jew would stand for that for an instant.

On the other hand, supposing that the fantastic events of the Reports are actual events, and that Jesus claimed that in fact he was the Son of God and came back to life to back up the claim, then we would expect that the earliest accounts would be something like what we find reported in *Acts*: that there would be a concerted attempt to make out a convincing case that Jesus *did* claim to be God—the Hebrew YHWH—that he claimed that he could prove this by performing supernatural feats, that he was killed precisely for making

the claim, and that he predicted this, showed that it was prophesied of the Prince, and predicted that the ultimate proof of the authenticity of the claim was that he would return to life on the third day after his crucifixion—and then actually came back to life.

On this supposition, the earliest focus would be on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, and on what that implied with respect to our sins, rather than on what Jesus said in discussing how to live our life. That is, if the original Way was not a mode of living outlined by the great guru but essentially the way the mess you had made of your life could be undone, then niceties about how to live perfectly would take a back seat to letting people know that they had been saved and didn't need to worry any more. Only afterward, when the basic good news had been told, would people wonder about what kind of person Jesus was, what he said, and how he wanted us to conduct ourselves in this new life that had been given to us. They would also, of course, be interested in seeing more detailed evidence indicating that the original account was not just a mistake based on superficial observation of a few events.

With that in mind, then, let us consider the texts.

First, there are theories that say that there in fact was a document (or documents) called "Q" (*Quelle*, source), which formed the basis of the similarities between Luke's and Matthew's Reports. But first of all, there is no manuscript evidence for such a document, nor is there any testimony from the members of the early Christian community that there ever was such a thing, except possibly Papias' statement in 130 that Matthew compiled the Master's sayings in Hebrew—which some have thought referred to an Aramaic version of Matthew's Report, and which in any case couldn't be *Q*, because Matthew was supposed to have used *Q*, not written it.

A serious difficulty, to my mind at least, with the *Q* theory is that, when Matthew and Luke have passages similar to Mark, the language of Mark seems to have been kept rather faithfully. That is, some embellishments occur, but the parts that appear in Mark are

not very altered when they carry over into the other evangelists. But with the sayings of Jesus that are in Matthew and Luke and not Mark (which are the evidence that there was a *Q* behind them) there seems to be somewhat more freedom—which is odd, when you think of it, because if they are quoting Jesus, then is when you would expect people to try to get things verbatim, especially if they are using a textual source. Further, the ancients were very good at memorizing—look at Homer and the rhapsodes—and you would expect that if people cared about what was being said, even an oral tradition wouldn't come up with the considerable differences between Luke's and Matthew's versions of the Master's prayer. Granted, Luke's version is almost verbatim in Matthew; but there are significant interpolations in Matthew that look as if he's got another source for what he has written down. That looks mighty suspicious to me. Some scholars suppose that there are two *Q*'s. But then why the commonality?

My final problem with the *Q* idea is that it really rests on the supposition that the “historical Jesus” was the wise guru. As I mentioned, if this is true, then it would demand that the earliest writings be the sayings of Jesus. But it also demands that these would be the things that would be most carefully preserved; and since Mark, Luke, and Matthew in fact *did* preserve a number of sayings of Jesus, then there would be absolutely no reason for thinking that the more precious, earlier sayings would be destroyed because these superseded them. Not if the letters of Paul were so carefully preserved from a time no later than twenty-five years after Jesus died.

So we may take it as the most reasonable hypothesis that *Q* is a fabrication, not a reasoned conclusion from the evidence of the texts or the early testimony. The evidence for it seems stronger than it is because if the real Jesus was actually the wise guru, then something like *Q* would have to have existed first. But that is a kind of begging of the question, and we can discard it for our purposes.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

PAUL'S EARLIEST LETTERS

The first documents of the New Treaty, then, were the letters of Paul. Let us examine these to see what they reveal about Jesus.

The First Letter to the people of Thessalonica was, from indications within the letter itself, written shortly after Paul left Athens for Corinth on his second missionary journey, which would put it somewhere around A. D. 51, or (if Jesus died in the late 20's, as seems most probable) around twenty-five years after the crucifixion.

Let us establish the context of this letter, first of all. It was written to people who had only just heard about Jesus, and to people who had been pagans in the Roman empire. It would be very difficult for such people to regard a crucified person as a hero, because crucifixion, among other things, was a way of killing people which was regarded more as disgraceful than as painful: the person was hanged stark naked on the cross, for everyone to laugh at. We have *Hebrews* alluding to this when it mentions "Jesus, the front-runner and winner, who for the joy that was placed before him endured the cross and made nothing of disgrace." Paul also says in the first letter to Corinth, "our proclamation deals with the Prince hanging on a cross, which is shocking to the Judeans and ridiculous to the Greeks." Finally, the reports of the crucifixion stress the fact

that the people were making fun of Jesus as he hung before them. There is not much emphasis on pain here, but on how degrading the whole thing was—and Paul, in both the letters to Galatia and Corinth, considers this aspect of the crucifixion to be a serious obstacle to people's belief in Jesus. Evidently, from those letters, there were other preachers who were soft-pedaling this aspect of the good news, and therefore, in Paul's mind distorting the essence of why people should believe in Jesus in the first place.

One other aspect of the context of the letters is that the pagans were not averse to looking on human beings as gods. Augustus was worshiped even during his lifetime and was regarded by this time as a god; and, if *Acts* is to be believed, even Paul and Barnabas were worshiped for a while in Lycaonia—but *after* they had performed a sudden cure on a cripple. So we must keep in mind that a miracle-worker (or even a magician) would be looked on as a god by the pagans of the time, though certainly not by a Jew. This, however, would tend to be countered by the disgrace connected with the crucifixion, because it would imply fraud.

Would this mean that there would be a tendency to invent miracle-worker stories about Jesus on the part of the early preachers, in order to get him accepted among the pagans? The problem with this is that what it would tend to do is have Jesus regarded as another in the pantheon of divinities or semi-divinities; and in the early Christian communities, at least, with a good part of their population Jewish (*Acts* seems to report that even Paul went first to the Jews of the areas he entered), this divinization—or better, this *sort* of divinization—would be directly counter either to Jesus as a kind of modern-day Socrates or Jesus as the prophesied Jewish Prince. There would be nothing distinctive about him if he were simply another magician who had been caught making extravagant claims for himself.

Finally, note that we are less than thirty years after the death of Jesus at the writing of this letter, not enough time for legends to

have arisen about someone who was already greatly admired for other reasons. That is, if Jesus was the sage, who because of some injustice was crucified, the focus would for quite some time would be on what he said and why the crucifixion was unjust, and only later, after he had been accepted as a hero who died for his convictions, would the miracle-worker stories be added to bolster his reputation.

The only grounds for early stories of miracles would be a *deliberate* attempt to divinize him on the part of those who wished him worshiped as a god. This would work among the pagans, as I said, and therefore would have been attempted among them but not among the Jews, because that would be the quickest way to ensure that there would be no Jewish converts. Further, one could expect, in this case, a concerted effort on the part of those who knew him to correct this distortion of him into a pagan god or demigod—because that would detract from what the true message about him was about, which, if he was the sage, would be his wisdom, and if he was the Prince, the fact that he was picked by YHWH as the true successor to David.

This, then, is the context of the letter. Now what does it say to these recent converts? In the first chapter, we find this:

Your faith in God has gone everywhere, so that we really do not need to say anything; the people we come to already have heard from you about how we made a visit to you, how you turned to God from worshiping idols, how you became slaves of the real God who is alive, and how you are waiting for his son Jesus to come from heaven and raise the dead and save us from the punishment that is coming.

There is nothing about Jesus the sage, first of all. Secondly, we find a remark about being weaned away from “worshiping idols” and learning about the “real God who is alive,” (the Jewish YHWH, of course), but then “waiting for his *son Jesus* to come from heaven and raise the dead” and so on.

That is clearly Jesus the miracle-worker, and even Jesus the divinized, but divinized in the Jewish context, precisely *not* as one of

the pagan gods. That this was not well received among even the pagans is clear from what immediately follows in chapter 2:

We had, as you realize, suffered a great deal and been made fools of in Philippi; but we found courage in God and spoke up, and reported God's good news to you, in spite of the struggle it was. That was because what we do on your behalf does not come from a mistake, or from hypocrisy or fraud; we deliver the good news to you in the same form that God found that we deserved having it entrusted to us; we say what pleases the God who tests our hearts, not what men find attractive.

What we have said has never been to make people feel good, as you know; and God knows that it has never been a cloak for greed. We have never cared about what people think of us, either when we were with you or anyone else, though we could have demanded respect as emissaries of the Prince.

So Paul here is saying that his preaching was openly and honestly what he thought was true, in spite of the fact that it brought him ridicule and disgrace. He was writing this from Corinth just after his disastrous experience with the sophisticates of Athens, so the wound would have been opened once again. If Jesus was a wise man, then Paul, you would think, would have learned his lesson, and would have stopped trying to make him out to be a divinity at this early stage of preaching. It seems definitely to have been counter-productive, on the face of it, at least. Of course, his preaching is explainable if he can't help saying what he says, because he is reporting what he thinks are facts. He says he regards himself as an emissary of the Prince, not as someone who is telling about the sayings of an unjustly treated wise man.

Nor did this bring peace and joy among the people he preached to. He was writing, in fact, because their belief had unleashed a persecution against them.

And this is why we never stop thanking God, because when you listened to what we said about God, you did not accept it as human talk, but for what it really is: words God is saying as he acts within you when you believe. And so you became like God's

communities in Judea, in Jesus the Prince, because you have had happen to you from your countrymen the same thing that they suffered from the Judeans, the ones who killed Master Jesus and the prophets and kept hounding us—and instead of pleasing God, and in direct opposition to all the people, they kept us from speaking to the gentiles so they could be saved.

Apparently the pagans were treating the Thessalonians just as badly as the Jews treated the Judean converts.

Note the brief reference to the crucifixion. It is not to the crucifixion as such, but simply to the fact that Jesus, like the prophets, was killed by the “Judeans.” There is a hint here of the injustice done to the admirable person, that Jesus was killed, like the prophets, for preaching something that the Jews found unacceptable. This, as I said, is what you would expect if Jesus were another Socrates; but he is called “the Prince” here, in the same sentence. From the wording of this point of the letter, it is not clear that Paul is saying that Jesus was killed because of what he said, or because of his claim to be the Prince.

But then when Paul mentions the words of Jesus, what does he say (Chapter 4)?

So there is only one thing left, brothers and sisters, for us to ask you. Please, in the name of Master Jesus, behave and be pleasing to God as you heard us explain to you—behave as you have been behaving, only more so.

You know what the orders were that we gave you from Master Jesus. This is God’s will for you, and your holiness: for you to keep away from sexual wrongs, for each of you to know how to keep possession of his organism in holiness and honor, and not let desire rule him as the pagans and those who do not know God do, and to know how not to be in competition with or take advantage of his brother or sister in what he does; the Master will make you pay for all of this, as we told you before and made very clear. God called you to holiness, not uncleanness; and anyone who pays no attention to these rules is not ignoring a man; he is ignoring God, who is bestowing on you his holy spirit.

These are not enigmatic statements of the sage. In fact, we don't find this sort of thing in the Reports; it is pretty straightforward natural-law ethics, and, interestingly enough, emphatically sexual ethics.

Right after this, Paul reports something else that he claims Jesus said:

But I do want to say something, brothers and sisters, about those who have fallen asleep, so you will not be grieving like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and came back to life; and God will do the same thing for those who have fallen asleep with Jesus; he will bring them back with him.

And we tell you this as something that the Master has said: those of us who are left alive when the Master comes out of seclusion will have no advantage over the ones who have fallen asleep; because the Master himself, when the call comes—at the voice of the archangel and the sound of God's trumpet—will come down from heaven; and then those who died in the Prince will come back to life first, and afterwards those of us who are left alive will be lifted up with them into the clouds to meet the Master in the air; and then we will be forever with the Master in this way. So encourage each other with what I have just said.

Here we have a clear statement of the Resurrection as something “we believe.” And the purpose of the belief in the Resurrection is the assurance that “God will do the same thing for those who have fallen asleep with Jesus; he will bring them back with him.” And “the Master” (presumably Jesus, though the term was also the ordinary way to refer to YHWH) is supposed to have *said* that when he “comes out of seclusion” (appears among us again, but a term used also for someone who has been incognito and who returns publicly) he will come down from heaven, and so on.

So this first letter is all about the “Christ of faith,” not the wise sage. Jesus is pictured as the Son of God, as having died and come back to life, as bringing the dead back to life and as coming down from heaven to do so. Paul is also very aware of the pagan notions of

divinity and is deliberately trying to distance himself from them; so the miraculous dimension of what he is doing was not an attempt to turn Jesus into a kind of Hercules.

Far, then, from having legends grow up around Jesus to reinforce the profundity of his teachings, we find nothing about the profound teachings and only the miracles as proving, not the truth of what Jesus said, but the alleged fact that his return to life signals a return to life of the dead who believe in him (meaning apparently who believe that this in fact happened).

I went into this detail here to stress the fact that this earliest document gives no comfort whatever to those who hold the wise-guru hypothesis. It is exactly the opposite of what you would expect from that hypothesis, and just what you would expect if the historical Jesus was in fact the miracle-worker who came back to life.

The second letter to Thessalonica does not add anything to this. Again we find nothing about the wise sayings of Jesus, nor any attempt to show how unjust his condemnation was. We find encouragement in the persecution with promises of the vengeance of God at that reappearance of Jesus, a reiteration that no one knows when it will happen (there had apparently been a letter allegedly from Paul that indicated that it was imminent, which was the occasion for this corrective letter), and the mysterious prophesy about the “anarchist” who is to appear before the end and deceive everyone.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE LETTER TO GALATIA

In the letter to Galatia, which apparently was written around 57 (or some think, even before), there are some things that are interesting for our purposes. In the salutation, Paul lays out his credentials as an Emissary of the Prince “whose authorization is both from Prince Jesus and God his Father, who brought him back from death.” Again, we have the claim that the Resurrection is what is important. But listen to the way the body of the letter begins:

I am appalled at how quickly you turned away from the one who by God’s gift called you, and started after a different report of the good news—not that there really is a different one, except that there are people there who want to cause trouble and distort the good news about the Prince.

But if even we—if an angel from heaven!—gives you a report that is different from the report we delivered to you, throw him out of your community! I’ve said it before, and I say it again; if anyone tells you a report different from the one that you received, throw him out!

Do I look at the effect what I say has on men, or on God? Am I trying to make people like me? If I cared about what people thought of me, I wouldn’t be the Prince’s slave. So I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the report of the good news that came from me was not something that came from a man; I didn’t get it from any man or from being taught; I got it from a revelation by Prince Jesus.

Here we see that there are already people who are giving reports

of the Good news that are different from what Paul, at least, thinks is authentic. This particular “different Report,” as the rest of the letter indicates, included the requirement that the Gentile converts had to be circumcised like Jews, and presumably had to obey at least the major prescriptions of the Law.

This tells us a couple of things: First, that the Reports of the Good News that were being orally given were given in a Jewish context; Paul was breaking new ground in bringing them to the Gentiles—in fact, he says as much in this letter. But this means that any divinization would have to be in terms of YHWH, not some pagan god.

Secondly, the function of this letter is to show that what Paul originally taught the people of Galatia was not his own view, but the true teaching of the Christian community. The first thing he does is establish that he knows as much about Judaic practices as the “Judaizers” who were causing trouble. So what he was teaching did not spring from ignorance.

You heard how I behaved when I was a believer in Judaism—how savagely I went after God’s community and tried to destroy it, how I went deeper into Judaism than my own people of my own age, and was much more fanatical than they were in keeping the traditions of our ancestors.

But the one who set me apart from before I was born and who called me—not that I deserve it—thought it good to reveal his Son in me so that I could deliver the report about him to the Gentiles; and right away, without consulting any flesh-and-blood person, and without going to Jerusalem to meet the Prince’s emissaries who were appointed earlier than I was, I left for Arabia, and then went back to Damascus.

Paul was a Pharisee, and knew Jewish Theology even better than many of his Jewish contemporaries; and he claims, at least, that Jesus is no super-Gamaliel (under whom, we learn from *Acts*, he studied); he says he actually saw Jesus after Jesus’ death, and Jesus personally explained to him what Christianity was all about.

But to confirm the authenticity of his revelation and his teaching, he checked it with the people who had known Jesus before he died:

It was three years later that I went to Jerusalem to get to know Cephas (Peter, the Rock); and I stayed with him two weeks, without seeing any other emissary except James, the Master's relative. This is no lie that I am writing to you—before God it is not....

Then, fourteen years after that, I came to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with us—I came because of a revelation I had had—and reported privately to people everyone respected about the good news I was delivering to the Gentiles, in case the path I'm following—and was following then—led nowhere.

Here Paul claims that what he is teaching—which, as we saw, is that Jesus died and came back to life, and that this means that our sins are forgiven and that we will return to life with him when he “comes out of seclusion”—is what people like Peter, James, and John were teaching, and what the community in Jerusalem was teaching the Jews. So Jesus the miracle-worker, not Jesus the sage, was the official view of Jesus among the people who actually saw Jesus alive, including a relative of his,⁵ and of the early Jewish converts.

This is significant. Paul has used the expression “Son of God” to refer to Jesus; and if this was approved by the early Jewish community, it meant “Son of YHWH,” not some kind of pagan semi-divinity. Doubtless no one realized what exactly this expression entailed at this point; but precisely because it made YHWH seem so much like Zeus, which would make the whole Christian enterprise so

⁵The Greek word is ἀδελφός, which ordinarily would mean “brother”; but it was used in a Judaic context for any close relative. E. g. Abram refers in Gen 13:8 to Lot, his nephew as (the Hebrew equivalent of) his ἀδελφός, and Moses speaks of cousins in Lev 10:4 also as ἀσελφοί.

abhorrent to the Jews, it was almost certainly used with some reluctance and because the evidence that it *should* be used was overwhelming.

Paul counters the Judaizers by mentioning his confrontation with Peter; and in so doing he reveals what he considers the “meaningfulness” of Christianity:

And in fact, when Cephas came to Antioch, I stood up to him and told him to his face that he should be ashamed of himself. He used to eat his meals with Gentiles, until some people came from James; and when they arrived, he stayed away and avoided them, because he was afraid of what the circumcised people would think. And the other Judeans⁶ were as dishonest as he was; and even Barnabas got infected with the hypocrisy.

Well, when I saw that they were not behaving consistently with the truth that was reported in the good news, I said to Cephas, “If you’re a Judean and you do what the Gentiles do and don’t live like a Judean, why do you insist on Judaizing the Gentiles? We—who were born Judeans and not sinners the way the Gentiles are—know that doing what the Law commands doesn’t make anyone virtuous; a person only gets that way by belief in Jesus as the Prince; and so we have put our faith in Jesus as Prince, so that we’ll become virtuous because of our faith in the Prince and not because of the law—because ‘no material thing becomes virtuous’ by doing what the Law commands.”

So virtue can only be obtained now through belief that Jesus is the Prince, not by doing what the Law commands. And the reason is what follows (in Chapter 3):

You aren’t thinking, brothers and sisters in Galatia! Has someone cast a spell over you? You had the picture drawn before your very eyes of Prince Jesus on the cross. Let me just ask you

⁶Jews. The term is like our “yankee,” which actually referred to the people living in Judea, but which was applied to all the Hebrew people by those outside Judea and Galilee.

this one thing: Did you receive the Spirit from doing what the Law says, or from belief in what you heard? Have you no heads? You started spiritually; are you going to end up materialists now? Is everything that happened to you for nothing?

Here we have the first explicit reference to the crucifixion; and it is connected with receiving the Spirit—which, as the letter goes on to indicate, is connected with miraculous events among the people of Galatia themselves:

If you keep on this way, it is for nothing! And so the one who condescended to bestow the Spirit on you and who performed deeds of power among you did it because of what you did in obeying the law. Didn't he? Or did he do it because of your belief in what you heard?

Paul then says that those who believe in Jesus as the Prince are the true descendants of Abraham, and so the Judaizers are misleading the Galatians.

After all, even Abraham “believed in God, and this was evidence that he was a virtuous man.”

So I want you to know that those who base their lives on belief are the ones who are descendants of Abraham. And Scripture foresaw that the Gentiles would become virtuous because of their belief when God gave this prophesy of good news to Abraham: “All the nations—the Gentiles—will find approval in you.” So those who live from their belief win approval with the belief of Abraham.

But people who base their lives on doing what the Law says are under a curse.

He elaborates on this a good deal, and adds the following in the course of it:

The Prince bought freedom for us from the Law's curse when he became accursed himself for us; Scripture says, “Everyone who is hanged is accursed”; and that allowed the blessing of Abraham in Prince Jesus to fall on the Gentiles, so that we could receive—through our belief—the Spirit that was promised....

Before belief came we were kept locked up in legal custody until the future belief would be disclosed. The Law was a kind of

governess or school-master seeing to our upbringing toward the Prince, so that we could become virtuous by belief; and now that the belief has come, we aren't under the control of the governess any more.

You are all children of God because of the belief in Jesus as the Prince. Those of you who were bathed in the Prince have put on the livery of the Prince; there's no such thing as Judean or Greek, or anything like slave or freeman, or male or female; you're all one person in Jesus the Prince; and if you are all part of the Prince, *you* are the "descendant" of Abraham, and so heirs by the promise.

So Paul's idea is that belief that Jesus is the Prince makes a person one of the Prince's slaves, first of all—someone the ancients looked on as a tool (*organon*) of the master, like one of the organs of his body. Paul then stretches this to say that because (as he had said earlier, in a place I didn't quote) the life a believer lives is the Prince's life, then he actually *becomes* a cell in his body, and so is the one "descendant" who was to inherit the promise given to Abraham.

This is a far cry from repeating the sayings of Jesus the wise man. It is a working out of the implications of death for sin and resurrection, and reflection on what is the relation between the executed Prince and the documents of the Old Treaty. And this was written some thirty to thirty-five years after Jesus died.

But in this letter, Paul is not just fighting against the tendency to turn the original Christian message (which evidently focused precisely on the crucifixion and resurrection) into a "development" of Judaic thinking; he also has to deal with an attempt to turn it into a version of paganism:

And that is how we are; when we were minors, we were enslaved by the things that make up the heavenly universe; and then when the time of bondage was up, God sent his Son, born to a woman, and born under the Law, to ransom us from the Law so that we could be adopted as sons and daughters. And to prove that you are sons and daughters, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, where he cries, "Abba!" ("Papa!")

So you're not a slave any more; you are a son; and if you're a son, you are by God's act an heir; but before you knew about God, you were slaves to things which really weren't gods at all. But now that you recognize God—or rather, now that you're recognized by God—why are you turning back to these poor feeble components of the universe, and wanting to enslave yourselves to them all over again? You're starting to observe special days and months and seasons and years. I'm beginning to be afraid that all the trouble I took over you is being wasted.

Some of the converts seem to have reverted to reading horoscopes and guiding their lives by them. This is a tendency Paul confronts all through his letters, and an understandable one, given the background of the people and the superficial similarity between Christianity and paganism. We find the same thing somewhat more explicit in the letter to Colossae, for instance.

Where are we, then? The first letters of Paul indicate that the gist of what was being preached about Jesus was not the wise sayings, but the death and resurrection and what that implied for us, for our sins, and for our return to life from death. In this letter, Paul indicates that this is not just his Theology, but the same as the preaching that was going on from the people who saw Jesus before he died; and he deliberately tries to distance Christianity from being thought of as either a new interpretation of Judaism, as if Jesus were just a prophet bringing out hidden implications of the Law, or a kind of paganism, as if Jesus were a demigod who had power over the components of the universe.

So the early writings emphatically support the miracle-worker view of the historical Jesus, not the wise-sage theory.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE LETTERS TO CORINTH

The first letter to the people of Corinth was written about the same time as the preceding letter—again, only thirty-five years or so after Jesus died.

In the beginning of this letter, we find something interesting for our purposes:

But please, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Master Prince Jesus, come to a consensus in what you say, and do not have factions; agree together in what you think and what you feel is true. I am saying this, my brothers and sisters, because I have a report from Chloe's family that you keep arguing with each other; that is, that one of you will say he is Paul's man, and another that he is Apollos', and someone else that he is Cephas', and another that he is the Prince's.

Is the Prince in pieces? Was Paul hanged on a cross for you, or were you bathed in Paul's name?

What this indicates rather forcibly is that there were not, at least where Paul was, definite "communities" of people only under the influence of one preacher. The early Emissaries were going around the world telling people the Good News, and they evidently didn't stake out definite territory that was "theirs," which no one else was to invade (though Paul seems to wish this was the case, in the second letter to Corinth, written a year or so after this one—even though he himself doesn't follow the rule, as can be seen from the letters to Rome and Colossae). And, of course, the Christians themselves

seemed to be hungry to hear any information they could get from anyone who came by.

So the likelihood is small that there was a “Matthean community” that was responsible for Matthew’s Report and a different “Lucan community” that was responsible for what we have as Luke’s Report, and so on, as if these had only minimal contact with each other. Luke went around with Paul, for one thing. In all probability, there would be a main preacher responsible for most of the conversions in a given community, but others were welcome to embellish the original teaching; though there seems to have been an attempt to have a basic consensus on what was supposed to have been taught. This is attested, among other things, by how widespread Paul’s letters were in early Christian communities, in spite of the fact that they were written to definite cities.

Again Paul repeats what his preaching was, and indicates the kind of reception he faced:

And precisely because the Judeans want proof of the Prince’s authenticity and the Greeks are looking for scientific evidence, our proclamation deals with the Prince hanging on a cross, which is shocking to the Judeans and ridiculous to the Greeks; but to those of you, Judeans or Greeks, who have been called, the Prince is the power of God and God’s wisdom....

And when I came to you, brothers and sisters, I didn’t come with fancy language or sophisticated reasoning to deliver the message to you about God’s secret. I decided that the only thing I was to know while I was with you was Prince Jesus—and Prince Jesus hanging on a cross. And I was feeble and scared and shaking in my bones while I was in front of you; and what I said and the proclamation I was delivering had nothing intellectually persuasive about it; but it was a demonstration of Spirit and power—and so your belief rested on God’s power and not human wisdom.

Yet what we say is in fact wisdom to those who have reached the goal; but it is a wisdom that is not the wisdom of these times, or the wisdom of the doomed leaders of these times; what we say is the wisdom God kept as a secret....

A man who is living a natural life will not accept God's spirit; it is stupidity to him, and he can't recognize it, because God's spirit reasons spiritually. But a spiritual person can reason in both ways, and can't be out-reasoned by anyone.

So the only really important thing about Christianity was, at this early point in its history—at least in Paul's mind—Prince Jesus hanging on a cross, “which is shocking to the Judeans and ridiculous to the Greeks.” And it has “nothing intellectually persuasive about it,” though it is a demonstration of God's power. Paul, in spite of the impression we have of him from his letters, was apparently not a very good speaker, and he knew it, as indicated from this passage. There is a passage from the second letter to Corinth that confirms this:

“Ah, yes, his letters,” you say. “They're so stern and forceful; but when he's here with us in the flesh, he's a weakling, and the way he talks is a disgrace.” The people who are saying this had better consider that we will be in practice when we get there the kind of people we say we are when we send letters to you.

So Paul was perfectly aware of what he was up against, and yet felt constrained to make the core of his teaching the very thing that made him look most ridiculous—evidently because he believed that it was true. Later in this first letter, he sums up what the essence of Christianity is.

I should point out that Paul had a streak of what might be called humble conceit about him, as can be seen from the end of the passage that follows. For our purposes, it indicates that he was not the kind of person who would go out of his way to look foolish unless he felt there was nothing he could do about it.

Now then, brothers and sisters, let me review the report of the good news I delivered to you, that you accepted, that is the basis of your lives, and that is the source of your rescue—provided you preserve it as I delivered it to you; because if you don't, then your belief is pointless.

What I reported to you is what I had reported to me: that the Prince died because of our sins, as Scripture predicted; that he was

buried, that he came back to life on the third day after his death, also as predicted by Scripture, and that he was seen by Cephas and afterwards by the Twelve. Later, he was seen by more than five hundred brothers at the same time, a great many of whom are still alive, though some have died; and after that he was seen by James, and then by all the Prince's emissaries—and last of all, as if I had been born at the wrong time, he was seen by me.

I am the lowest ranking emissary; I don't even deserve to be called an emissary from the Prince, because I tried to destroy God's community. I am what I am by God's free gift—and his gift to me has not been wasted; I have worked harder than everyone else. But not even this is my doing; it is God's gift with me that did it.

Anyway, what difference is it what I did or they did? This is what our proclamation says, and this is what you believed.

That is, the whole sum and substance of the Good News is that Jesus died as Scripture predicted and came back to life; and this is supposed to be confirmed because people who were there actually saw it happen; and (Paul says) if you don't believe me, go ask them, since I saw him at the wrong time, in a sense.

Again there is not the slightest hint that the sayings of the wise Jesus are of any real importance. Paul has still not given any of the strange commands that you find in the Reports, like turning the other cheek. He did allude in this letter to letting yourself be cheated by others; but it was in a context where he did not say that this was a command from Jesus, but only as a contrast to the practice of some Corinthians of cheating other members of the community, so that those other members felt constrained to sue them in pagan courts.

But the passage that immediately follows this is extremely revealing:

But if the proclamation says that the Prince came back from being dead, how is it that some of you claim that corpses don't come back to life? If corpses don't come back to life, then the Prince didn't come back to life; and if the Prince didn't come back to life, then the proclamation is meaningless and what you believe

makes no sense; and we turn out to be perjurers before God, because we have given testimony sworn before God that he brought the Prince back to life, which he didn't do if there is no bringing dead people to life again. If a dead body can't come back to life, then the Prince didn't come back to life; and if the Prince didn't come back to life, your belief is useless; you still have your sins. Not to mention that those who have fallen asleep in the Prince no longer exist. If we are people who have hope in the Prince only in this life, we are the sorriest human beings there are.

But the fact is that the Prince did come back to life, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.

Evidently there were some members of the community in Corinth who could have taken lessons from our contemporary Theologians. They were clearly saying, "But you must *understand* this business of 'coming back to life' *properly!* It doesn't mean that his corpse actually got up and started walking around; corpses don't really come back to life. This is just a symbolic way to represent the 'newness of life' we have because of Jesus' generous sacrificial act for us; and how his life is renewed *in us*, and so he lives again beyond his grave as we believe that he gave his life for us." Paul says to this, "Poppycock! When I say, 'came back to life,' I mean that his corpse literally got up and walked around. That's what I and all the other emissaries and witnesses mean; and we swear that it's a fact. And if it's not a fact, but is just something symbolic, then the whole of our religion is a simple waste of time."

Now if this passage were one isolated instance in Paul's writings, you could argue that this literalist sense (which on the face of it is fantastic) couldn't be what he intended. But it is simply a clarification of the whole tenor of what we have already seen, just in case someone might try to take the far-fetched reading of the earlier texts that Paul didn't literally mean what he said.

What this and the preceding letter reveal is that right from the beginning there were three aberrations of Christianity: First, there was an attempt to interpret Christianity as a new kind of "mystery

religion” along pagan lines—a tendency which developed into Gnosticism in the next century. Secondly, there was the attempt by the Jews to make Christianity a new kind of sect of Judaism, failing to recognize the radical break with the Old Treaty because of the crucifixion and Resurrection. And thirdly, there was the attempt of the sophisticates to view Christianity as a symbolic representation of a philosophical world-view.

All through all his letters, Paul rails against all three misinterpretations; he is constantly exhorting the communities—and preachers like Timothy—to stop “speculating” and trying to turn Christianity into some kind of “science”; he is constantly restating his credentials as someone who knows Judaic teaching; and he keeps telling people that Jesus is greater than all the powers of the universe.

The fact that there were people going around even at this early stage decrying Paul and claiming that one or another of these aberrations was “true Christianity” (as the second letter to Corinth shows, they almost succeeded there) clearly indicates that there was a pressing need for there to be a consistent, coherent case to be built up for Jesus as he was historically known to be, indicating that he was indeed the Son of God, that he died and came back to life, that this was predicted by the Jewish Scriptures, and that it meant rescue from our sins.

Let us table this for a moment, and note a couple of other things in the first letter to Corinth. Paul expands (in Chapter 12) on the notion that he introduced in the letter to Galatia that our belief (here, the Spirit) makes us cells in Jesus’ body. In this letter, the identification is much more literal:

It is the same as in a body. The body is one thing, but it has many organs; and even though there is a multiplicity of organs, they are all only one body; and this is how it is with the Prince. When we were bathed in one spirit, we all were bathed into a single body, whether we are Judeans or Greeks, or slaves or free; we have all drunk the same spirit.

But the body is not one organ; it is many of them. And if a

foot were to say, “I am not a hand, and so I don’t belong to the body,” that wouldn’t make it not belong to the body; and if an ear were to say that because it wasn’t an eye, it didn’t belong to the body, that wouldn’t make it not belong to the body. If the whole body were its eye, how would it hear? If the whole thing were an ear, how would it smell? No; the fact is that God has put the organs, each of which is a unit, into the body in the way he saw fit. If all of them were one organ, where would the body be? So there are many organs, but only one body....

And you are the Prince’s body; you are parts that came from a part of it. And God has put these parts together in the community: first the Prince’s emissaries, second the prophets, third the teachers, next wonder-workers, then those with the gift of healing, helpers, guides, and speakers of different languages.

There is, then, a literal identification with Jesus. This is significant for my thesis, which, if you recall, is that because of the rejection that led to the crucifixion, we must work out our happiness through suffering by joining in the suffering of Jesus. What Paul is saying here is that the New Treaty has joined us literally into a new body Jesus has, because we share his life. He is not now, as he presumably would have been, our King, but in a sense our very self.

Does this imply that we relive his crucifixion in our own lives? It isn’t indicated in this letter.

The second letter to Corinth seems to me obviously to be two letters, the first of which is from Chapter 10 on, which begins with “αὐτὸς δὲ ἐγὼ Παῦλος παρακαλῶ ὑμᾶς . . .” “I, Paul, appeal to you...” and continues with a long justification of his conduct which—in the first part of the letter as we have it—he says he is not going to start doing *again*; and in that first part he also refers to a letter in which he did just that, rejoicing at how successful it was. Scholars have made much of the incoherence of this letter; but it seems to me to make perfect sense if you imagine a salutation before Chapter 10, read that until the end, and then read the letter from the beginning to the end of Chapter 9, and add a closing there. It would be perfectly understandable for the two letters to get joined together

this way if the letter that was at the beginning was the one that originally got circulated because Paul didn't want the other one to be read outside of Corinth on the grounds that (1) it was between Paul and Corinth alone, (2) it would be embarrassing to the people of Corinth, and (3) there was so much bragging in it. People, however, probably demanded to see it because the circulated letter didn't make sense without it—at which point, it was appended to the “second” letter.

The main thrust of this letter (or rather, both of them) is to show that what Paul has been preaching is the simple truth as he learned it, and that

Of course, we have never “interpreted” God's word to fit our own ideas; we have said what we said in the Prince out of sincere hearts, as if it came from God and was said in God's presence.

But he says something very interesting for our purposes in Chapter 5:

So we don't pay any attention from now on to anyone in material terms. And if we once even thought of the Prince as a political prince, we don't think of him that way any longer. And so if someone is in the Prince, he is a new creation; what is old has vanished, and suddenly has become something new.

And all this comes from God, who is transforming us to himself through the Prince, and giving us the service of transforming others, in this sense: because God was the one who transformed the world to himself in the Prince, and no longer keeps records against people of the rotten things they do, he has put in us the words that do the transforming.

What this means is that we act as official representatives of the Prince, who is, so to speak, God talking to you through us; and we beg you, in the Prince's name, be transformed to God. He made over into sin the one who knew no sin, so that we could become God's virtue in him.

The force of this is masked by the usual English translation, which says that God is “reconciling” us to himself. “Reconciling” in English implies that friends have had a falling out and become friends

again. But the Greek word means an alteration, and an alteration on the part of one party only. Further, there is no “again” notion in the Greek verb at all, as there is in the “re-“ of the English. As far as the Greek is concerned, we have never been previously in anything like the state this verb implies. Hence, what it says is that we are changed or altered from our condition $\epsilon\alpha\upsilon\tau\omicron\varsigma$ to or for himself, (the dative), and then $\tau\omicron\upsilon\ \epsilon\kappa$ to or for God.

We have an indication here that what Paul is thinking is that Jesus is no longer to be looked at as a King, but as someone who has transformed the world. We are a “new creation” in a much more literal sense than was thought. God is, by giving us the very life of the Prince, transforming us *into* $\Upsilon\text{H}\text{W}\text{H}$ through the identification we saw earlier with him; and his emissaries perform the act by which he effects the transformation.

Up to this point, Paul has called Jesus the Son of God, but not God himself. He doesn’t spell out what this transformation means as yet, but there is a hint that he is toying with the idea of our divinization because of our identification with Jesus.

The letter to Rome tells us another couple of things. It is a kind of summary of what Paul has written so far: that we are the true descendants of Abraham, that this comes because of our belief, and therefore the Law does not apply to us any more. But (as he said to the people of Corinth) this does not mean that we can do what the Law used to forbid, but now the motivation is not because it is forbidden but because a person doesn’t act against himself.

In Chapter 6, we find this:

And what should we conclude from this? That we should stay sinners, so that the gift can be complete? Of course not. How can those of us who died to sin still live in it? Don’t you realize that those of us who were bathed into Jesus the Prince were bathed into his death? We were buried with him by the bath into death we took, so that in the same way that the Prince came back to life by the glory of the Father, we too are to base our conduct on the newness of our lives.

That is, if we have become of the same nature as the Prince by a death like his, we will also be the same in a return to life like his. And we know this much, that the old human being we used to be has been crucified with him, so that the sinful body can disappear and not any longer be a slave to sin—since a person who dies is released from sinning.

So if we died with the Prince, we believe that we will live with him, because we know that now that the Prince has come back to life, he will not die any more; death no longer has any mastery over him. The one who died to sin, died only once; and the one who is alive, lives for God. And in the same way, you are to consider yourselves dead to sin and living for God in Jesus the Prince.

So the bath of Baptism bathes us “into his death,” and because of this we will come back to life with Jesus. The identification, then, with Jesus includes the identification with the crucifixion and through the crucifixion the Resurrection—which is the thesis of this study. It is *because* of the crucifixion that this identification occurs, and because of the identification that we win through to eternal life by going through the Master’s death.

But there is something else very significant for the thesis included in the letter to Rome:

And did you know that there is a longing in creation for the revelation of God’s sons to occur? What happened is that creation got trapped into pointlessness, not by anything it did, but because of the one who made it that way; but it had the hope that creation itself would be free from slavery to decay and would find the freedom of the glory of God’s children.

That is, we know that every creature has been in pain and anguish along with every other one up to now; and not only that, but we too, even though we have the firstfruits of the spirit, are having pain until we are adopted as sons and our whole body is set free.

So this pain and anticipation of future glory is not only true of human beings; it is something that is a characteristic of every creature. This is exactly consistent with the thesis of this study, that

evolution, since it was caused by the eternal God, took into account the two rejections of him by the human race, and must, like us, work out its final fulfillment through pain and suffering.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

OTHER LETTERS OF PAUL

The letter (or letters) to Philippi, probably written some time around 60, or perhaps during the imprisonment in Rome in 61-3, takes the Theology of Paul a step further:

Your attitude is to be the one that was in Prince Jesus, who when he possessed God's form did not consider being equal to God something he had to keep hold of; he emptied himself and took the form of a slave, and turned himself into what was the same as a human being; and once he found himself in human shape, he lowered himself so far as to submit obediently to death, and death on a cross.

That is why God elevated him above everyone else and gave him the name that is greater than every other name, so that at the name "Jesus" every knee in heaven, on earth, and under the earth is to bend, and everyone's tongue is to acknowledge for God's glory that he is the slave of Prince Jesus.

So, my friends, submit obediently, as you always do, not just when I am with you, but even more now that I am away; and work for your own rescue with fear and diffidence—because it is God who is active inside you, and who makes the choices and performs the acts that he sees fit.

Jesus is now acknowledged as the same as God; and somehow this divinity "emptied himself" into what was the same as a human being. He transformed himself into being human—so that we would be transformed into God? As I said, the hint was given in the letter to Rome. Is it stated more explicitly?

It sounds like it. The final step in the process is what we find in the letters to Colossae and Ephesus (which latter is, to me, obviously the letter to Laodicea referred to in the Colossian letter; it has no direction in the best manuscripts):

Here is what is said in the letter to “Ephesus,” which, it seems to me, because it is rougher (and is referred to in the one to Colossae) is the earlier:

God, the Father of our Master Prince Jesus, is to be blessed, because he has blessed us in the Prince with every spiritual blessing in the heights of heaven. This was what he gave us when he chose us in him before the world began to exist, so that we would be sacred and sinless before him in love; and when he had sonship to himself as his purpose for us from the beginning through Prince Jesus.

This was the choice of his will, and it is what leads us to praise the glory of the gift he gave us in his Beloved, in whom we find release from captivity because of his blood. Our immorality is forgiven by the riches of his gift, which has also overflowed into us with complete wisdom and knowledge, because it has informed us of the secret of his will; that it was his pleasure, which he determined beforehand in the Prince, for things to work out so that when the time reached completion, everything in heaven and on earth would be brought together under one head in the Prince.

He is the one in whom we have our inheritance, because of the plan which he formed from the beginning and is working out exactly as he chooses; so that we would be the first to put our hope in the Prince, for the praise of his glory. He is the one in whom you listened to the truth that was spoken in the report of the good news of your rescue; and he is the one in whom you believed and received the seal of the holy spirit he promised, who is the pledge of our inheritance, to be redeemed from his estate, for the praise of his glory.

Here is what I think is the revised version in the latter to Colossae:

And we pray for you, in every good deed you do, to be productive and increase in knowledge of God, and to grow strong

in every sort of power by the might of his glory, so that you will be able to stand any kind of hardship and tolerate everything gladly, and thank the Father, who has made you fit to share the inheritance of the sacred people in the light.

The Father was the one who extricated us from the power of darkness and moved us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, from whom we have forgiveness and removal of our sins. The Son is the visible counterpart of the invisible God and the first-born of the whole of creation, because everything in heaven and on earth was created in him; everything visible and invisible— Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, and Powers, everything—was created through him and for him; he himself exists before everything and everything has continued to exist in him.

He is also the head of the body which is the community; he is its Principality—its ruler and source—the first-born of the dead people, so that he is to have the first place in everything; because God thought it proper for every fulfillment to be located in him, and for everything on earth and in heaven to be transformed by him and to him, as he made peace by shedding blood on his cross.

Not the most pellucid of all texts, either of them, and the only instance we have of Paul's actually rewriting a letter. Most of the time, he is clearly dictating just what comes to mind; but here he is carefully choosing his words, evidently to get across an extremely mysterious and radical idea. But the logic of the progression of Paul's thought is clear: The difference between the Old Treaty and the New is that we become one thing with Jesus—his very body—because of our sharing his life. But the life of Jesus is in fact the life of YHWH; and therefore, in Jesus, we are divinized; we are transformed into YHWH and are divine as well as human, because Jesus has given us the gift of being simultaneously divine and human, like him, whose life we share. And the world is also transformed along with us, in some way. This is not pantheism; it is a special favor of God bestowed on those he chooses, who "put on the livery of Prince Jesus." There is only one God, who is a spirit; the world is *not* a part of this God; he has had to transform us to himself in order to do this;

and he did it through the crucifixion.

This at least leaves open the possibility that this union with God—this identification with him—would not have occurred had the crucifixion not occurred, because

as Scripture says, “What God has prepared for those who love him is something no eye has seen or ear heard, something that has not entered man’s heart.” And God has disclosed this to us through his Spirit.

as he says in Chapter 2 of the first letter to Corinth. No one would have desired it, because no one would have been able to envision actually becoming God; it is a reward, if you will, because of the punishment for mankind’s sin. Eternal *companionship* with God in the person of Jesus is one thing; eternal *identification* with God *in* Jesus is something entirely different.

One interesting little confirmation of the identification with the crucifixion occurs in the first chapter of the letter to Colossae:

I am happy now in what I am going through for you; I am in my own flesh putting the finishing touches on the Prince’s suffering for that body of his which is the community.

So our own suffering “completes,” as it were, the suffering of Jesus. If our thesis is true, this is because our rejection of Jesus which led to the crucifixion means that the crucifixion does its work of redeeming us by our uniting of ourselves to it in our own suffering.

Interestingly, then, the attempt to find out whether we can trust the texts by examining the earliest documents reveals that the Good News about Jesus was originally not at all what Jesus *said*, but what he *was* and what happened to him and therefore to us. And it does look as if, in Paul’s mind at least, the “meaningfulness” of these factual events is that we become identified with Jesus, and therefore identified with his death by our own suffering.

For our purposes, it is not terribly useful to go into the letters to Timothy and Titus, so let me finish this brief look at the texts of Paul by answering a possible objection a bit more fully. Paul claims

that he is telling what he knows and has been told not only by Jesus himself but by those who saw him before he died. There are only two ways in which he could say this if Jesus did not in fact come back to life from the grave: (1) he is lying, or (2) he is deluded. In the second case, we have to go back to the original witnesses of Jesus' life and examine how they told their story, and whether it makes sense that they were deluded.

But suppose he is lying. A person lies if he has some reason for it: some gain in prestige or money or power of some sort. As to making money from his preaching, we find this in the second letter to Corinth:

Then what's wrong with me? That I degraded myself—to dignify you—when I delivered the report of God's good news to you without charging for it? I was stealing from the other communities when I accepted support from them so I could serve you; and when I was with you and needed something, I didn't put a burden on anyone; anything I needed was met in full by the brothers and sisters who came from Macedonia. I was determined then, and I am determined now, not to impose on you. And as the Prince's truth is in me, there will be no silencing this claim I make, through the whole territory of Greece. And why? Because I don't love you? Ask God!

Yes, and I'll keep doing what I'm doing now, to cut off any chance of making a claim to be like us on the part of anyone who is looking for an occasion to do it.

So the *accusation* against Paul, as the letter makes clear, was that he was defrauding the people by teaching his strange doctrine, apparently charging no one for it, but actually fleecing them indirectly. He answers that part somewhat later in the letter:

And now I'm getting ready to visit you for the third time—and I'm still not going to charge you anything; I want you, not your money. Parents should provide for their children, not children for their parents; it gives me pleasure to spend for your souls until I have nothing left; but if I love you too much, you love me less.

All right, maybe I haven't imposed on you financially myself;

but from the beginning I've been a faker who swindled you out of your money. Oh really? Did I manage this swindle by someone I sent as my representative? I sent Titus and the other brother; was it Titus who swindled you? Don't we behave with the same spirit? Don't we walk on the same path?

So it isn't money that motivates Paul. In fact, before he got help from the Macedonians, he supported himself by his trade as a tent-maker. Further, in the letter of Philippi from prison, he thanks those very Macedonians for their help, but says that he doesn't need it:

It gave me great happiness in the Master that your concern for me blossomed again just now, the way you used to care for me, until I stopped giving you the chance. I'm not saying this because I needed what you did; I've learned to manage by myself no matter where I am; I know how to do without, and I know how to have more than I need. I am familiar with all of it: to have a full stomach and to go hungry, to have too much and not to have enough; I have strength for everything by the one who gives me power. Still, it was nice of you to do your part in my hardship.

And you people in Philippi know that at the beginning of my reporting the good news, when I left Macedonia, you were the only community I let help me out in this business of giving and receiving; and that in Thessalonica you sent money I needed not once but twice. It isn't that what I want is the gift; what I care about is the profit you get and the interest it earns for you.

You see, I have all I need—I have more than enough, now that I have received your gift from Epaphroditus; but it is a fragrant offering, a fitting sacrifice, acceptable to God.

Was it prestige or comfort? Listen to his litany of the kinds of things that happened to him in his preaching:

But here I go being crazy; and I say that I can be as arrogant as the next man. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Israelites? So am I. Descendants of Abraham? So am I. The Prince's servants? This is the crazy man talking; I am more of one; I work a lot harder than they do, I've been in prison a lot more, I've been whipped many more times, and many times faced death; I got the "forty lashes

minus one” from the Judeans five times, I’ve been beaten with rods three times, I was stoned once, I’ve been shipwrecked three times, and once spent a whole day and night in the water; most of the time, I’m traveling from one place to another, in danger from fording rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, in danger from foreigners, facing the dangers you find in the city, the dangers you find in the country, the dangers in the ocean, the dangers from pseudo-brothers; most of the time I’m working hard, worn out and don’t have enough sleep; I’m hungry and thirsty, and I’ve often gone without eating at all; and I’ve been cold and not had enough to wear; and besides these external troubles, there is the responsibility I carry every day, and my concern for all the communities. If anyone is weak, I am weak; if anyone has obstacles thrown in his way, I am enraged.

Further, the very reason that he is writing like this to Corinth is that he was drummed out of the community in disgrace because of the accusations against him. And the very last letter we have from him, while he was awaiting death, the second letter to Timothy, ends in this way:

Alexander the coppersmith has done me a good deal of wrong. The Master will repay him for what he has done; but you watch out for him, because he was violently opposed to what we say.

The first time I appeared in court, no one helped in my defense; they all deserted me; but I hope that this won’t be held against them. Anyway, the Master stood by me and put strength into me, and helped me deliver the whole proclamation for all the pagans to hear; and he pulled me out of the lion’s mouth.

And the Master will keep saving me from any attempt to do me harm, and will rescue me for his kingdom in heaven, where there is glory for all the ages of ages. Amen.

Give my regards to Prisca and Aquila, and the family of Onesiphorus. Erasmus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus in Miletus, because he was ill.

Eubolus, Pudens, Linus, Claudia, and all the brothers and sisters here send their regards.

The Master be with your spirit.

If, then, he thought that he was going to win prestige or fame from this, he was a total fool. He was harassed all his life and ridiculed for what he was doing, and at the end everyone deserted him. True, he thought that he would win eternal glory from it; but that would happen only on the assumption that he believed what he was teaching. Hence, he could not be lying; and so if what he was reporting was untrue, the only alternative that is possible is that he was deluded.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

LETTERS BY OTHER WRITERS

One thing that is worth mentioning at this point: the letters of Paul are clearly what might be called internal documents of the Christian community: writings that were intended for people who were already believers. But one of the things they reveal, even at this early stage, was the need for an external document for people who were not yet Christians, because the oral preaching was not by any means uniform, and (if Paul is to be believed) was distorting the facts, often for the sake of financial gain or power on the part of those who were “delivering the proclamation.”

I think that this was one of the functions of the Reports of the Good News; but we will get to that shortly. Let us now look at the other letters, to see if what Paul was reporting was an aberration, or whether it is consistent with what the others were also saying.

First, the letter of James. Many say that this was not written by James, but by someone else (an Alexandrian Jew) “as from” James, in the same way as, for example, the book of Wisdom was written “as from” Solomon, though it must have been written years later. There is also a good body of opinion that this letter dates from the next century, and not somewhere around sixty to seventy, when I think it was written. As to the date, it says a great deal about the fact that faith without works is dead. For example, “Consider it this way: Suppose I say, ‘You have faith, and I have actions. You show me your faith without any actions, and I will show you my faith from my

actions. You believe that there is only one God. Fine. Devils believe that too, and cower.”

This is clearly a response to what we find in the letter of Paul to Galatia, the first letter to Corinth and the letter to Rome, where Paul insists that actions don't make a person virtuous any more; only faith in Jesus as the Prince does. Now Paul also says in those letters that the faith *spills over* into actions, even (though not emphatically) in the letter to Galatia (“In Jesus the Prince circumcision has no force, and neither does having a foreskin; the only thing that matters is faith *that acts through love*.”) It is also clear from the letter to Corinth that the faith doesn't allow you to do what the Law forbids; and so it implies actions; but what *is* clear is that the Corinthians were misinterpreting Paul's teaching as if it implied that all you had to do was have faith and you could do whatever you pleased.

Now when would a letter with a content like James's be written? When this doctrine of Paul had been around for sixty or seventy years, and when it had been discussed and interpreted by the community, or when it was a “hot topic,” and when it was controversial, and when the qualification that “faith without works is dead” would have to be stressed? Further, the reference in it to Abraham *and his works* is again a reference to the letter to Galatia's (or the one to Rome's) stress on the fact that Abraham was considered to be virtuous “because he believed.” It is definitely a response to one or other of those two letters; and the time to respond to a letter is at the beginning, when it is being circulated. I would incline to place it shortly after the letter to Galatia, because the letter to Rome makes it clear that Paul was not trying to say that faith gave one a license to do wrong, and so faith in his sense implied actions.

That would place it some time after 57; and if before the letter to Rome got circulating, before 60 or so.

Was the author James, the Master's relative? Why not? The tone of the letter is that of a Jew who doesn't seem to be much in touch

with the teaching of Jesus. The assumption is that this lets James out, because after all, he *was* Jesus' relative, and so had to be a Galilean. Well no, not necessarily. We must remember that this James was not either of the Jameses that were members of the original Twelve, because in the Reports (written later than Paul's letters) those Jameses are identified by who their father was, Zebedee and Alpheus, and neither of them are called relatives of the Master, while Paul and others refer to this James as "the Master's relative." Secondly, this word *ädelfójj*, which is usually translated "brother," means, as I said, "a close relative," and can just as easily be a cousin.⁷ It is perfectly possible for Jesus to have had a cousin who became a Christian only after Jesus' death, and who might very well have lived a good part of his life in some place like Alexandria. Or even if he didn't, he could have been a person who had cosmopolitan interests and was perhaps even embarrassed (like the relatives John speaks of) by this crackpot carpenter-preacher—until he found out after Jesus' death what the facts of the matter were. In that case, he would not have known about what Jesus' teaching was during his lifetime, and would only have found out about it like everyone else, after Jesus' death.

Finally, if the letter was in fact written reasonably close to Paul's relevant letters, it is very unlikely that it was written "as from" James. Why impersonate someone who was around to deny authorship?

But the important point is what the letter says. Again, it is anything but the sayings of Jesus, and is really full of Jewish natural-law morality, but with an emphasis on brotherly love. And

⁷Incidentally, if there is such clear textual evidence that Jesus had *ἀδελφοί*, then it is difficult to see how the tradition of Mary's being a "perpetual virgin" could be so ancient. Obviously those who began the tradition, especially if it were centuries after Jesus' death, would be flying in the face of clear evidence to the contrary *unless* *ἀδελφός* had a meaning other than a blood brother in our sense of the term.

this is just what you would expect believers to be clamoring for at this point. “All right, we believe, and so we’ve been rescued. But now how are we supposed to live our lives?” It is also interesting that there is a heavy emphasis on caring for the poor, which recalls another part of Paul’s letter to Galatia:

And when they recognized—these respected pillars, by the way, were James, Cephas, and John—the gift that had been given to me, they shook hands with me and Barnabas and made us partners; we were to go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. The only thing we were told was to keep the poor in mind—which was just what we had been careful to do.

James, note, was one of the ones who wanted Paul to be concerned about the poor. But in this internal document, obviously addressed to believers, we find no analysis of the meaning of the more esoteric statements of Jesus—evidently because, whenever this letter was written, the meaning of what Jesus said was not the important issue. Then what was distinctive about Christianity? You find nothing in this letter; as so many commentators have mentioned, it could easily have been a document from Judaism that some Christian copied and just attributed to James. For that matter, it could have been written by a Buddhist.

If we look at the first letter of Peter, it seems to me silly to say that it wasn’t written by Peter, even if it weren’t so well attested by ancient witnesses. In the first place, if the character of Peter is anything like what all the evangelists report, it would be very unlikely that he *wouldn’t* undertake an official letter. In the second place, the elegant style is easily explained in the letter itself, where Peter acknowledges the help of Sylvanus. Third, the persecution doesn’t place the letter late, not even for being “Christians.” According to *Acts*, the Christians got that name early on in Antioch, and even the first letter to Thessalonica indicates that persecutions precisely for being Christian were rampant from the very beginning. True, it was not a formal crime to be a Christian until considerably later, but that would be small comfort to those who were persecuted for what they

were without its being against the law. Nor does the fact that chapter 3, for instance, is almost an echo of Paul's letters to Colossae and "Ephesus" in how wives are to treat their husbands and vice versa indicate that it isn't by Peter. Granted, Peter and Paul had a run-in, where Paul "told him to his face that he should be ashamed of himself," but this doesn't mean that Peter hated Paul and wasn't ready to listen to him. Incidentally, this copying from someone else is also something that crops up in the second letter; and why shouldn't the first Pope use information from his leading Theologians when he wants to make a point? Of course, in those days before radical individualism, plagiarism was not considered evil; if anything, those plagiarized probably regarded it as a compliment.

In any case, the letter's intent is not by any means to explore the significance of what Jesus said, but to encourage people shocked by the fact that they are suffering great torment, not because they did anything wrong, but simply because they believed in Jesus. This, in fact, must have been a severe blow to the faith of many "Princists" from the very beginning. "Why on earth are people *killing* us just because we think Jesus came back to life to save us from our sins? How does this hurt them? And why is God allowing this to happen?"

When you think about it, it is very odd that a belief in someone's coming back out of the grave, so similar to many of the pagan legends, should unleash such a virulent response. It is easy enough to see why the Jews would hate the Christians, but not why the pagans would—except in the sense that Luke talks about in Ephesus, that Jesus was supplanting Artemis as the real God. And that must have been it. The pagans couldn't stomach the idea that Jesus wasn't just an addition to the pantheon, but that those who accepted him as the god held that there really weren't any others. And what was behind this, of course, is that the Christians held that Jesus *really* was God in the sense of "factually real," not in what you might call a "religious" sense (almost an aesthetic sense) of "real." In any case, the early Christians couldn't fathom what caused the pagans to detest

them so; they were good citizens, obeying the emperor; they just wanted to be left alone, as Paul makes clear in the first letter to Timothy.

Peter's answer, interestingly enough, is to link what they are going through with the crucifixion of Jesus himself—exactly what one would expect if the thesis of this investigation is true. Beyond that, the letter is, as I said, a reiteration of Pauline moral teaching.

So once again we have internal documents that deal precisely with the implications in believing in Jesus the resurrected wonder-worker, in the face of an environment which not only regards this as silly, but as somehow subversive because, apparently, it is alleged to be factual, and therefore needing to be crushed.

The letter of Jude is generally regarded as having been written in the next century, but I think it was also written around this time—that is to say, before 70—by the Judas who also was a relative of Jesus (Mark mentions both James and Judas as Jesus' relatives). Note that James, above, does not call himself the relative of Jesus, but his slave, and this author doesn't either, though he *does* call himself "the slave of Prince Jesus and relative of James." It is interesting that, if either of these were written "as from" those people who were related to Jesus, the authors chose to be modest about the attribution, to such an extent that it almost defeats the purpose of putting the name there, given that there were so many Jameses and Judases that were among Jesus' original followers and relatives. If you were writing pseudonymously, a century later, why pick someone so obscure for the one the letter purported to be from? The "apocryphal Gospels" chose "authors" like Andrew, Thomas, Peter, Barnabas, Paul (the "Revelation of Paul") and so on. True, there is a "Gospel of Thaddeus," who, of course, is the Judas who was the Emissary of Jesus—and who doesn't seem to be this one. It is far more likely that these cousins of Jesus would be aware that everyone *at this early date* would know who they were, and were not anxious to stress their blood relationship with someone they regarded

as God Almighty. Put yourself in the place of one of them, about to identify yourself as a letter-writer. Would you call attention to the fact that you were the Master's cousin?

Again, the "foreign" air about this letter and its use of the Book of Enoch (which, of course, is not canonical) can easily be due to the fact that these cousins weren't just peasants from Nazareth, but perhaps Jesus' well-to-do relations who had extensive dealings in a place like Alexandria.

What this letter deals with is "an infiltration by some individuals—predicted in Scripture long ago for this crucial moment—who are irreverent people intent on turning the blessings of God inside out into a license for sex, and denying that Prince Jesus is our only Lord and Master." Some say that this clearly makes the letter late, but we have an indication that similar things were going on from the second letter of Paul to Corinth and the letter to Philippi. The fact that this developed into a full-blown heresy in the second century doesn't prove that it wasn't there from the very beginning, and that members of the earliest communities had to be carefully warned against it. Nor does the reference to the "Emissaries of our Master Prince Jesus" make the letter late, because if the author was the Judas who was the relative of Jesus, he wasn't one of the original twelve who had been picked by Jesus as his emissaries and who heard what Jesus said before he died.

Whoever the author, however, and whenever it was written, it is still the case that what we find in yet another of the documents addressed to those who already believe is that they should beware of people who are trying to "interpret" Christianity into a kind of "meaningful" system that will allow them "to take their irreverent feelings as their guides." So it is precisely the people who are trying to figure out the "meaningfulness" of what Jesus said that are the ones you have to watch out for—exactly the opposite of what you would expect if the events surrounding Jesus' life were legendary and the profound statements were the important thing.

The second letter of Peter is so universally recognized as late that I put down my view here with some diffidence. No early witness mentions it. Stylistically, it is more awkward than the first letter, the author stresses being an eye-witness at the transfiguration, it contains a re-write into worse prose of almost the whole of Jude's letter (which clearly makes it later than that letter), and there is the warning at the end to be careful not to misinterpret Paul's letters (because "in them there are some things that are hard to understand, which ignorant and insecure people twist to their ruin, just as they do with the rest of what has been written.")

But I think it was written by Peter. First of all, I detect the same somewhat pompous personality beneath both of them—a personality consistent with what we know of Peter's character from the Reports. Secondly, both indulge in incorporation of other writings, somewhat revised and unattributed, into the letter. The difference in style is easily explainable by the help of Sylvanus in the first. It is easy to picture the shock of the author of the first letter after getting back Sylvanus's copy-editing of what he doubtless regarded as deathless prose, and his vow never to let *that* happen again. Thirdly, if Paul's letters had not been collected until after Peter's death (in 67), they certainly were circulating before then; Peter himself had to have a copy of the letter to Colossae in order to write his first letter.

But what tips the scale for me is precisely what makes most people think that the letter was not written by Peter: the reference to the transfiguration. Here is the passage:

You see, we were not retelling "meaningful" legends when we informed you about the power and presence of our Master Prince Jesus; we saw his magnificence with our own eyes. When, for instance, he had taken on himself from God the Father honor and glory, and the voice reverberated down to him from the glory of the Grandiloquent, "This is my Son, the one I love, in whom I am pleased," we heard this voice resound out of the sky while we were with him on the holy mountain.

So we possess more solidly the prophetic utterances, which

you would do well to make your own to be a lamp shining in a dark place until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts. Above all, be aware of the fact that no prophetic writing is a matter of personal interpretation; no prophesy ever comes from the choice of a human being; it always comes from a person's being led by the Holy Spirit to speak from God.

There used to be, however, false prophets in the people, just as there will be false teachers among you, who will insinuate disastrous "selections among the facts," even to repudiating the Owner who purchased them, and will bring on themselves swift ruin.

And so on, following the letter of Jude.

Now I have heard people defend this as the kind of thing a second-century writer would say if he were writing "as if" from Peter. But in the context of Christianity, where the "religious" sense of "real" is precisely what the Christians are denying, and shedding their blood because they are denying, then to have someone come along and say, "This is not legend; I, who am writing to you, saw this with my own eyes," is simply a lie, if he didn't actually see it, and is writing "as if" from someone who did see it.

This is the whole issue. Did Jesus do these fantastic things or not? If not, as Paul said, belief in him is a waste of time, "and we turn out to be perjurers because we swear to you it did happen." Now Paul himself couldn't say he saw these things; he wasn't there. But Peter could. So if this letter was late, it undercuts the whole point of Christianity, because it says that you should believe things "as if from" an eyewitness when it isn't an eyewitness who is writing this.

That is, you simply *can't* judge these writings as similar to other ancient writings if they were trying (as I have been attempting to prove) to show the actual factuality of the events related. The similarity to the other writings is only superficial; the whole point of the Christian writings is vitiated if they are "meaningful legends"; and they are at pains to say, over and over again, that this is precisely

what they are *not*. And yet that very protest makes moderns who “project themselves back to the times” think even more firmly that that is what they *are*. But really. This is making them rather devious and disingenuous, it seems to me. And what else could the authors do to dispel this notion than what they have in fact done? Such a line of thinking poisons the wells.

Another thing which makes people think the letter is late is toward its end, in this passage: “I have tried to waken memories in your vulnerable minds, and call again to your attention the holy prophets’ predictions and the commandment of the Master and Savior that came through his Emissaries: first of all, to have you realize that during the final age, cynics will come along with their ridicule and say, motivated by their own desires, ‘Where is the promise of his being with you?’”

But look at what Jude says: “My friends, remember the predictions of the Emissaries of our Master Prince Jesus, when they said, ‘In the final age, there will be insolent people who take their irreverent feelings as their guides.’ These are the people who are splitting you apart; they are animals, and have no Spirit.”

Why would Peter, the chief Emissary, refer to the Emissaries? Because Jude, from whom he was copying, did. So if Peter is the author, there is a simple explanation. It isn’t so easy, however, to explain why a pseudonymous author would resort to such obvious plagiarism. Think: you are a writer in the second century, obviously wanting people to think that you are Peter writing a century earlier, because you stick in that reference to the transfiguration. Why, in the first place, would you then simply lift what was in an already extant, circulating letter and embellish it a little? And in the second place, if you put in the transfiguration episode to establish who you were, would you then slip up and refer to the Emissaries as if you weren’t one?

As to the fact that people of the time didn’t mention this letter, I think this can be explained by a kind of embarrassment in the

community. Greeks were very style-conscious (as Paul shows in the second letter to Corinth), and this letter is so obviously trying to be “literary” and so obviously falling flat on its face. There is also the fact that it doesn’t really say all that much that Jude didn’t already say; and a community that had Jude in hand would wonder what to do with this other letter—though, if it *was* by Peter, they couldn’t very well just throw it away.

For these reasons, then, I think the letter was written by Peter, shortly before he died (as he intimates in the letter itself). Given that, there are a couple of things that are instructive for us.

First of all, there is the transfiguration passage that I quoted above. If this was in fact written by Peter, then what he is doing is the same thing that Paul was doing in the first letter to Corinth: stressing the fact that this is *not* something “religiously true,” which would be compatible with the bones of Jesus still being in his grave, but something which I myself saw with my own eyes. This is the kind of thing we would expect if Christianity dealt with the factuality of fantastic events in the face of an age which was simultaneously skeptical and willing to accept such stories as myths.

Secondly, there is precisely the warning to the believers not to be taken in by people who are turning Christianity into a mythology, a tendency that gets stronger the farther away one is from the actual events themselves.

Thirdly, there is the little variation Peter makes on Jude’s statement of the “predictions of the Emissaries.” Instead of talking about their irreverent feelings and that they are animals and so on, Peter goes on this way:

savior that came through his Emissaries: first of all to have you realize that during the final age, cynics will come along with their ridicule and say, motivated by their own desires, “Where is the promise of his being with you? From the time ‘the fathers fell asleep’ everything has stayed just as it was from the beginning of creation.” They choose not to notice that a sky existed from time immemorial and an earth too, which was formed out of water and

by water from God's pronouncement—by which the world that then existed was destroyed by being deluged by water; and the present heavens and earth are by the same pronouncement stored up for fire, and kept for the day of judgment and the doom of irreligious people.

And do not let this escape your notice, friends: that for the Master, one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years are the same as one day. The Master is not wasting time keeping his promise, the way some accuse him of wasting his time; he is showing patience toward you, since his will is not for some to be destroyed; it is for everyone to move toward a change of thinking.

Some say that this is another indication that the letter is late. But let us say that it was written in 66 or 67, some forty years (a whole generation) after Jesus died. Since we saw from the first letter to Thessalonica, sixteen years before this, that the people were obviously expecting Jesus to return any minute, is it too soon to have the scoffers come forward and taunt the "Princists" with, "Well, where *is* this Prince of yours that you keep waiting for? When is he coming out of hiding? Let's face it; everything's going on in just the same way as it always has. You're obviously fools."

That is, after hearing people predicting that Jesus was going to come and claim the throne of the world, and having years go by without anything happening, people would be bound to react the same way we react when one of our preachers predicts the end of the world and the world goes on. That would certainly shake the faith of the believers—and you wouldn't have to wait until the second century for it to happen. In fact, it would be much *less* likely to be a problem in the second century than at the time when the original Emissaries of the Master were dying off. After all, if he's a Prince and he appointed these people as his emissaries to get the world ready for his return, where is he? Pretty soon none of them will be left. Peter is reassuring them that you can't count on his return during the lifetime of the original Twelve; and that if he doesn't return by then, that says nothing about the truth of what was reported to them as

fact.

So this document too says, “Hang on to the factuality of what was reported, and don’t pay any attention to the cynics and the scoffers, or to the ‘interpreters.’ We know what actually happened.”

The other clearly internal documents are the letters of John, which it seems to me form a triad. I think the second and third letters were tacked onto the first, the way I think the “harsh letter” of Paul was tacked onto the second letter to Corinth. The second and third letters, then, as I see it, were written first, dealing with what we would today call a lecture engagement in some community; and the first “letter” is actually the lecture.

Again, what the second letter does is warn against people who “go beyond what was taught” and don’t stay with the teaching of the Prince (*of* the Prince? What he taught or the teaching about him?). In the third letter, we find that “Diotrephes, who is impressed with his own importance, does not recognize our authority; and for this reason, if I come, I will mention what he is doing, rattling on with slander against us; and not satisfied with that, he not only won’t give a welcome to the brothers, he keeps those who want to from doing it and expels them from the community.”

So there were people who stood up against John himself and tried to have his lecture canceled. Interesting.

What the first letter—the actual lecture—says is the refrain of John’s Report:

What existed from the beginning, what we saw with our own eyes, what we looked on and handled with our hands, dealing with the meaning of life—and the life disclosed itself; we have seen it and swear to it, and we inform you of the eternal life which existed face to face with the Father and which disclosed itself to us—what we saw and heard is what we are informing you of so that you will have companionship with us. Our companionship is with the Father and with his Son Prince Jesus; and we are writing this for your joy to be complete.

There you are. The eternal life which existed face to face with

the Father is what we saw and handled with our hands. Jesus is God Almighty, and is no vision of God, but the kind of thing you can handle with your hands. Anyone who says that the author of the Fourth Report didn't write this can't read.

The burden of the lecture is, of course, that we should love each other, and in so doing be united to Jesus; that this is no new commandment, but yet it is new, because it means something ineffable in Jesus: "See how much love the Father has given us: that we would be called God's children! And that is what we are!" But even if we sin, we have a patron who can plead for us; so there's nothing to worry about, because we have a share in his Spirit.

And he ends with, "Children, keep yourselves away from idols."

Now I think, as I will say, that a good deal of John's Report of the Good News was also an "internal" document, directed to believers who had begun to "interpret" Christianity as if Jesus were a kind of hologram that God projected onto the world—meaning that Jesus wasn't really a flesh-and-blood human being—or that Jesus was a man "filled with" God somehow, and wasn't really YHWH himself. Interestingly, John also gives the most convincing evidence against the notion that Jesus didn't really die on the cross. I have a Hindu friend who believes that Jesus was a yogi, who put himself into a kind of hibernation during the crucifixion and then revived, but didn't really die. John mentions the piercing of his side after the soldiers recognized that he was dead, "and blood and water came out of the wound." He stresses immediately that "it is an eye-witness who is reporting this, one who is telling the truth and who knows of his own knowledge the facts that he is relating." That is, I saw it. I saw that the blood had already separated into two liquids, the way it does when a person has already died. So he not only bled; the *kind* of bleeding was that of a corpse which still has liquid blood in it.

Now John's Report also makes out a case for Christianity to unbelievers; but, true to the genius of this great writer, it makes a lot more sense for those who are already aware of the Synoptic Reports,

where the Bread of Life speech would be understood in terms of “This is my body” at the Last Supper (which John does not mention); and so on. So the work is both esoteric and exoteric, if I may use such terms.

The only remaining documents other than the Reports are *Acts*, *Revelation*, and *Hebrews*. The first is a fairly straightforward history of the early Christians, with emphasis on showing how the Holy Spirit guided the spread of Christianity, and a kind of historical defense of the orthodoxy of Paul. It does not have anything special to offer us, except perhaps to give an example of what Luke thought the early preaching was like. Clearly, like ancient historians, he “novelizes” his narrative—by, for instance, putting as a direct quotation the words of a speech he couldn’t have heard, and which certainly had no stenographer (there were stenographers who used shorthand in those days) to take down. To me, this presents no problem as to the factuality of what he is writing, insofar as the speakers he “quotes” actually said words to the effect that he indicates. We must keep this in mind when we discuss the words of Jesus that are quoted in the Reports, however.

I will defer *Revelation* to the end of this study which is getting so long, because it is a Theology of the whole of history, and needs to be seen in the light of the rest of what we discover. As to the “letter”—actually, the discourse—“to the Hebrews,” as they say, it was not, obviously, written by Paul; and I personally think it was by Apollos, but of course it could be by anyone who knew Scripture thoroughly and was an excellent writer of Greek. Its language is worthy of Demosthenes. But this discourse has significance for us, because again, though it involves very intricate textual analysis, the analysis is *not* that of what Jesus said, but of the documents of the Old Treaty; and the burden is to prove to Jews that “the Way” (Christianity) can be a fulfillment of the Old Treaty. The Jews doubtless said, “It can’t be. This ‘Way’ of yours can’t be a religion as ours is, because there’s no sacrifice in it, and no priesthood. And

don't claim that Jesus is a priest, because you can't have it both ways; if he's the Prince, then he's a descendant of David and not of the tribe of Levi; and priests have to come from the tribe of Levi."

The author answers, "Yes there is a sacrifice, the perfect one of Jesus himself, which happens once for all; and there is a priesthood, even older than the Levitical priesthood, one which Abraham himself deferred to: the priesthood in the line of Melchisedek. And even the psalm speaks of the Prince precisely as a priest in this line. So you have no argument; in fact, your own Scriptures argue against you." It is brilliantly reasoned.

But once again, the point of the whole thing is that Jesus, who is God's own Son, died for our sins, fulfilling the Old Treaty demand for sacrifice, not that his wisdom surpasses that of Moses. Again, it is the events of Jesus' life and who he is that makes the difference, not the values connected with his example or the wisdom of his sayings.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE HISTORICAL SITUATION
AT THIS POINT

Now then, what is the main thing that all of these documents are telling us? That the early Christian Church was a set of internally placid communities, though persecuted from outside, carefully preserving the preaching of the evangelist who came among them to convert them? That there was a “Markan” community that preserved the original preaching of Mark, which was later written down, and a “Lucan” community and a “Johannine” and “Matthean” community which did the same for these preachers?

Far from it. Just about all of the letters indicate that from the very beginning, each Christian community was in turmoil, with different preachers swaying the people in very different directions, and evidently members of the communities themselves interpreting things in shocking ways. It looks as though the early Christian communities were no more “of one mind” than the Protestant churches are in the present day. In fact, you might say, given the number of times the writers deal with this subject, Christianity was in crisis at a time shortly after the beginning, and only some years *later* got consolidated into something more or less like a consistent view of what was actually going on.

Let me review this aspect of things a bit. In the first letter to Thessalonica, Paul is worried that the persecution will make the people alter their faith. In the second letter, he warns them that some

subversive person has forged a letter supposedly by him indicating that the end was just around the corner, and he asks for prayers “to be able to escape from people who will not listen to reason and who are simply evil; the belief you have is not everyone’s.”

A few years later, he has to write to Galatia to warn them that Judaizers are interpreting Christianity as if it meant that you had to become a Jew to be a Christian, and members of the community are trying to combine their faith with following horoscopes. At practically the same time, he has to write to Corinth to keep them from breaking up into followers of their original preachers (exactly the opposite of the hypothesis above), and to insist that Christianity has only one message. He also warns them against the members of the community that were mythologizing the Resurrection. A year later, he is writing back to that community after being driven out in disgrace by some infiltrator who twisted their faith and made them think that Paul was a fraud.

He writes to Rome a few years after that and greets all sorts of people in a place he never visited. And in the course of the letter, he warns the Jewish converts not to interpret Christianity as an extension of Judaism, and corrects once again the misinterpretation of his own view of freedom from the Law—among people who had never had him preach to them.

In another few years, we find him writing to the Philippians not to pay attention to the Judaizers, because he is as good a Jew as any of them; and he mentions the people who “deliver the Prince’s proclamation out of jealousy and competitiveness...[and who] aren’t sincere in reporting about the Prince.”

He writes to Colossae from prison, to people he has never met, to warn them against the attempt to interpret Christianity as something fitting into the science of the day, with the Prime Movers and the heavenly spheres; and he writes the same thing to the people of the other community in Laodicea.

The letters to Timothy warn him to keep away from

“speculation” and useless discussions of theory, and just stick to the facts; and he points out specific people he has to watch out for. He does the same thing to Titus.

James clearly is trying to correct mistakes in interpreting what Paul preached, as well as give basic moral guidance. Peter, in his first letter, doesn't warn against subversives, but tries to give a reason why the Christians are suffering persecution from outside. But Jude has no other point to his letter than to caution against subversives who were twisting Christian teaching; and Peter in his second letter lends the authority of the first Pope to this warning, as well as to James's misgivings about what was being done with Paul's letters.

And even John's letters, which seem later, also stress the notion of infiltration by people who want to suppress the genuine message and replace it (evidently, from the first letter, by a theory either that Jesus is God but not man or that Jesus is man but not God), and who had no respect even for “the student the Master loved.”

How likely is it, then, that there would be these little pockets of Christians who were preserving an oral tradition that belonged to one preacher—especially in the light of the fact that Luke and Matthew both had to have the *text* of Mark to work on, since they copied even some of the linguistic twists that are distinctive to that author?

No, what emerges from these letters is that what was *needed* by the year 65, when the original witnesses of Jesus were dying off, was some *document* that people could hold on to, which would lay out the facts in such a way that Christians could know what should be believed and what was to be rejected. And John's Report, since it presupposes some knowledge of the Synoptics in order to make full sense, indicates that such a document already existed, but containing some ambiguities which John wanted to make sure were cleared up.

Part Three

Reconstructing the Kingdom

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

THE FUNCTION OF THE REPORTS

So the historical context indicates that the community found a crying need for an authentic document that everyone could agree contained the basic information, and which the various emissaries and preachers could comment on or embellish based on their own personal experience or things that they heard from the original witnesses.

And this, I take it, was the purpose of the first Report of the Good News, which is almost certainly Mark's, since the other two Synoptics use him and even take over some expressions which are peculiar to Mark's style.

In order to perform the function that was needed at the time, what would this Report have to do? It would have to make out a detailed and convincing case for the factuality of what the Christians believed about Jesus. So it would have to present factual evidence, first of all, that could be attested by eye-witnesses. Secondly, the factual evidence would have to reveal clearly (1) that Jesus claimed to be YHWH, and was understood to be making that claim, (2) that he was crucified precisely because of that claim, (3) that he predicted that this would happen, (4) that he claimed that this was predicted of him as the Prince referred to in the prophesies, (5) that that prediction actually was in the prophesies, (6) that he predicted that the ultimate proof of his claim would be to return to life on the third day after his death, and finally (7) that the prediction was verified by his actually being seen alive after his death.

If I am correct, then, Mark's Report was to serve as the first textbook of Christianity, laying out the facts of Jesus' life insofar as they related to his being God and dying for our sins and coming back to life. So it dealt with the "historical Jesus" in the sense that it related without prejudice, one might say, what actually happened, and could have been observed by anyone who was there. After all, every one of the students who actually saw the events was a skeptic about the "Christ of faith" until after the resurrection; and it was *what they saw* that converted them to believers—always assisted by divine grace, of course. But they thought they had *evidence*, factual, observable evidence, that they could share with other people, and it would do the same job for others that it did for them. You didn't have to have faith before the evidence became evidence; though there were plenty of people who saw some of the events and didn't accept the implications of them.

I stress this because a great deal is made of the presupposition of faith on the part of those who read the documents of the New Treaty. Ever since Augustine, with his *fides quaerens intellectum*, it is assumed that people become Christian by the divine gift of faith, for which no human evidence is either possible or necessary. Once you have faith, then you don't need any evidence; if you don't have faith, no evidence will give it to you.

There is a certain sense in which I might agree with this; but to me it is a negative one. We are so blinded by our this-worldly bias that we can't overcome it without some supernatural help in seeing the facts that are presented to us. Just the other day, in a course on critical thinking, I was teaching the distinction between consistency and inconsistency in what one says, and the criterion the textbook was using was that the passage was consistent if one could imagine that the events in question happened, and inconsistent if it was impossible to do so. One of the examples was, "Er had been dead for ten days when he stood up and began telling stories of remarkable visions." Several of the students said that the statement was

inconsistent on the grounds that what was related was impossible, and so couldn't be imagined. I countered with the contention that it was fantastic, but there was no reason for saying that it was impossible, and I alleged, "We know of at least one case where a person was dead for three days and then returned to life"—at which point, they dismissed this as being a "religious truth" and not a fact, and so of no bearing on whether the statement was possible or not.

My point here is that all of us have a built-in bias in thinking that if something is very much outside, even contrary to, our invariable experience, this something is impossible (and therefore apparent evidence to the contrary is some kind of trick); and if anyone claims it happened, then the claim is false. And this attitude we have generally stands us in good stead; and there is no particular reason for abandoning it in religious matters—especially when there are contradictory religious claims, meaning that you definitely can't accept *all* the claims of *all* religions as factual. (Islam, for instance, claims that Jesus was not in fact really crucified.) Hence, there is the need for divine grace to overcome this bias if we are going to be able even to consider evidence dispassionately and objectively.

But that does not mean, it seems to me, that, once you have faith, you have no need of evidence. Again, how is one to distinguish Islam from Christianity in this case? Believers of each religion obviously have faith; but they can't both be right. It simply cannot be that Jesus was in fact crucified (for a Christian) and the crucifixion in fact never happened (for a Muslim). There are no "facts for" someone; a fact is a fact is a fact. Either Jesus was crucified or he wasn't; and so one or the other of the believers is simply wrong. Faith, then, *allows* evidence to be looked at without bias; it itself is not evidence. It is, as the discourse to the Hebrews says, "the *underpinning* of what is hoped for; it is the argument for facts that cannot be observed." But it isn't of itself the evidence for those facts.

And if you look at what Paul was doing in his letters, he was obviously presenting what he considered evidence why people should

bother believing that Jesus died and came back to life—some of which, to be sure, was the miraculous events that accompanied the preaching. But what *that* told an unbeliever was that God must be behind what was being said, because God would not produce miraculous events “on call” to someone who was claiming a falsehood. The miracles were not faith; they were intended to produce faith in people, by giving the people evidence that what was being said was true.

Hence, the Reports were intended to present evidence to someone who did not have faith; and therefore, they had to be couched in such terms, especially since the events they related were in themselves fantastic, that the hearer would find his skeptical bias undermined by them, and would be inclined to believe that the text was (1) not relating mythological stories, but actual facts, (2) the author was not lying; and (3) he knew what he was talking about, either from his own sense knowledge or from contact with people who saw the events.

One note about the “historical Jesus.” I said above that what the Reports were talking about *is* the historical Jesus, in the sense of the one you would have seen if you had been there; he did the things they say he did and said the things they claim he said. But the Reports were never intended to be “histories of Jesus” or biographies; they had no interest, as current historians or even ancient biographers would, in events of Jesus’ life that were not relevant to the case they were making.

So, for example, events would be selected and arranged with a view to how they affected the progress of the argument, not with any care for chronology. It seems very likely that there was only one time when Jesus drove the buyers and sellers from the Temple, and John puts this at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry, while the others place it just before the end. John also has Jesus go to Jerusalem on several occasions, and the Synoptics have him in Galilee all the time, and give the impression that Jesus made a single and climactic journey to

Jerusalem. In *this* sense, the Reports are not about the “historical Jesus,” and some attempt may be made to reconstruct which event occurred when.

So neither the time nor the location of various events can necessarily be relied on if one is interested in tracing Jesus’ steps from the beginning to the end. For instance, Luke puts the Christian Manifesto on a plain, and Matthew has it as the sermon on the mountain. Such topographical details give force to the argument rather than affect its factuality.

But I would contend that it simply makes no sense in the context in which the Reports were written, for them to be making up stories or be recounting legends. The whole point of Christianity as Paul and the other letter-writers insist, is vitiated if the fantastic events did not actually happen; and if some of them are neat little embellishments and others are actual occurrences, and you can’t tell one from the other except by “form criticism,” then they might as well all be fairy tales. No case is made for faith.

The second thing that should be stressed, however, is what I said earlier when speaking of the speeches in *Acts*. One must not look for verbatim transcriptions of Jesus’ sayings. In the first place, it is very unlikely that any of his first students were scribes, taking down what he said in shorthand; they were students, trying to learn what he was all about—and doubtless eager for cabinet posts in the new government they saw on the horizon. Hence, they would pay attention to what he was saying, in the sense of getting the meaning or the basic thrust of what he said, even when they didn’t understand it; but they would not be concerned with the actual words.

This, in turn, does not mean that the authors were putting words into Jesus’ mouth. I think Luke is instructive in this. The speeches of the early emissaries in *Acts* are much more flowing and eloquent than, say, his recounting of Jesus’ “sermon on the plain.” It is of no special significance to recount what Peter or Paul actually said on a given occasion, except to indicate that a speech on a given

topic was made at that time; but with the sayings of Jesus, so strange, often, and enigmatic, it would be important what he actually said. Combining this with what is just above, what this amounts to is that the sayings of Jesus would have to be fairly close to Jesus' actual words.

Combining *this* with the remarks about time and place above, then those sayings of Jesus would be arranged in such a way as to bolster the case that was being made, and so one could expect collections of things said at various times and on various occasions into places where they would logically fit, without any attempt to be faithful to the actual chronology or location of their pronouncement by Jesus.

With all of that as a preamble, I think that Mark was actually commissioned to write the first Report, because he was known to Peter (we have at the end of his first letter, which is certainly authentic, "Your sister in Babylon, who is also chosen, sends you greetings, as does my son Mark.") and was also well known to Paul (who ends his last letter, as we saw above by asking to have Timothy bring Mark with him, because "he's a great help to me."). My guess is that Peter saw the need of an authoritative document, and chose Mark rather than Sylvanus, for some reason, to be the author.

In saying this, I am, of course, completely rejecting the idea that the Report was written by some members of "Mark's community" years after Mark had continued preaching there. We know that Mark was wandering all over the world; *Acts* has him presumably in Jerusalem at first, because his mother lived there, as we learn from the twelfth chapter; then he is with Paul and (his cousin) Barnabas in Judea, Seleucia, Cyprus, and Pamphylia, when Mark went back to Jerusalem; and then (in Chapter 15) Mark accompanies Barnabas to Cyprus, and Paul goes to Syria with Sylvanus. In spite, however, of the rift that arose between them at this point ("Paul demurred at constantly having at his side a person who had deserted them in Pamphylia and had refused to continue with them in their work."),

evidently they got back together, or the note at the end of the second letter to Timothy doesn't make sense.⁸ And somewhere or other he managed to be connected with Peter. Further, from what we can see from *Acts* as well as Paul's letters, many different people kept visiting a given community.

Furthermore, as I said, there was an urgent need at this point in Christianity, with the original witnesses being killed off, for a *written* document that everyone would recognize was well-attested, presumably by someone who was known over a large area to be trustworthy and well-connected: someone of the stature of Paul or Sylvanus or Mark or possibly Barnabas or Luke—or, of course, one of the original twelve Emissaries. But it had to be someone who could write well, and someone who was a clear, logical thinker (which, from the letters, we can say would exclude both Peter and Paul).

In any event, we have Mark's Report, which makes its case for Jesus' divinity by the miraculous events, as well as by devils shouting things like, "What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?" and by his statement when the students saw him walking toward him on the lake, "Be brave. *I am.*" (Qarseîte, êg^{ll} eïmi), which is "It is I," of course, but also happens to be the Greek of YHWH. His reply to the chief priest at the trial also answers the question, "Are you the Prince? The son of the Blessed One?" in this way: "*I am.* And you will see the Son of Man seated on his throne by the Father and coming in the clouds of heaven." So there is no doubt that Jesus, as Mark portrays him, made the claim of being

⁸This, by the way, is one reason for thinking that that letter was actually written by Paul, because if it were written late "as from" Paul, then the dissention between Paul and Mark would have been well known from *Acts*, and there would be absolutely no reason for a pseudonymous author to undercut his case by gratuitously inserting such a remark.

God, and proved it by the miracles and the Resurrection.

Nevertheless, there were difficulties with the Report, however convincing it might be in its structure and selection of incidents. It presupposed somewhat too much knowledge of Jewish life and religion for it to be completely intelligible to those who had no contact with the Chosen People; even expressions like “Amen I tell you” wouldn’t make sense to a Roman.

But there were also, of course, events being told about Jesus that were not in Mark, embellished by legendary stories, and it would have been a good idea to weed out the narratives which were authentic from those that weren’t.

And who better to perform both these tasks than Luke, who spent so much time among the Gentiles with Paul? And this is how his Report begins,

Although, my noble Theophilus, there have been many attempts to give a description of the events that have taken place among us—apparently based on what we have been told from the original eye-witnesses who dedicated themselves to the service of what they were affirming—I still thought it would be useful to research the whole matter from the beginning, and write you the results of a careful study, so that you would know what would be safe to consider factual in what you have been told.

So Luke embarked on a rewriting of Mark’s Report, with the intention of making it more available to Gentiles, as well as adding to it the results of his research into what stories about Jesus were factually based, presumably with the idea that if there were things circulating that were not in this document, they could be presumed to be mere legends.

Once again, we have an explicit attempt to set down what the facts are and to distinguish them from “meaningful legends”; Luke is presumably checking with eye-witnesses to be sure that the events he narrates were actually observed.

It follows from this, of course, that what Luke relates about the pregnancy of Mary and the birth of Jesus actually happened. But I

should inject this cautionary remark about the quotations from the characters here. Luke, as I mentioned earlier, was acting like a historian of his time, and “novelizing” history. Hence, the poems put in the mouths of Mary and Zechariah were intended to express the significance of the events, and would not be interpreted by anyone at the time to be stenographic reports of spontaneous effusions of eloquence. But this sort of thing cannot apply to the quotations from Jesus (except trivial remarks), because what Jesus said was part of what needs to be kept authentic, on the supposition we are going on. So we can trust Luke to give us, if not the actual words of Jesus, at least a reliable paraphrase of what he said, rather than an “interpretation” of the significance of the event disguised as a quotation.

Hence, I am not, by any means, against historical or “form criticism” of the Reports. But we must remember this about them: The authors were certainly *influenced* by the literary forms they were familiar with; but they had a unique *purpose* which governed their writing and made it different from other writings of the time which had the same general literary form. Thus, the fact that they were trying to get across what actually occurred, and to present the evidence that Jesus was YHWH in the true flesh of a human being, is bound to make their use of the literary form (biography, history, letter) different from what others did with these genres.

Perhaps I may illustrate my point from something not Biblical. Plato’s dialogues look like plays, and obviously take a great deal of their literary form from the plays of the time. But they are not plays, and in significant respects depart from the requirements of drama, and even verisimilitude. For instance, Plato sometimes has Socrates talking to people he couldn’t actually have spoken to, because they were dead before Socrates was born. We accept this sort of thing because we recognize that Plato was using this form as a painless way, if you will, for people to be able to absorb his philosophical points; and we interpret the dialogues first in the light of their philosophical

purpose, and secondarily we take the literary form into account when we recognize that everything that is said by characters other than Socrates is not necessarily something you want to hold Plato to.

Similarly here. The literary form can account for various *secondary* aspects of the Reports; but it cannot be used to account for primary aspects, allowing us to explain away apparently fantastic events on the grounds that they were the same legendary puffery you find in other biographies and histories of the time. Why? Because if this is the case, then, as I have been stressing, the purpose of the Reports is vitiated, since the whole reason for any interest in Jesus is that he was not simply a crook or a Socrates, but was God and proved it by doing fantastic things.

Both Mark and Luke, then, set forth the events and the sayings of Jesus, arranged in such a way as to make a powerful case that Jesus is God and died for our sins. But neither of them give many of the nuances of what Jesus said, nor do they show how well Jesus' life fits in with what you would expect from the Old Treaty documents.

And this is the function of Matthew's Report.

That is, my theory about Matthew's Report is that the similarity between it and Luke and Mark is that Matthew knew these texts, not that both Matthew and Luke, for instance, had access to an *urtext* called "*Q*." I think Matthew, who was one of the original Emissaries, saw that some of the statements recorded, though they were what Jesus *said*, gave the wrong impression unless they were qualified by what he said at other times. He also realized that a number of the events of Jesus' life that were simply put down as happening were either predicted or foreshadowed by the documents of the Old Treaty. Based on this, he (or the one or ones who persuaded him to write the Report) decided that a more interpretive version of the Good News should be undertaken.

Thus, for example, when Luke has Jesus say, "It is a good thing to be poor, because then you have God for your King," Matthew's version handles the objection, "But what about the poor who curse

God because of their poverty?” He adds the qualification, “It is a good thing to be poor τῷ πνεύματι (in spirit), because these people are ruled from heaven.” If this is introducing an answer to the objection above, then what it means is, “It is good to be poor and not discontented, because...”

Similarly, Matthew talks about the “kingship of heaven” rather than the “kingship of God,” because *basileía* can also mean the “kingdom” in our sense of the territory or the population ruled, not just who is the ruler, and if one puts it in the sky, then he doubtless thought it was clearer which of the two meanings was intended.

Once again, the insertion of the qualification “except for sexual misconduct” in Luke’s and Mark’s unqualified statements about divorce handle the casuistical objection, “So divorcing your wife makes her an adulteress. Well, suppose she’s already an adulteress. Then presumably you can get a divorce.” If this is what the qualification is a response to, then what the statement says is “Anyone who divorces his wife makes an adulteress of her—unless of course she already is an adulteress—and anyone who marries a divorced woman commits adultery.” On this reading, a loophole is closed, not opened.

I suppose one of the reasons for the theory that Matthew and Luke both used the same document is the difference in treatment of the common material; and commentators who say that one author used the other tend to hold that Luke used Matthew. But it seems to me that the treatment Matthew gives to Mark’s text (whether this text is also in Luke or not) is very similar to the kind of thing you see between Matthew and Luke: shortening, leaving out of background details, but putting in interpolations of Theological import. Comparing Matthew and Luke and Matthew and Mark, makes it, to me at least, a defensible position that Matthew had both the text of Luke and the text of Mark as sources, and adapted the material to suit his own purpose.

But be that as it may, it seems clear that the function of the

differences between the earlier Synoptics and Matthew is that Matthew introduces more nuances into Jesus' statements, presumably because they are closer to what the original intent of the statement was.

Current theory is that Matthew's Report was written to a Jewish community, as Luke's was written to Gentiles. But I don't think this is the case; I think it was written, like the others, to all the communities (the "universal church").⁹ It has a Jewish cast to it, first

⁹My view, in other words, is at variance with most scholars. It seems that the prevailing opinion at the moment is that Matthew's Report was written to handle the shock of the Jewish Christians at the destruction of the Temple—from which it follows, of course, that it was written long enough after the event for the community to be shocked enough to need a whole Report of the Good News to assure them that Jesus predicted this.

I detect some of the inherent skepticism of the "historical" approach to Biblical scholarship behind this. There is a twofold assumption, whether conscious or unconscious here, I think: first, that, since Jesus' prophesy as reported came true, then the document which tells of his making the prediction had to have been written after the event (because how could the "historical Jesus" have known what would happen?). I have been trying to say that this kind of manufacturing of statements and events of Jesus' life vitiates the whole point of the New Treaty documents, and is inconsistent with the documents themselves. Second, it is taken for granted nowadays that the document was responding to some set of social or psychological problems of a given segment of the believers; in this case, the Jewish people the "author of Matthew" had contact with. But then why not write a letter explaining the situation, as Paul did to the Thessalonians, rather than disguise the whole thing as a report about what Jesus said and did? Were the early authors really that devious? Look at the letters of Paul if you think so.

Besides, what would all the fuss be about among the Christians, especially the Jewish ones, if the Temple was destroyed? They certainly believed by this time that Jesus had superseded the Old Treaty laws and ceremonies, and they had no particular brotherly affection for the Jews, who had been harassing them even to death from the beginning; and so without

of all because Matthew was a Jew and thought like a Jew; but more importantly, because he was giving a picture of what Jesus was saying that was more accurate than a simple transcription of his words at a given time, by qualifying the particular statement with what he said at other times or with explanations that he gave to his students afterward; and this would necessarily have a Jewish flavor to it. Matthew was also trying to show the Biblical significance of the events of the life of Jesus, which necessarily would involve references to the documents of the Old Treaty. This would make his Report sound Jewish for two reasons: first because the references, of course, were Jewish; but secondly, because he referred back as a Jew would do looking for a *midrash* for some event that he knew occurred in Jesus' life.

A propos of this, we tend to think that a quotation from a famous person is more accurate the more closely it resembles the actual words the person uttered. But when you think about it, it is very often the case that what a person says can convey a meaning that is different from what the person intended to convey; and this can be discovered by questioning the person or by listening to other things he says. What we would do in this case is quote the exact words and then add qualifying footnotes; but that is our convention for these things. It is not necessarily less accurate to put in the person's mouth

any elaborate explanations, they would be expected to feel how appropriate it was that (a) the Jews would be punished, and (b) the Temple, the symbol of the continuation of the Old Treaty between YHWH and the human race, would be torn down.

No, Matthew's Report *was* responding to a "need of the community"; but it was the need of the *whole* community of believers to see to it that the statements of Jesus didn't get taken in a sense he didn't intend and that he be seen in the context of the prophesies and prefigurings about him in ancient Israel.

the qualified statement you know he really was trying to get across.

As to the events Matthew links to things in the Old Treaty, the temptation is great to say that he (or the “tradition” the author was writing down) invented these events, such as the appearance of the sages at the birth of Jesus and so on, because there were events in the Old Treaty which needed fulfillment in Jesus. After all, there is the psalm about the kings of the East coming to give homage to the Prince, and so on.

Significantly, though, this psalm is not the one Matthew refers to, nor are the people who are reported to appear kings, but only “wise men.” And think of what the prophesy was that is fulfilled here: the one about Bethlehem being insignificant, but being the source of the one who would rule Israel. This would be fulfilled by Jesus’ being of the lineage of David, because then he came “out of” Bethlehem (David’s home town); he didn’t have to be physically born there to fulfill it. So why invent such a thing to place Jesus as being born in Bethlehem? In this connection, it is significant that Luke reports that Jesus was born in Bethlehem without giving a hint that the event had anything prophetic connected with it; from his narrative, it is portrayed as an accident due to the census. Matthew, however, stresses the Theological implications in this accident—which is, to me, a good reason for saying that Matthew knew what Luke wrote, and isn’t just reporting a “different tradition.” If he didn’t put down some of the events that Luke did, it is just as tenable that the omission was due to his knowledge that they were already documented as that he was operating from a “different tradition.” Similarly, the omission of the wise men and the flight to Egypt from Luke does not imply that Luke did not know of these events; it could just as easily be due to the fact that they didn’t bolster the particular case that Luke was making (and would have involved explanations of why Joseph settled in Bethlehem for a while

and then decided to go back to Nazareth).¹⁰

As to the flight into Egypt and the return, as well as the slaughter of the innocents, this is not something that you would necessarily want to create to fulfil the prophesy “I have called my son out of Egypt.” Granted, when applied to Jesus, the words have a literal significance that they don’t have in their primary application to the people Israel and the exodus; but the documents of the Old Treaty are full of metaphorical uses of terms like this which are not literally fulfilled in Jesus’ life (where, for instance, are the dogs at the crucifixion, which would seem to be predicted by the psalm that refers to the dividing of the clothes and the piercing of the hands and feet?), and why make up a whole trip just to fulfill this one and stick in an even more far-fetched fulfillment dealing with Rachel in the slaughter of the children?

What I am getting at is that these *midrashes* make sense *if* you start with the events in Jesus’ life as actually having happened, and you look for earlier things which prefigured them; but they don’t make a great deal of sense the other way round. Hence, I take it that the more reasonable theory is that Matthew knew of these things, which either Luke did not, or did not use because they did not suit his purpose, and saw a significance in them which induced him to include them in his statement of the case for Jesus’ divinity.

In any case, I think that Matthew’s Report was intended to flesh out the Theological import of the events in Jesus’ life and his sayings,

¹⁰People hold nowadays that this sort of reconciliation of the two narratives is hopelessly naive, though it went on for centuries before the present age of “form criticism.” I don’t see that it’s any more naive than to assume that because Matthew inserts “the king was angry and sent troops and destroyed these murderers and burned their city” into the story of the guests invited to the wedding, he was alluding to the destruction of Jerusalem. Naivete takes many forms.

and that, probably for that reason, it was placed first in the collection of the documents of the New Treaty.

What then of John? It seems to me that his Report was written some time later, as most commentators hold, when the significance of Jesus had been debated and most of the original Emissaries had died off. A new generation of believers was holding that Jesus was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” but was not really God Himself, or on the other hand, was God showing himself as a kind of phantom human being. John wanted to make it perfectly clear, based on eye-witness observation, that Jesus was a tangible, flesh-and-blood human being; but that he was in fact God, knew that he was God, and proved that he was God. The synoptic Reports, in other words, left open some loopholes which John wanted to be sure got closed before the last of the original Emissaries died and there was no one to counter the subtle (but often well-intentioned) sophistries of those who wanted to make Jesus and his significance something rationally acceptable.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

JOHN

We finally come to an examination of the text to see what it will reveal, if anything, about the way things would be if Jesus had been chosen King of Judea; and we begin, as I said, with John's Report.

First, it is clear from the introduction that John considers Jesus to be God incarnate; the Word (which also means "the intelligibility or 'meaning' of things") was "face to face with God" in the beginning, "and the Word was God." Hence, there is some distinction between the Word and God, but not one of divinity or reality, apparently.¹¹ Note that "the light shines in darkness, and the

¹¹Incidentally, some say that this is a hymn that "the author of John" used as a kind of epigraph; but I think that this theory doesn't hold water for several reasons: first, because the rest of the book is shot through with the same Theology; second, because it uses the style of the rest of the book—simple language used to sublime effect, coordination rather than subordination, etc; and finally, because it is interrupted by the remarks about John in a way that a person quoting a hymn already before him would not do. There is a tendency in some Biblical circles whenever something poetic appears to say, "See there! He's copying one of the pop songs of the time!"

2. I should make a tiny remark about the actual testimony the Baptist gives in John's Report. The best manuscripts (including the emended version of the *Codex Sinaiticus*) say this: "'I saw,' he said, 'The Spirit coming down from the sky like a dove and lighting on him. It wasn't that I recognized him; the one who sent me to bathe the people told me that when I saw the Spirit come down and rest on someone, he would be the one who is to bathe people in

darkness did not grasp it.” “He came into his own lands, and his own people would not accept him.”

Does this refer to Jesus, or to the relation between YHWH and the holy people before Jesus, or to both? Probably to both; but it is significant “he was in the world” is placed before “the word took on flesh and made his home among us.” But certainly once this happened, “we saw how great he was, with a greatness that belongs to the only Son God ever fathered, full of God’s blessings and truth.” John clarifies himself on this much later in the Last Supper discourse, when Philip says, “Show us the Father, Master, and that will be all we need!” “I’ve been with you all this time, Philip,” cried Jesus, “and you still don’t know who I am? Anyone who is looking at me is seeing the Father! How can you tell me to show you the Father! Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me?” What he is saying here, evidently, is that he is the way the Father appears in this world. The phrase “I am in the Father and the Father is in me” is intended both to explain and be explained by “One who is looking at me is seeing the Father.” He does not simply say, “The Father is in me,” as if when you looked at Jesus, you could see the being who *housed* the Father; but “I am in the Father” also. The container is inside the contained; and the only way that this is possible is if the two are identical. And he says so in various places: “The Father and I are one and the same thing.” That is, *hen*, the neuter, is used, not *heis*, the masculine, which could indicate some kind of union between two things. But Jesus claims that the Father and he are “one thing”; or as we would say today, “one and the same.”

And in the very first scene after the introduction, we have the Baptist saying words to the same effect:

“The law was given by Moses, but blessings and truth came into

the Holy Spirit. And I saw this, and now my sworn testimony is that he is the Son of God.”

being through Jesus, the Christ—the Messiah, the Prince. No one has ever seen God; but the God God fathered, who is in the Father’s bosom, has made him known.”

First of all, the “blessings and truth” refer back to the end of the introduction just a couple of sentences above: “and we saw how great he was, with a greatness that belongs to the only Son God ever fathered, full of God’s blessings and truth.” Hence, it is clear that the strange statement of John is meant to convey that John not only knew but publicly proclaimed that Jesus was God and the Son of God.

This presents us with our first difficulty: How likely is it that the Baptist, if he didn’t use exactly these words, used words which indicated that he knew that Jesus was God in human flesh? *A priori*, one would incline to be supremely skeptical about this.

But let us try to think about it objectively. Was John putting his own Theology into the Baptist’s mouth, or was he reporting the gist of what he heard (since presumably he was the companion of Andrew who heard the Baptist and followed after Jesus)? The answer to this question will color everything else that we can say about this Report.

The question really is whether the Baptist would have known the real truth about what was going on, or whether he was merely acting on an inspiration that Jesus was the Prince who had been foretold, without being informed of the implications of this.

Luke seems to indicate that something of the divinity was known even by the Baptist’s mother: Elizabeth cries to Mary, “But how is it that my Master’s mother should be coming to me?” Now allowing for Luke’s use of language that didn’t belong to Jesus, he is clearly indicating here that Elizabeth was aware (a) that Mary was pregnant, (b) that her child was the Prince, and that (c) he was something beyond merely the successor to David (which could have been true just on the grounds that Mary and Joseph were in David’s line).

Either Luke, who has just got through saying that he isn’t going to be telling legends, is doing the same thing that John is doing, putting Theology into the mouths of those who said no such thing

(nothing even remotely resembling it), or there is at least a hint that the revelation that was given to Elizabeth and presumably to John was to prepare him for the actual role that he was to take in announcing that this Prince was to usher in a kingdom totally unlike anything that had ever occurred in history.

If we now look at earlier reports of the Baptist's preaching, we find Mark quoting him in this way: "Someone who is more powerful than I is coming after me; I am not good enough even to untie his sandal straps. I have bathed you in water; he will bathe you in the Holy Spirit." And, in fact, Mark reports that during the Baptism of Jesus by John, the Holy Spirit descends like a dove and a voice from the sky says, "You are my Son, the one I love. I am pleased with you."

Luke fleshes this out a little by having John say, "I am bathing you in water; but there is someone coming who is more mighty than I—someone whose sandal-straps I haven't the right to untie—and he will bathe you in the Holy Spirit and fire! And he has his winnowing-fan in his hand to thresh out the grain, so that he can store the wheat in his granary, and burn the chaff with a fire that will never go out!" Luke also reports the voice as calling Jesus his beloved Son, which is obviously from Mark; but we must remember that Luke was researching things to make sure that what was reported was authentic.

Matthew says the same thing, but adds that before John actually bathes Jesus, he says, "I need bathing by you, and you are coming to me?" indicating that he knew that Jesus was not just the prophesied Prince but someone of surpassing holiness.

John, of course, was a hermit, and so had plenty of time to reflect on his mission as herald before he started his project of bathing the people; and so it is quite possible that he actually claimed that Jesus was God's Son and realized (though those who heard him didn't) that this meant that Jesus was also God. In all probability, most people took what he was saying as the hyperbolic utterances of a religious fanatic. So too, without doubt, did John (the Evangelist) and Andrew at the beginning; but when you think about

it, it might easily have been through the Baptist that these earliest followers of Jesus had the seeds planted in their hearts enabling them to believe in the divinity of Jesus against all their Judaic training. John the Evangelist certainly gives this impression.

If this is the case (keeping in mind that the Synoptics hint at the same sort of thing), then it might very well be that it isn't the Evangelist that is putting words in the Baptist's mouth, but that the Baptist's Theology found its way into the Evangelist's mind; and he is simply reporting what he heard the Baptist say. It is as plausible a scenario as the other, at least.¹²

But this, of course, means that the Baptist foresaw a kingdom in which God was going to take over the ruling of Judea in the person of Jesus; and there would be a winnowing out of those who deserved to be his subjects from those who would be thrown aside like chaff. John the Evangelist does not add "and fire" to the bathing by the Holy Spirit, nor does Mark; and one can argue from this that probably the Baptist didn't add this phrase either, and that what

¹²The *New American Bible* takes the original reading of the *Codex*, supported by a few other manuscripts and translates the end, "Now I have seen for myself and have testified, 'This is God's chosen One.'" The note explains that they adopted this reading as more probably what was actually written because of the principle of the "more difficult" reading. That is, it is more likely, they say, that an inattentive scribe would substitute "Son of God" for "chosen of God," because all the Synoptics have that reading; but the careless scribe would not be inclined to make the substitution the other way. I can think of a situation where he would. A scribe who had the inclination to think of Jesus as a man "filled with" God would perhaps be inclined to "correct" the "misleading" impression that John actually claimed Jesus was God's Son at this early stage. And don't think this doesn't happen. I heard a reader at Mass the other day substitute "a member of God's family" for "Son" in the passage of the letter to Galatia, where Paul says, "But you are not a slave any more; you are a Son," not realizing that Paul had been claiming that the "son" in question was the (singular) "descendant" of *Abraham* who was to inherit the promise, and we were identified with him. Hence, I think it legitimate to take the reading of the best manuscripts as the true one.

Luke and Matthew report was a hyperbolic addition based on the tone of what was said.

Now “the day after that”¹³ John—who we find out later was prominent enough to be known by the High Priest—and Andrew see the Baptist point Jesus out and follow after him, clearly not as following a guru, but with the idea of being in the entourage of this Prince.

And that the Prince is gathering his retinue seems confirmed by that mysterious passage with Nathanael, where Jesus tells him, “Before Philip called you I saw you—under the fig tree,” and Nathanael exclaims, “Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!” What happened under the fig tree? Either this is all “meaningful legend” or there were strange doings afoot; Nathanael had some kind of experience indicating that Jesus was divine and was to be the King. Note that John does not say anything about that experience (though I would suspect he asked Nathanael, who probably refused to talk about it); he certainly seems to be simply reporting what he saw.

And, of course, he reports Jesus as confirming the divine implications of this, when he says, “You believe just because I told you I saw you under the fig tree? You will see more marvelous things than that. Amen amen I tell you, you will see the sky open up and God’s angels going up and coming down upon the Son of Man!” The reference is, of course, to Jacob’s ladder (or stairway); and the point is that Jesus is claiming that he is what mediates between God and earth, and that, presumably in the new kingdom, orders will come from heaven to earth through Jesus, and petitions from earth to heaven also through him.

Here is a case where the meaning could be double. Clearly, Jesus is this mediator now, though he is not on earth. But it would

¹³Remember, we need not take time literally here; and is it merely a coincidence that from the beginning to the wedding in Cana there are seven days? I think not. I think this is the “creation” of the New World Order.

be much more literally true if he were in fact the King of the world. Perhaps once the new order was established, the messengers between God and the human race would be a common sight.

But immediately in the Report, there are indications of the rejection that was to come. The Pharisees ask for his authorization to drive the sellers out of the Temple, and Jesus predicts his death and resurrection; and though “while he was there in Jerusalem many people believed in what he was because they could see the proof that he gave, Jesus did not put his trust in them, because he knew them, and he needed no proof to inform him about human beings; he knew what was inside a person.” Nicodemus’ reaction to Jesus statement that a person had to be born from above is a case in point.

But does the Nicodemus episode tell us anything about the Kingdom? Clearly, there is the prediction of the crucifixion, (“The Son of Man will have to be lifted up, so that those who believe will have eternal life.”); but before this, what of “Unless a person is born from water and Spirit, he won’t have God as his king.”

It sounds as if a bath such as the Baptist predicted was to be a condition for entering the actual kingdom Jesus intended to found. Perhaps the idea was that when he was chosen King, then he would decree a bath which would wash away sin and the effects of Adam’s fall; and those who underwent the bath would then experience a birth into a new sort of life: the life of perfect control over oneself, in which sickness and dying would no longer exist.

If this is so, then when Jesus talked about “eternal life,” the primary sense of the term would be an unending stay on this earth; and instead of finally going to meet God, God visible as Jesus would eternally have his home with us.

No wonder Nicodemus was nonplused, if he caught any hint that Jesus might have been saying this. “But how can this be?” he asked; and Jesus answered, “You are a teacher in Israel and you don’t understand this? Amen amen I tell you, we are telling you people about what we know, and are giving evidence about what we have seen; and you don’t accept what we say. If you don’t believe when I speak of things on earth, how would you believe if I were to speak

of heavenly things?”

Think about that. The new birth is part of the “things on earth” that are easy to believe; it’s the things in heaven that are incredible. And presumably, Nicodemus ought to have been prepared by the prophets to accept a shift in the whole of creation.

But of course, everyone always interpreted the Messianic prophesies metaphorically. But listen to Isaiah 65 (in the *New American Bible* translation):

“Lo, I am about to create new heavens and a new earth;
 the things of the past shall not be remembered
 or come to mind.
 Instead, there shall always be rejoicing and happiness
 in what I create;
 For I create Jerusalem to be a joy
 and its people to be a delight;
 I will rejoice in Jerusalem
 and exult in my people.
 No longer shall the sound of weeping be heard there,
 or the sound of crying;
 No longer shall there be in it
 an infant who lives but a few days,
 or an old man who does not round out his full lifetime;
 He dies a mere youth who reaches but a hundred years,
 and he who fails of a hundred shall be thought accursed.
 They shall live in the houses they build,
 and eat of the fruit of the vineyards they plant;
 They shall not build houses for others to live in,
 or plant for others to eat.
 As the years of a tree, so the years of my people;
 and my chosen ones shall long enjoy
 the produce of their hands.
 They shall not toil in vain, nor beget children for sudden destruction;
 for a race blessed by YHWH are they and their offspring.
 Before they call, I will answer;
 while they are yet speaking, I will hearken to them.
 The wolf and the lamb shall graze alike,
 and the lion shall eat hay like the ox.
 None shall hurt or destroy

on all my holy mountain, says YHWH.¹⁴

Jesus' castigation of Nicodemus said in effect, "You're supposed to know these prophecies; but you don't believe them, do you? Consequently, you don't believe I am doing anything but talking in riddles. I am telling you that I am speaking literally and plainly, and the only problem is that you refuse to believe it. Well you had better believe it, or you will be one of the ones left out of the Kingdom." He wouldn't have said this to an ordinary Jew, because that sort of person wouldn't be expected to know the prophecies that well; but teachers in Israel were a different story.

It is significant that Jesus is reported to have begun bathing people, in competition, as it were, with John, who was quite willing to have Jesus "grow greater, and I less," because, "the one that God has sent to represent him is the one who speaks the utterances of God, because the Spirit does not give things in doses. The Father loves the Son, and has put everything into his hands. One who believes in the Son has eternal life; one who does not believe the Son will not see life, and God's vengeance rests on him." Again we have Johannine Theology; but whether it was put in the mouth of the Baptist by the Evangelist or whether the Evangelist got the idea from the Baptist is open to question. Immediately after this, it is reported that Jesus himself did not actually bathe anyone; and so the Kingdom was not yet founded, and this bath was another preparation.

In the episode at the well in Samaria, Jesus reveals himself to someone who is all but a Gentile, and in a very interesting way. First of all, he says that anyone who drinks the water he gives will never feel thirst afterwards. If this is to be taken to refer to the physical future, it means that bodily needs will not apply in the Kingdom; we will not have to replenish energy and nutrients lost.

I think we should be able to say that our bodies, after the bath that ushered us into the Kingdom, would be much like Jesus' resurrected body: true, flesh-and-blood bodies, which could be felt,

¹⁴I have replaced "the LORD" with YHWH.

and which *could* eat (Jesus ate something to prove that he was not an apparition), but which, if this passage means anything, would not have to.

When the woman, after hearing Jesus tell her about her five men, realizes that he is a prophet and hears Jesus' answer to her objection about worship, says, "I know that the Prince is coming, and that when he comes he'll explain everything to us," Jesus answers, "He is speaking to you; that is who *I am*." (*Ego eimi ho lale soi*. Lit. "I am, the [one] speaking to you.") Now of course, this is a normal way of talking. We would say it, "I am he, speaking to you," but Jesus is in fact using the divine name, and in a context in which it is significant. So after telling the woman that he was coming to give people eternal life of no thirst, he is explicitly claiming to be the Prince, but covertly claiming to be God.

And when his students ask him to eat something, he says, "I have food to eat you know nothing about." "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me, and to finish the task he gave." and he remarks that the fulfillment is a lot closer than they think it is.

The episode at the Bethesda pool and the cure on the Sabbath, of course, is the next step in the preparation for the Kingdom; but it involves Jesus' claim to be master over the Sabbath, because "The Son can do nothing by himself; he only does what he sees his Father doing. . . . But the fact is that the Father loves the Son and shows him everything he is doing; and he will show him even greater things than this and you will be amazed. Just as the Father brings the dead back and gives them life, the Son will give life to anyone he pleases."

But he says something significant for our purposes at this point. "Amen amen I tell you that the time is coming when corpses will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who listen to it will live again. . . . Don't be surprised that the time is coming for everyone in the grave to hear his voice; and they will all leave it: the ones who have done good to eternal life, and those who have done wrong to eternal condemnation."

So the Kingdom will not simply be populated by those who accept Jesus from the time he makes his pronouncement; all of the

dead who were virtuous will come back to life in the new realm and live eternally on this earth with the believers. If any of his followers caught what he was saying, imagine their excitement that this was to happen this year or next year! But of course, they too, probably including John, thought that he was speaking metaphors.

Having predicted that those in the new Kingdom would never feel thirst, Jesus then claims that no one will feel either hunger or thirst, after first preparing his students for this (and for the reaction of the people) by the miraculous feeding of the five thousand followed by walking on water.

There is one little aspect of the walking on water that might be overlooked. When Jesus sees the students terrified as if he were a ghost, he says, “You know who *I am*. Don’t be afraid.” (*Ego eimi, me phobeisthe*. “I am. Do not be afraid.”). Again, this is ordinary language; “It’s me. Don’t be afraid.” But the fact is that Jesus uses the Greek of the divine name. (If I were one of his students and I caught the implication in what he was saying, I would have been more frightened than ever—which is a clear indication that none of them did.) But what he says is significant in the light of what occurs the next day..

At that time, in his discourse to the crowd that followed him across the lake, Jesus of course claims to be the food that will give them eternal life, and that to have it they would have to “eat the meat which is my body and drink my blood,” which outrages the people, who shout, “That’s disgusting! How can anyone listen to it!” And Judas, presumably, at this point thinks that Jesus has finally lost his mind, while poor Peter responds to Jesus’ appeal, “Master, who would we go to? We know that what you say is eternal life, and we have believed that You are God’s Holy One—we know this.” Note that Peter does not really say that he knows that Jesus is divine, and that he can literally give his body to be eaten; he just says that he believes that *somehow* Jesus’ words make sense, though he clearly has no idea how.

Now it turns out that we know how Jesus managed this. He made the bread and wine at the Last Supper into his body and blood;

and so we do in fact literally eat the meat of his body and drink his blood. As to those who think that this is more symbolism, recall what John has Jesus tell Philip at that same Last Supper, “Anyone who is looking at me is seeing the Father.” And we know that, either Christianity is a total waste of time, or that is literally true. So, we can say of the Eucharist, “Anyone who is looking at this is seeing Jesus in the flesh.” Just as Jesus is the way the Father looks, so this apparent bread is the way Jesus’ body looks at present.

In the physical Kingdom, of course, Jesus would not be sacrificed; and so presumably he would be present to us in the same form he was present to the students after the Resurrection. But, given that here in the synagogue by the lake he is saying that he will give his body to eat and his blood to drink, we could expect that the Eucharist, recognized as it is now among Catholics and others as Jesus’ actual physical body, would also be part of the Kingdom. And I would suspect that the “water that removes thirst” referred to at the well would be this blood of his, which we find here is “real drink.”

Would the subjects in this Kingdom eat the meal daily or only once? Presumably, since there is no hunger or thirst (i.e. no loss of energy which needed to be replaced), there would be no need for more than a single time; once it occurs, it effects the unification into the mystical body of Jesus. Still, since Jesus *did* eat something to show his students he was real, it might be that people would eat it more often. *A propos* of this, there are certain saints who seem to survive quite nicely on nothing but the Eucharist. It may be that throughout this Christian history marred by our rejection of Jesus, he gives the favor of this or that aspect of the Kingdom which he originally, so to speak, intended to found (and which will occur in fact after the Last Day) to certain of his believers—presumably to keep the faith alive, by showing that he really did mean what he said. Part of this Bread of Life speech, however, creates a problem for my thesis. Early on, Jesus says, “It is the will of my Father for everyone who sees the Son and believes in him to have eternal life, and I will bring him to life on the last day.”

On the last day? But of course, the day Jesus becomes King will be the last day, because that is the day which ends history and begins the eternal equilibrium of the New Jerusalem; it is just that the last day was only a matter of months away if Jesus was accepted; with his rejection, it was postponed, we can now say, for thousands of years. And Jesus implies as much a little later on, when he says, “Your ancestors ate manna in the desert and died; but this is bread that comes down from heaven for people to eat and not die. I am living bread that comes down from heaven, and if anyone eats this bread, he will live forever.”

We, of course, interpret this “not dying” to mean—what? Not going to hell, I suppose, which in *Revelation* is called the “second death.” And the interpretation we give it is based on the hindsight of the fact that we believe Jesus, and yet we see that people *do* die; and so there must be an interpretation that is consistent with the manifest facts about our lives.

But the point is that it need not necessarily be taken in that sense; and the thesis I am advancing is that it has both senses: The bread I give you will keep you from physical dying (if I am accepted as King); it will bring you back from death (if I am rejected) to the eternal life you would have had without dying—unless of course (as Paul says) you happen to be around when the penalty-time for your rejection of me is up.

This second meaning is reinforced just a few lines after the assertion that we will not die: “A person who eats the meat which is my body and drinks my blood has life forever, and I will bring him out of the grave on the last day.” After all, as John remarks a little later, “Jesus knew from the beginning who the skeptics were, just as he knew who the traitor was.”

That is, Jesus here is planting the seed of the truth about the Kingdom, but he is doing so in such a way that, outrageous as it sounds, it is not so hard to accept as the fact that a person who eats Jesus’ body will simply stay alive forever without ever dying at all. Jesus, who says, “So you find this hard to accept? What if you were to see the Son of Man rise up to where he was before?” knows that

no one, even if called by the Father, would be able to accept this all at once, not even the people who had seen the miraculous feeding or the students, who had seen not only that but Jesus walking on water the night before. Hence, he exploits his knowledge of what in fact *will* happen (though it need not) and qualifies his not dying and living forever by making it compatible with dying and coming back to life and then living forever.

The attitude of Jesus' relatives which John records at this point reveals something of what the well-disposed non-student was thinking; they thought of him as a magician, who should "go show yourself to the world" if he wanted to make something of himself. And the following episode during the Festival of the Tents indicates that Jesus now felt it necessary to stress this second sense of the Kingdom: the one that actually would obtain. He chides the people on their wanting to kill him because of his healing on the Sabbath, and starts warning them that he will be around only a short time, and "you will look for me and not find me, because you can't come where I will be."

The people, of course, expected him to be their King (as was evident from their reaction to the feeding of the five thousand), and so they could make nothing of what he said.

On a later occasion, Jesus reiterates this, and warns the people that if they do what they plan, they will die in their sins. He says, "Unless you believe what *I am*, you will die in your sins. The Greek is somewhat different: *ean me pisteusete hoti ego eimi*: "unless you believe *that* I am." But since this can be construed as meaning "unless you believe that I am the one [you must accept as king]," I translated it as above, since to translate it more literally would make it unambiguous that Jesus at this point is claiming to be "I am." And the people caught the ambiguity, and immediately asked, "Who are you?" And Jesus answered with that enigmatic statement, *te arche o ti kai lalo humin*; The best manuscripts make this a question. Literally, it is "The beginning (accusative) that which also I speak to you?" Now the accusative alone is used for length of time, and the "that which" is neuter, so it doesn't modify "beginning," which is

feminine. The *New American Bible* translates this as a statement: “What I have been telling you from the beginning,” taking the accusative as being the equivalent of *ek tes arches*. My problem with this is that “the beginning” is a point in time, not a length of time. The *New English Bible* attempts, “Why should I speak to you at all?” which I think is a little far-out. I rendered it, “Should I tell you the source of all this?” I.e. “Is what I tell you to be the beginning [of the definitive rejection, presumably]”? No; there is a great deal I could say to you; but the one who sent me is faithful, and I am only to say to the world what I have heard from him.” If I am right, Jesus realizes that the crisis is approaching; if he says anything more openly, he has no chance of being accepted.

So he turns to the Judeans who stuck with him even after the Bread of Life speech and tells them that if they are steadfast, the truth will set them free. But even they become indignant that he is implying that children of Abraham could be regarded as slaves. Jesus then realizes that even those who seemed to be his followers are now lining up on the other side, and there is no further use of being ambiguous; and so he comes right out and says that “anyone who keeps what I say will never see death,” evidently hoping either to bring them back to their faith when they ate the bread and heard him speak, or make them realize that they could no longer pretend to follow him as an enigmatic speaker.

They challenge him with the death of Abraham, and he counters, after calling his Father to witness, through the miracles, that he is telling the truth, and that Abraham himself was glad to see his day come; and then when they scoff, “You aren’t even fifty years old, and you’ve seen Abraham!” he lashes out, “Amen amen I tell you, “before Abraham came into existence, *I am*.”

Gone is the ambiguity. There is no way to construe this except as a claim to be YHWH; and they pick up stones to throw at him, and he disappears.

This is immediately followed, in John’s Report, by the healing of the man born blind, something which had never happened before, and which the blind man himself says couldn’t have happened unless

God was behind Jesus.

Jesus' behavior now seems to be something like what YHWH did with Sodom based on Abraham's pleas. He is trying to round up his sheep, if any, in the hopes that there will be enough of them who can stomach the seemingly outrageous and blasphemous statements so that he will be able to institute the Kingdom even over the opposition. But "I am ready to give up my life, and then have it back again. No one is going to take it from me; I am giving it up of my own free will. I have the right to give it up, and I have the power to take it back; this is the command I have from my Father."

Here is the "contingency plan" being offered. Jesus can accomplish his main purpose through his death, even though if the people believe, neither he nor anyone else will have to die. One suspects that he would have to have at least *some* people who would stick by him, however. The problem the students had, of course, is that Jesus frequently *does* speak metaphorically ("Be careful of the Pharisees' leaven," which they take literally, and he chides them that he isn't talking about bread.); and as what he says becomes literally more outrageous, they were doubtless racking their brains trying to find out the metaphorical sense that in this case wasn't there.

During the feast of the Dedication, the Judeans, who have been embroiled in controversy about him, challenge him to stop talking enigmas and come out with a straight answer as to whether he is the Prince; and he says, "I have told you, and you didn't believe me. And the deeds I perform representing my Father give proof of it; but you won't believe them either—because you don't belong to my sheep. . . . My Father, who gave them to me, is greater than anyone, and no one can take anything from his hands—and the Father and I are one and the same thing."

And they again pick up stones, but Jesus offers them an out, quoting Scripture, when it says, "I said 'you are gods.'" But they won't any longer be persuaded that he is doing anything but blaspheming, and so he apparently gives up, but actually sets the stage for the raising of Lazarus from the dead.

Why, if John is reporting and not making up things to produce

a dramatic effect, is he the only one who mentions this colossal miracle? There are several possible explanations. First of all, since Lazarus was a friend of Jesus, his return to life (though after four days) was not as dramatic as the raising of the widow's son that Jesus happened upon, or that of the daughter of Jairus; it is much easier to stage such an event if you have the cooperation of your friends. Secondly, if those called back from "near-death experiences" are any indication of the state of Lazarus' mind after his resurrection, it might have been thought indelicate to mention him while he was alive; and by the time John was writing he was dead. I might point out, however, that the two earlier resurrections occurred when the person had just died, and could be explained on the grounds that they hadn't really died, but were in a deep coma. But this was (if not a trick) more convincing, since Lazarus, as Martha said, "is already decaying; he's been there four days."

But the conversation with Martha just before this is really important for our purposes. Here is the way it goes:

"When Martha heard that Jesus was nearby, she ran out to meet him; Mary stayed at home.

"Master," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother wouldn't have died! And yet . . . even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask him."

"Your brother will come back to life," said Jesus.

"I know that he'll come back to life in the Resurrection on the Last Day," said Martha. ["But—"] [This is not in the text, but is clearly implied. Why else would Martha have said what she had just got through saying?]

"I am resurrection," said Jesus, "and I am life. Anyone who believes in me will be alive even if he is dead, and anyone who is alive and believes in me will not die ever. Do you believe this?"

"Yes, Master," she said. "I have always believed that you are the Prince, the Son of God who has come into the world."

Here Jesus makes a clear distinction between those who have died and will come back to life (and Martha knows already that this is to happen on the Last Day—possibly not from Jesus, but the teaching of the Pharisees); but Jesus hints that it can be sooner

because he himself is resurrection and life; but then he says, “anyone who is alive and believes in me will not die ever.”

Note the difference with Mary, who says the same thing Martha says at first, but doesn't add the note of hope that Jesus can do anything about it. And Jesus “heaved a deep sigh [of disappointment]. Then he said, ‘Where did you bury him?’” And when the people tell him to come and see, he breaks down and cries. Why? Because of how much he loved him? Clearly not. Because of the fact that not even these people would believe him—not even Martha, really, as we can see from what follows.

When Jesus asks the people to roll away the stone, she says, “Master, he's already decaying; he's been there four days.” I can see the fire in Jesus' eyes as he turns on her and says, “Didn't I tell you that *if* you believed, you'd see how great God is?”

How many people would take Jesus literally? But he is apparently angry that they don't. And Lazarus' return to life proves that he deserves to be taken literally; though what happens afterwards is that when the incident is reported to the Judeans by the ones who actually saw it, their only reaction is, “What should we do? This man is doing so much to prove this claim of his. If we leave him like this, everyone will believe that he is the Prince, and then the Romans will come and crush our country and our people right out of existence!” And that leads to Caiaphas' assertion that they would be better off with one man dying for the people rather than having the whole people destroyed. And so they commit themselves to killing Jesus, and for practical purposes, the original plan is dead because of an indirect consequence of the major evidence that was supposed to prove it feasible.

But we must not be too harsh on the Judean leaders. Would you actually have believed that in a couple of months death would be abolished forever? Would you have believed that this calling of a friend back from death was not a clever trick by a master magician, and was a real restoration of a decaying corpse to life? Do you believe it now? Do you think this actually happened, or do you suspect that maybe the author is retelling something that he didn't see, like these

urban legends that are going around nowadays that happened to somebody who is known to somebody who knew my cousin?

I know that the mere fact that I *want* it to be true makes me doubt. Perhaps I am investing more credence in what after all isn't as evidentially valid as I think it is.

But he *would* have his recognition as King, however futile it might be in practice. Note that he waits until the Passover, when there would be a flood of Galileans in the city, because he had a better chance with Galileans than simply with the Judeans, and they might be able to sway the people as a whole. He enters the city on a donkey, just as the prophets foretold (if you looked at them hard enough), and is acclaimed King by everyone—except the people who really mattered. When they see what is happening, the Pharisees say to each other, “You see? Nothing will do any good! The whole world has gone after him!”

Immediately after this, John recounts that strange episode of the Greeks who approached Philip, who then took Andrew and told Jesus that some non-Jews wanted to see him. Jesus says, “The time has come for the Son of Man to show what he really is!” And he continues with the analogy of the dying grain of wheat, and his turmoil of spirit, answered by a voice from heaven, at which he announces that the present moment is the world's crisis-point, to be saved by his being lifted up and drawing everyone to himself.

Somehow he knew that the occasion of these Greeks (either Gentiles or Jews who lived in Greece—probably, I would think, the former) wanting to see him was the point at which everything was to turn against the triumphal spirit of the people.

No more does Jesus announce what the Kingdom is to be like on earth; he is leaving, and then going to return. There is one attempt to save the situation: if Judas can be made not to carry out his plan of betrayal, Jesus might still be chosen King. So Jesus offers him a special gesture of friendship, even as this gesture also serves as

the signal to John as to who the betrayer actually is.¹⁵ he dips bread in the Passover sauce and hands it to Judas¹⁶ —“and Satan went into him along with the bread.” Jesus still does not denounce him, and merely says, “Do what you’re going to do, and be quick about it.” But Judas has made up his mind.

John says nothing of Jesus’ interrogation at the actual trial before the Judeans, but from the Synoptics we learn that Jesus said nothing (and so would have to be acquitted, because no two witnesses agreed on what he did), until ordered specifically by the one who had authority over him as a Judean to state whether he was or was not “The Prince, the Son of God [or, as Mark has it the Blessed One].” And he answers, “*I am.*” and clarifies that by indicating where he got the name “Son of Man” that he gave himself: “And I will tell you further that after this time, you will see the Son of Man enthroned beside the Power, and coming upon the

¹⁵There is something here that is not in John’s Report. When he announces that one of the Twelve is a traitor, each asks whether it is himself, and Judas, according to Matthew says, “I wouldn’t be the one, would I, Rabbi?” and Jesus answers, “You are right.” So Judas knew that he knew; which means that this act is an act which indicates that Jesus would not punish him for it. Judas, however, undoubtedly took it as defiance, and determined to carry out his plan. There is some indication that he thought that if Jesus actually had the power he seemed to have (especially if he knew about the betrayal), he would overthrow his enemies and proclaim himself King. I say this because Judas is reported as returning the betrayal-money in remorse at what he did. In spite of John’s understandable animosity toward Judas, his motives could very well be much more complex than we tend to think.

¹⁶Note also that, even though John implies that the following day is the Passover, because the Judeans will not enter the headquarters so that they can eat the Passover dinner, even he seems to indicate that the Last Supper was in fact the Passover meal; because this dipping of bread into the sauce was one of the rituals of that meal.

clouds of heaven,” referring obviously to Daniel’s theophanic vision. What John does report is Jesus’ interrogation by Pilate, where he does not deny being a King, but says that his Kingdom does not belong to this world. This would be true even if he were actually named King by the Judeans, and it would be evident if the thesis of this study is correct, because those not belonging to the Kingdom would witness the transformation of the world. The point here, however, is that Jesus shows Pilate that he has no reason for finding him guilty, and Pilate admits as much, when he goes outside and says, “I don’t see that you have a case against him,” and tries to get him released without actually releasing him contrary to the mood of the crowd.

Jesus, then, avails himself of every opportunity for Judas, the Judeans, and the Gentiles to realize what they are doing and set him free; but in every case, they reject his overtures. Hence, as he predicted in the Last Supper discourse after Judas had left, he was leaving the world; but “I will not leave you orphans; I am coming back to you.” And “you too are in agony now; but when I see you again, your hearts will be full of joy, and no one will take your happiness from you.” And so we find the plan of God as we know it: that Jesus dies, and through his death we are saved; and that he rises, but leaves us so that this salvation occurs through our suffering and our faith that he will in fact return, and every tear will be wiped away. What, then, have we learned about the Kingdom as it would be without this rejection? It seems that entrance into it would be by some kind of bath; that the Eucharistic meal would be eaten in it at least once; that we would no longer be thirsty or hungry; and that we would never die. Would we get sick? John does not report that we wouldn’t. Would pain be abolished? Again, we have no clear indication from John.

It does seem that there would be people who would be outside the Kingdom, who presumably would be living the kind of life we now live, and who would “die in their sins.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE SYNOPTICS

What remains before us is to see what hints the Synoptics leave us of what the Kingdom would have been like if Jesus was accepted; and then to make some remarks about Revelation.

I am going to give a combined view of the three Reports here, as I did in *The Synoptic Gospels Compared*.

First of all, there is nothing in the infancy narratives of either Luke or Matthew that deal with the Kingdom except Simeon's prophesy, which predicts the crucifixion; but that is what really was going to happen, not what would have happened if people hadn't been perverse.

There is a hint of something, however, in John's preaching as reported by Luke and Matthew. John seems to indicate that there would be a radical separation in the Kingdom:

Don't tell yourselves, "We have Abraham for our father";
I tell you that God can make these rocks bear children to
Abraham! No, an axe is now at the trees' roots; and every
tree that doesn't produce good fruit is going to be
chopped down and thrown into the fire to burn!

And, of course, there is the prediction that Jesus would bathe people in the Holy Spirit.

The first indication by Jesus himself of what the Kingdom was to be like was his preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth, as reported by Luke. Jesus opened a scroll to Isaiah, and read,

"YHWH's spirit is on me;
and this is why he has anointed me
to report the good news to the poor.
He has given me a proclamation to deliver;

one of freedom for prisoners of war,
of new sight for the blind;
he has told me to set broken people free
and announce a year of YHWH's favor."

He rolled up the scroll, handed it to the attendant, and sat back down. Every eye in the synagogue fastened upon him.

He began his sermon by saying, "Today that passage is being fulfilled as you listen to it." But the people started to whisper who he was, surprised that claims of divine favor were coming from that mouth.

They couldn't believe it, of course, because they knew him. This was one of Jesus' problems, also mentioned by John, who has Jesus tell the Judeans, "You know me! You know where I am from! But I didn't come by myself."

But what he was saying in this sermon was that the blind would see. And, of course, he actually did cure the blind. What he meant, according to my thesis, was that this would be the normal state of affairs in the Kingdom. And in fact, though the specific act of giving the blind sight seems to have come later, Jesus immediately started going around curing all sorts of people and driving out demons.

These cures, when not looked on as legend, are usually considered as (a) a mark of Jesus' compassion, and/or (b) a sign that he was God. I think, however, that, not denying either of these, Jesus was now inaugurating the "reign of God." That is, he was preparing the people for the time when he would formally declare himself King of Judea (and afterwards the world) by showing people what life was going to be like under his rule.

But Jesus, remember, was not going to take over control of Judea by storm; the Chosen People were to be put to another test like Adam's, in the sense that they had to freely *choose* him as their King, knowing what they were choosing. And so they had to be made aware not only what life in the Kingdom would be like, but that their King was not simply a successor to David, but God in human flesh.

That Jesus thought that this was too much for the people to swallow at the very beginning explains why he reprimanded the

demons who shouted as they were expelled from people, “You are the Son of God!”

Jesus also told many of the people he cured at this point not to reveal that he was the one who had cured them, something a bit surprising, if he was using cures to announce the Kingdom. One possible explanation is that Jesus did not want to be looked on as a miracle-worker; he was telling people the good news—and the good news was that the world was being transformed into a place where sickness, suffering, pain, and death would be no more. That is, it wasn’t that Jesus had the power to do this that was important, it was that this was the condition of the Kingdom of God that he was going to head.

But of course, the people really just thought of him as a wonder-worker, and understandably wanted to take advantage of his healing powers when he was around; they weren’t really interested in any new Kingdom.

This is also why, I think, Jesus called for people to “change your way of thinking, and believe the good news.” (*Metanoete kai pisteuete en te euangelio*) The first verb is usually translated “repent,” but it means literally what I translated it as. Certainly if Jesus were announcing a complete transformation of the world, people were going to have to make a radical shift in the way they thought about things if they were to be able to believe him.

And so Jesus soon Jesus took the next step in the introduction of the Kingdom: he forgave the sin of the paralyzed man who was lowered through the roof. He evidently saw that the man was more remorseful for sins that he had committed than desirous of being cured of his paralysis (were they related?), and so he seized the opportunity and told the man that his sins were forgiven. This, of course, shocked the Jewish leaders, because “only God can forgive sins.”

Jesus answered, “Why are you trying to pick apart what I did? Which is simpler: to tell a man his sins are forgiven, or to tell him to stand up and take his stretcher and walk? But just to prove that the Son of Man does have the power

to forgive sins,”—and he turned to the paralyzed man and said, “I tell you, stand up, take your stretcher and go home.”

The point, of course, was that *saying* the one thing was as easy as saying the other, and producing the effect by what one said was as naturally impossible in the second case as it was in the first; and therefore, since the words produced the effect in the second case (which could be seen), why should one doubt that they also did in the first?

This caused even the Judean leaders to wonder; but not for long, because Jesus was doing things that shocked them: eating with tax-farmers and sinners, and not acting like a prophet, whose students fasted. Jesus pointed out that what he was speaking of was a wholly new state of affairs, and you can't put new wine in old skins. And with the incident of plucking grain on the Sabbath, Jesus claimed command even over the Sabbath day, even though he cited precedent for what he was doing. (Note that the other two writers who were editing Mark dropped his little proverb “The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath.” This may be true in a sense, but it detracts from what Jesus is quite clearly trying to get across in this particular place: that *he* is the Master of the Sabbath, and therefore can do what he pleases on the Sabbath, not simply that you have to use common sense in keeping it.)

The proof that he had command over the Sabbath was given with the healing of the man's shriveled hand in the synagogue on the Sabbath, which Jesus did by simply asking the man to hold out his hand. In this, he accomplished two things: (a) he showed clearly that, if God was with him (and how could he not be if he could make cures like this, especially in a synagogue and on the Sabbath?), he had been given control over the Sabbath; and (b) that the Judean leaders had no grounds to charge him with anything, because after all he didn't *do* anything to the man; he only asked him to hold out his hand.

But instead of being convinced, of course, the Judean leaders plotted to “ruin” him. The verb here is not “to kill,” and so it need

not be assumed at this early stage that they actually wanted him dead; disgraced or discredited would do.

At this point, it is appropriate, I think to bring in the Sermon on the Mount; presumably something like a manifesto of the Kingdom would have been stated by Jesus at the beginning, though (certainly as Matthew reports it) the authors probably brought in material from throughout Jesus' public life. But Jesus would have been testing the waters, and seeing how much people could take; and what he found, of course, was that they could not take much, and later he would have to speak in analogies (parables), so that at least some people would be able to understand and the others would not be blameworthy.

When you look at the beatitudes in the light of the thesis I am advancing, they appear quite different from the way we normally think of them.

“It is a blessing for people to be poor, because they have God as their King [Matthew: “they are ruled from heaven”].” Matthew adds, as I said earlier, “in spirit,” to restrict this to the poor who do not use their poverty as an excuse for hating God. But think what this means: “You won't be poor much longer, because the Kingdom in which God rules is just about to be established.”

And the exordium of the speech continues in the same vein: consider yourself blessed (in the sense of “lucky”) if you are suffering, because you are about to be comforted; if you are not assertive (“meek”), because you are the heir of the new Promised Land; if you are hungry and thirsty (for virtue, Matthew adds), because in this Kingdom, you will have all you want; if you are merciful, because you will be shown mercy; if you are pure in heart, because you will see God; if you make peace, because you will be a child of God; and finally if you are oppressed, because you are the subject God rules over.

As I said, probably the actual list was closer to that of Luke, because Matthew tends to classify things according to topic, and Luke simply mentions poverty, hunger (presumably physical hunger), suffering, and oppression. Nevertheless, the idea is the same. Jesus

says that those who have what any sane people would call curses are in fact the lucky ones, because these for some reason are the key that opens the gate to the new Kingdom. This is reinforced in Luke by the doom pronounced upon the rich, the full, the happy, and the applauded (which, interestingly enough, Matthew omits—I think on the grounds that Luke’s Report if not qualified might give the impression that *simply being* poor gets one into heaven and *simply being rich* damns one). And later on, as Jesus meets the rich young man, he remarks at how hard it is for a rich man to become a member of God’s Kingdom; harder than for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye, though “for God everything is possible.”

Why is this? Because the poor, the suffering, the hungry, those whom others trample on, are the ones who see that life as it is now lived does not make any sense, and are predisposed to view the miraculous cures as an actual revolution in the construction of the world, and to listen to Jesus and follow him. On the other hand, the rich, the flattered, the assertive, are people for whom life as it now exists is good and rational, and who are threatened by any change. But here we have the first of the *double entendres* that Jesus increasingly makes. The beatitudes would literally occur shortly after Palm Sunday if Jesus were accepted as King, but they still do apply in a different sense, even in our own day, and so do the condemnations. Jesus is not promising to us (or to his listeners either, who would in fact reject him) that in a year or so, all believers’ tears would in fact wiped away, but only that this *could* happen; but if not, after suffering and dying with him, the believers would be members forever of the New Jerusalem, which will only come about when the world itself has gone through suffering and death before God “makes everything new” again.

Jesus points out that his listeners are the earth’s salt, which I take to mean its preservative; and they had better be careful not to let themselves go rotten, or there is nothing that can be used to freshen them. They are also the world’s light, which has to shine over the world and not be hidden. That is, the news of the Kingdom must be spread by them and not just by Jesus.

Jesus then gives his rules for conduct in the Kingdom; it is to be a question of interior disposition, and not simply external behavior—"not simply" because "not the dot on one I or the cross on one T will vanish from the Law." The willingness to let others take advantage of oneself (which is what these rules boil down to) makes sense in a Kingdom where no one can in fact do harm to another or use another for his own gain, though it is excessively impractical in the world we live in. If someone slaps you on one cheek, and you turn the other, be prepared for a punch. If someone takes your coat and you offer your shirt, your pants won't be far behind.

So I think we have here an indication that in the Kingdom, it will simply not be possible for people to take advantage of each other; and people have to change their way of thinking so that they are (a) not interested in taking advantage of others, and (b) not constantly worried about who is stealing a march on them, and covering their flanks. You can't become a member of the Kingdom unless you forgive your enemies. Why? Because they are going to be just as happy as you will be, and you won't be able to get even with them.

The rule still applies in the spiritual Kingdom; but its sense is different. If we let people take advantage of us, they will take advantage of us, and despise us as weaklings to boot. But the point of doing this as things now stand is that by so doing, we unite ourselves to Jesus crucified, who allowed people to take advantage of him; and so we die with him to rise again with him. In the spiritual Kingdom, we are not to expect justice in this life before death. (I might point out here that this applies *only* to the individual himself; one must not let harm be done to those one has responsibility for. Thus, a man cannot "turn the other cheek" and allow his wife to be raped, for instance, and a government *must* defend its people from attack.)

But this injustice one allows, of course, is because of the punishment of mankind for the rejection of Jesus. In the Kingdom Jesus would have established, there would not exactly be justice

(because there would be no atonement for sins of the past), but no one, once he is a member, would have to worry again about mistreatment by others.

On that point of atonement, note that Jesus has, before this, simply wiped away people's sins; they didn't have to make reparations for what they had done. And this is what will happen in the Kingdom. The wrong done up to now will not be atoned for; it will simply disappear; and therefore, the members of the Kingdom must be prepared to accept that situation. Paul makes the same point in the letter to the Romans. If you want God to punish the sinner, then you are repudiating the very basis on which you are a Christian: that God has redeemed us by a free gift, not allowed us somehow to "right the wrong" by punishment. —And how few are willing to do this! We can "forgive" if we believe that the person who has wronged us is somehow going to pay for what he has done; but how many of us will entertain the possibility that the person who has done us damage will get off scot free and even suddenly be lifted up to bliss? But that is the Kingdom.

There is no need to do good visibly; the Kingdom is the reward for those who enter it, and what people think of us is nothing, because ultimately each of us will be what we choose to be, not what we are expected to be.

And, of course, not only do we not need to concern ourselves about mistreatment by others, there is absolutely nothing to worry about. In the Kingdom, nothing adverse can happen to anyone. We need not be afraid that God will give us something that we might not like, or even that we will ask for something that might be harmful; God loves us, and he will only give what we would have asked for if we knew everything relevant to what we were asking.

The result of this speech was not that the people caught what he was saying; everyone was astonished at what he said, but because he taught as if he himself were in control, not as if he was interpreting something else, as the Scripture scholars did.

Jesus gives an indication that the Kingdom was not just open to Jews when he heals the slave of the centurion at Capernaum; he also

shows his power by healing the slave without ever seeing him, and simply by a word.

But something else is revealed here and elsewhere about the Kingdom: the person's own belief that it will happen is what brings about the cure; and so presumably, it is faith that suffering will actually be abolished that will enable the Kingdom to come into existence. And this makes sense. If people don't believe that Jesus means what he says, but take him as some kind of magician, then they won't accept him as their King except in the sense that any set of people accept a great man as their ruler. But Jesus has to be accepted as the God-King, and not even in the sense that Augustus was regarded as a god-king; Jesus must be accepted as YHWH, ruling not from the sky but in the flesh of this human being.

Jesus also, presumably somewhere in this early period, but after the manifesto of the Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount, actually brings a few people back to life, like the son of the widow of Nain and the daughter of Jairus. Again, he is proving that he is capable of bringing about the kind of world he has announced. He is giving evidence why people should believe the good news he is reporting. For the benefit of his students, he stills a storm when they wake him in fear that the boat will be swamped; and expresses annoyance at their skepticism after they had seen all the other things that he had done. Not even his students had a notion that the world was about to be completely transformed.

The incident of the Gadarene (or Gerasene) demoniac shows that, even if non-Jews could participate in the Kingdom, they were certainly not prepared to accept Jesus as their ruler; when they see how he has destroyed the herd of pigs in curing the demoniac, they beg him to leave their land. There is a certain irony here; they doubtless knew the Jews' attitude toward pigs, and were anything but eager to have their way of life altered.

When Jesus heals the dumb demoniac, the Judean leaders try to neutralize what he did by claiming that his power came from the ruler of demons; and Jesus, of course, answers that a kingdom divided against itself cannot survive. It becomes increasingly likely

that the religious leaders will not give Jesus a hearing, let alone support; and without them he cannot be chosen as King.

So Jesus warns them about the sin against the Holy Spirit, which cannot be forgiven. This takes on a special meaning in view of my thesis. If they reject him, this will be irrevocable; the promised Kingdom will not occur, and suffering and death will not be wiped away. We will continue to “earn our bread in the sweat of our brow,” even though by the Divine ingenuity this will result in our ultimate redemption.

To reinforce the notion that his power is not some special gift or talent he has, but is simply the way things will be, Jesus then names his twelve emissaries, whom he sends to announce the Kingdom, and they, to their joy, find that they too can cure people and drive away demons.

John, now in prison, also tries to bring his own students to recognize who Jesus is, and sends a delegation, and Jesus replies as to what is happening to the blind, the lame, lepers, and the poor, recalling Isaiah’s prophesy that Luke has him quote at the beginning of his ministry.

But Jesus was finding himself rejected already in such cities as Chorazin and Bethsaida, in spite of what he had done in them; and he pronounces their doom.

And now when people ask him for evidence (as if he hadn’t given it!) to prove that he was the Prince, he makes the ominous statement that the only evidence they will be given is that of Jonah, who was in the whale’s belly three days. Mark reports Jesus as saying no evidence will be given, which doubtless Jesus said on one occasion. The Jonah addition in Luke and Matthew might well have come either from some other time, or more likely from some explanation of this to his students.

I suspect that somewhere around this time occurred the Bread of Life speech John reports, where not only the leaders but the ordinary people were alienated from what Jesus was trying to tell them; and so he now seems to resort to ingenuity to fulfill his mission, having seen that open proclamation of who he was and what

he was about was closing people's minds rather than opening them. His problem at this point is twofold: (a) the Kingdom must be revealed, so that the people will have been told about it when they finally make their choice, and cannot plead that they were uninformed about what Jesus meant; and (b) somehow, the reluctant Judean leaders must be forced by the people into accepting Jesus.

As events worked out, we can see how Jesus carried this out. The revelation of the Kingdom now took the form of analogies and stories; and by them and by the cures and so on, Jesus gathered a large enough following that, when he chose the Passover to enter Jerusalem on the prophesied donkey, a large enough mass of the people would be on his side in the center of Judaism that the leaders would not dare do anything except acknowledge him as King. The plan was foiled, of course, by Judas, who made the Judeans able to capture Jesus secretly and hold a trial before the people got wind of what happened.

At any rate, it is at this point that Jesus begins speaking in analogies and stories; and the reason is so that people will hear about the Kingdom but not be able to understand it. Why is this? The obvious answer is that then they would not be culpable in their rejection of Jesus. But the thesis sheds, as I said, a different light on this. Jesus must tell the people what the Kingdom will be like, because that is his mission. But if he does so, then in spite of the fact that some will accept it and turn to him, the people as a whole will reject him out of hand, irrespective of the confirming evidence that God was with him (they were beginning to do so already)—and they would do this before even the message could be delivered in its fullness.

Hence, Jesus tells the message in stories and analogies, or in other words in enigmas, so that the people will be told, but will be able still to accept him as King without the bald understanding of what this entailed; and in that way, Jesus could, as it were, trick the people into allowing him to bring about the transformation of the world. It is not that he was lying to them; he was simply presenting the truth in such a way that (a) it was there to be understood by

“one who had ears to hear,” but (b) it was not such as to inflame passions against him. Those who would reject him could now dismiss him as a riddler.

But this, of course, means that the analogies tell us what the kingdom would have been like if Jesus were accepted. This is not to say that the analogies have *only* this sense; they apply both to the physical and the spiritual Kingdoms. That is, they are equally applicable to the Kingdom if Jesus is accepted or rejected, but their sense is different in each case. I am only giving the sense that applies to the physical Kingdom, because commentators for centuries have teased out the sense that applies to the Kingdom that actually occurred, which is the spiritual one.

From the analogy of the farmer, we note that the good news has various ways in can be accepted. Presumably, then, even in the physical Kingdom, there would be people who would for various reasons choose not to become members; and also those who did become members would not all be equal, because the seeds reproduce at different yields.

The analogy of the seed that grows secretly shows that this is not something done by the person who enters the Kingdom, but is God’s work, independently of any effort on his part.

The mustard seed shows that the Kingdom will spread through the world, even though it seems to have insignificant beginnings; and the leaven illustrates more or less the same thing.

The analogy of the weeds among the wheat is interesting. When applied to the physical Kingdom, it apparently indicates that there will be sinners there, up until the completion of time, when they will be collected and thrown out.

First of all, when is this “completion of time” (*syntelei ton aionos* lit. “completion of the age”)? Presumably, it is the same as the completion of time is now, and I speculate that this occurs at the time *Revelation* indicates when the impatient martyrs are told to wait “for the complete tally of their fellow-slaves and brothers who were to be killed as they were.” That is, it is possible that the Kingdom is

supposed to have a certain number of members in it;¹⁷ and when this number is reached, no new development will occur, and there will simply be eternal fulfillment for those who have chosen to accept membership (or in the present order, being rescued from their sins). In the physical Kingdom, there would be no suffering for the members (except perhaps those who sinned after they entered), but there would be an increase in numbers up to the final tally, and then the sinners would be expelled. Presumably, there would be no cataclysm heralding the transformation of the world if the physical Kingdom was actually founded. This point is again made in the analogy of the net that catches all kinds of fish, which are separated in the last day.

The analogies of the hidden treasure and the pearl, of course, simply say that the Kingdom is the most valuable thing that any person could desire, worth giving everything else up for.

The next thing that is significant for our purposes is that of the Syrophenician woman, who begs to have Jesus cast a demon from her daughter; and Jesus refuses, with the harsh-sounding phrase, "It is not right to take the children's food and give it to dogs," and she makes the clever response about the dogs' eating what falls under the table, at which Jesus yields to her request.

We tend to think that Jesus' cures were exercises in compassion; and certainly this one and that of the centurion were. But this incident shows that Jesus (who no doubt was *also* compassionate) was curing the Jews for a different reason; he was giving them the "children's food." The thesis makes sense of this. The cures of the Jews were the inauguration of the Kingdom, the way things were normally to be when Jesus was accepted as King. The cure of non-Jews was an act (a) of supererogation on Jesus' part, and (b) one which would tend to undermine what he was doing to the Jews,

¹⁷Certainly not merely 144,000, which is a symbolic number meaning the square of 12—heaven on earth—and the cube of 10=5x2, or persecution-martyrdom.

because it would look (as it has for millennia) as if he simply was using his power out of pity for the afflicted.

When the Pharisees ask Jesus for a sign from heaven, he reprimands them by saying that they already know how to read the signs of the weather in the sky; and therefore, they should know how to read the signs in what he is doing.

Then, on the road to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus reaches the turning-point in his preaching about the Kingdom; he asks who people think he is, and the answer is that most people do not consider him the prophesied Prince of the new Kingdom, but a prophet like John or Elijah. He then asks his students who they think he is and Peter blurts out, "The Prince," with Matthew adding "The Son of the Living God," whereupon Jesus says, "Good for you, Simon Bar-Jonah! Flesh and blood hasn't revealed this to you; it was my Father in heaven!" And Jesus names him, in essence, Prime Minister.

But at this point, Jesus begins to tell the students that he is going to be crucified; because he knows that he has not been able to convince a critical mass in those who have heard him, and the Bread of Life speech (which none of the Synoptics record, of course, but which, as I said, probably started the preaching by analogy) has alienated many who before were willing to listen. And therefore, anyone who comes after Jesus will not simply enter the physical Kingdom, but will have to give up his life, and do what his followers now do, uniting themselves to Jesus in his suffering, and only later rising with him in glory.

He softens the blow of this by the transfiguration, in which he is seen with Moses and Elijah, who, as Luke reports, were talking to him "about his departure" (*te exodon autou*). What were they saying? Discussing ways in which it could be avoided?

After this, Jesus points out that important positions are nothing in the Kingdom, because presumably there will be no power that one person can exercise over another; we will all be like children; able to interact, but not able to dominate. In the spiritual Kingdom, of course, this childlike attitude of receiving and not being in control

enables us to unite ourselves with the obedient, crucified Servant; but in the physical Kingdom, it would be literally the status of everyone, and the rulers would be at the service of their constituents, without having any power over them.

The Kingdom, apparently, will be able to recover those who have sinned and left; the analogies of the lost coin and especially of the lost sheep seem to imply this. That is, in terms of the physical Kingdom, the lost sheep would not refer to those who have not yet entered (since those do not belong to the flock yet), but a sheep which belongs to the flock and then strays.

The command of Jesus to forgive “seventy times seven times” and the analogy of the unforgiving servant, when looked at in terms of the physical Kingdom, imply that all of us will be given the enormous treasure which none of us deserves of being freed from sin, suffering, and death; and since presumably none of us can do any damage to others in the Kingdom, the notion that we are “owed” by others, or that we have a right to “make people pay” for the damage they have done to us, is incompatible with that form of life.

Jesus now extends his commission to seventy students, probably for two reasons: (1) to reinforce the notion that this is not just some special power that Jesus has, but is the condition of the Kingdom itself, and (2) to see if this greater dissemination of the good news can head off the opposition that is becoming increasingly harsh. At their triumphant return, after conquering demons, Jesus says that he saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. There is still a possibility for success, apparently. Jesus remarks, “It is a wonderful thing for your eyes to be able to see what you are seeing. In fact, there are many prophets and kings who longed to see what you are seeing, and did not see it, and to hear what you are hearing, though they did not hear it.”

In the story of the good Samaritan, the fact instructive for our view of the physical Kingdom is that it was not to be confined to

Jews, but even to those they despised.¹⁸

The analogies of the importunate friend at midnight, the corrupt judge, and Jesus' statement about asking and knocking indicates, perhaps, for the physical Kingdom that persistent prayer on the part of the students might bring it off.

Jesus now denounces the Pharisees and Scripture scholars, essentially for being so wedded to their interpretation of Scripture that they couldn't see what was happening before their own eyes; the fact that some of the traditions were being broken, though they were of no consequence, blinded them to what these traditions pointed toward.

The story of the rich fool who stored everything in his barns, of course, indicates that those who think they can make their way without entering the Kingdom (because they have great possessions) are deluded. Hence, we should not be concerned about what to wear and eat and so on; in fact, in the Kingdom, we won't have to eat at all if we don't want to.

The analogy of the watchful servants suggests that the actual inauguration of the Kingdom would be rather abrupt. Perhaps Jesus was preparing the students for Palm Sunday, which was "make or break" time, given the opposition of the leaders. If Jesus could bring the people with him during this religious festival, then they could perhaps override the Pharisees and Scripture scholars, and the Kingdom would be a *fait accompli* before anyone could do anything to prevent it.

The analogy of the barren fig tree in Luke indicates that it is possible for even the Judean authorities to wake up to the facts, provided enough cultivation is given them.

The analogy of the wedding banquet shows again that the Kingdom, though originally for Jews, is open to anyone. It also, of

¹⁸Times have changed so little. The Samaritans were the ancestors of the Palestinians, and they and the Jews had the same attitude toward each other (for almost the same reasons) as the present-day Jews and Palestinians.

course, says that not everyone who is invited will attend, and not even all those who become members will be properly disposed, and will be removed from the Kingdom.¹⁹

The warning that you must “hate your own father” and relatives would mean that you might have to become a member over the opposition of those you love most; and the only real choice is the Kingdom rather than relatives. Many who have joined monasteries have put this into practice in the spiritual Kingdom; but it would have been that much more tragic in the physical one, watching those one loves die because they would not enter.

The analogy of the prodigal son shows that a virtuous life is not a condition for entrance into the Kingdom; nor is atonement for the past necessary. The father simply welcomes the son, completely ignoring what he has done. This lesson is reinforced by what happens with the brother (who, notice, is not excluded from the household even though he is envious). The story also seems to indicate that one can leave the Kingdom and then return after coming to one’s senses. The gates would always be open for travel in both directions.

The analogy of the corrupt manager of the estate seems to show that if a rich person is clever with his resources, he can use them to get into the Kingdom. It seems to counteract the warning that it is harder to enter the Kingdom for a rich man than for a camel to pass through a needle’s eye; here Jesus seems to be saying that there is a way you can use money to “buy your way in,” as it were.

If this is taken in conjunction with what Jesus says to the rich young man, then the way you do it, apparently, is by giving it away to the poor; they are the “friends” you make for yourselves with filthy lucre.

The analogy of the rich man and Lazarus warns people that you

¹⁹ If this interpretation of this and other analogies is correct, it seems to argue against those who think that, once one has accepted Jesus as savior, there is no possibility of not being saved. There are several instances where Jesus implies that expulsion from the Kingdom will occur; and this presumably would apply both to the physical and spiritual Kingdoms.

can't count on living the kind of life you now live once the Kingdom is inaugurated. It also contains the warning that looking for proof is futile; because even if someone comes back to life from death, people won't listen to him. It is, of course, significant that the poor man here is named Lazarus (the only time there is a name to any character in the stories), and Lazarus was the one who, according to John, did in fact come back to life (and whose return did not convince the skeptics). When people ask Jesus when the Kingdom will be inaugurated, he says that there won't be the usual outward signs of it; it is already here. This seems to mean that as Jesus was gradually accepted, people would find that they did not get sick and they just kept living; and only after a while would it be evident that the world had been transformed.

Still, there are other indications that it will be obvious when Jesus assumes his power. "The eagles will gather where the body is." The analogy of the corrupt judge is interesting, not only as indicating that persistent prayer might bring about the Kingdom, but for its last statement. "Still, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" We think of this as the Last Day; but it could just as easily refer to Palm Sunday—and the answer was that he did not find faith on earth.

The analogy of the workers in the vineyard is another indication that the rewards of the Kingdom will not be based on how hard we have worked to get them; we are all going to be invited in, and living in the Kingdom is our reward. And if God chooses to ignore the greater mess that people other than I have made of their lives, who am I to complain?

The analogy of the talents, of course, doesn't deal with life in the Kingdom, but what to do with the good news about it. This is given to each to be spread to others; and it is based on this whether we gain entrance ourselves.

The entry to Jerusalem is the first step toward Jesus' actual acceptance as King; it was, I think, intended so to cow the Judean leaders into accepting Jesus because of the enthusiasm of so many people. The flaw in the plan, however, as John points out, was that

they were as afraid of what Rome would do as what the people would do during the festival. Jesus knows this, and weeps over Jerusalem. I suppose the cursing of the barren fig-tree is a symbolic act by which Jesus recognizes that he will not in fact be accepted.

In sparring with the Judean leaders, Jesus does say something revealing about the Kingdom. His answer to the question of the wife who had seven husbands seems to say that in the Kingdom, where people will not die, they will not have sexual needs either. Presumably, we would be able to be with others; but the exclusivity of marriage would be a thing of the past.

Beyond this, what Jesus is doing at this time is warning people not to reject him. The analogy of the evil tenant-farmers shows this. Even the prediction of the end of things, which mixes up the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of time, deals, it would seem, with the real world, preparing the students for the horrors that are to come because of the rejection of Jesus.

There are, then, quite a number of hints from the Synoptic accounts of Jesus' sayings and actions as to what life in the physical Kingdom would have been like. All of them are ambiguous, as I have stressed, and are open to a spiritual interpretation if Jesus is rejected. And these are consistent with what we saw from John.

So it would seem that, if Jesus had been made King, those who chose to do so would have bathed themselves "in the Holy Spirit" and in water, and would have joined the new King, feasting as we now do on his body and blood, but with no hunger, thirst, sexual desire, or sickness; and we would never die. We could sin and leave the Kingdom, but not damage anyone in it without that person's consent; but even if we did leave, we could still reenter if we saw the folly of our ways.

Before repining at what we have lost, consider that in the Synoptics, at least, there is no mention of identity with Jesus and living the life of God himself; and, in fact, apart from the Bread of Life speech, Jesus does not give any indication of this in John's report until the Last Supper, after Judas had left and set the passion events into motion. And even in the Bread of Life speech, one who

eats will “live *through* me,” and not, as in the Last Supper, live *in* me “as I live in the Father and the Father lives in me.”

So it is quite possible that in the physical Kingdom, God would be with us in the flesh and walk and talk with us, as he did during Jesus’ public life; but the identity with him, and the ability to think the Divine Thought—the Beatific Vision—was not something that was to be part of it.

Thus, the rejection of Jesus brought us, along with the agonies so many of the best of us suffer in this world, the undreamed-of gift of actually being God Almighty; and this self we have created for ourselves by our choices is not only itself, but a cell in that body which is Jesus, so that it both lives its own natural life (as a skin cell in my body does), but also, and foremost, lives the divine life, just as Jesus does. So once again, we have a “happy fault”; just as Adam’s lapse brought us Jesus, so our rejection brought us into, not unity with, but identity with him. And even the Kingdom will occur; but now only after the end of human development.

So I think it can be said that the suffering that the world has undergone can make sense—and even, perhaps, more sense than if Jesus had been accepted and the physical Kingdom established.

I should point out in this connection that, given the fact that we are cells in one body, one person’s suffering, when offered in behalf of others, might make it possible for the other to achieve a goal that he would not be able to achieve by himself. That is, it might well be the case that in the economy of the present order, where the pathway toward one’s goal that does not lead through suffering simply does not exist, that in a given case, the pathway toward a goal would entail so much suffering that the person would reject the goal, or might even choose a self-contradictory goal and be lost. But the suffering of another, offered for him, might open up a pathway of lesser pain that he can choose, just as one part of a body does things to heal other parts.

If that is the case, then suffering is, as has been taught for centuries, not only something that we endure because of the Fall and the rejection of Jesus, but a positive tool to enable others to achieve

goals they otherwise wouldn't achieve.

It is only in this spirit that the "self-sacrifice" that Ayn Rand rails so much against not only makes sense but is ennobling. Knowing that ultimately I am going to achieve my goal—and so my suffering here is not actually doing damage to my true self—I can accept this temporary suffering to enable others not to lose courage and to choose goals that they otherwise wouldn't choose for fear of the formidable difficulties in their way. So the self is not destroying itself for the sake of the other, but taking on itself temporarily more of the penalty of our perverseness so that weaker souls can prosper beyond their unaided powers.

And this, of course, is what Jesus did in the crucifixion: enabled us to achieve a goal that was absolutely impossible for us by ourselves; and so the sufferer who offers his suffering for others is uniting himself to Jesus crucified, and is applying the redemptive suffering of Jesus to others in the world.

What this study adds to this is that it was not the *per se* intention of God, nor of Jesus, that things be this way, but rather it was God's will *per accidens*, because of the choice of mankind to reject him twice. So Jesus is not the "supreme altruist," who somehow brings about happiness by his own suffering; he is the supremely clever manipulator, as it were, who turns the tables on perversity by using it for the happiness of others. Jesus did not seek his own crucifixion; it was brought upon him against his desire by the free choices of others—even though he freely accepted it, if this was the will of the people.

Thus, people like Nietzsche and Ayn Rand blame Jesus needlessly. Their blame is perhaps well placed on the usual interpretation of what the crucifixion was all about; I think a case could be made that it would be self-contradictory of a loving God to create a world like ours where the nature of things is such that pain and suffering exists in it. And a "plan of salvation" whose purpose is to rid the world of suffering through an acceptance of suffering is also a contradiction.

But suffering as a punishment, and as something temporary that

in the last analysis makes no difference (and is necessary—because of the punishment—for achieving one’s freely chosen goals), makes it possible to see the horrors of this world in a light that does not explain them away, but still allows them to fit into a rational scheme of things.

I think I still would have preferred the physical Kingdom, even if it meant the loss of the unimaginable gift of identity with God. For that matter, I would have preferred the world in which there had not been a Fall in the first place. But I can accept the world I live in, in spite of the fact that at times I must cringe when I see the dismaying images that daily bombard us on television. In one sense, we are greater because we are in the world of suffering and pain, because we are not only called, but are children of God; and what we will be cannot even be imagined.

CHAPTER TWENTY

REVELATION

Strictly speaking, *Revelation* doesn't have anything to do with the physical Kingdom Jesus would have set up if we had allowed him to; but I think a few words about the book are in order, now that it seems that a case can be made for the present order's being a "contingency plan" on God's part.

The reason is that *Revelation* is a poetic Theology of history; and since it looks at the whole of history from the divine point of view, the study I have made can shed a little light, perhaps, on what it is saying.

I have made an extensive commentary on the book part of *The New Testament: An Idiomatic Translation*; I do not intend to reproduce it here, but merely make remarks that indicate how to read *Revelation* in the light of what has been said so far.

The first thing to notice about the book is that it is a poem, not a cryptogram. Granted, the numbers and the images are symbolic (the lamb representing Jesus, his horns power, his eyes knowledge, three and nine standing for God, four for earth, and so on); but it is really the emotional force of the often bizarre imagery which conveys the meaning the author intends. You have to know what the symbolism represents in order to appreciate the work; but knowing this is not really to catch the meaning. You must, armed with this knowledge, read it and let it "work" on you the way any great art object does; and when you are through, you understand through the emotions something that is not conveyed in any other way.

Thus, for instance, when you see John weep and then hear that

the “lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has won the right to open the scroll and break its seven seals,” and then you see “surrounded by the throne and the four animals, and surrounded by the elders, a lamb, standing as if slain, with seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent into the whole world,” this lion-lamb strikes terror into your heart. No little animal this that you would want to pat on its curly head. And in fact people call to the mountains and rocks, “Fall on us and hide us from the face of the one seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the lamb!” It is the emotional impact of the imagery which conveys the idea of both the meekness and the overpowering force of Jesus.

But the poetic nature of the book has another aspect to it: it means that its message applies in every age, because every age has something that the symbolism esthetically attaches to, whatever its reference in John’s time. And its basic message is that the Christian community will be apparently conquered by secular forces, and its defeat will be its victory over those very forces.

What I am saying is that in every age there will be a beast numbered 666 (someone using secular authority to usurp God’s, and—the number—the object of God’s wrath) and a small beast (secularism as a religion) which tries to force everyone to worship the beast; but in every age—in every country, for that matter—the beast will be a different person or political power. Nero was the “prime analogate” for the beast, and the name “Nero Caesar,” if written in Hebrew characters, has a numerical value of 666. It does not follow (and need not, because this is a poem) that each age’s stand-in for Nero will have a name adding to 666, nor that everyone whose name (or name and title) adds up to 666 is the one in that age who is Nero *redivivus*. John had to reveal to his contemporary readers who he was referring to in such a way that he would conceal the information from the Romans (and so avoid charges of treason and further persecution); but that particular need for cryptogrammatic utterance is not there for subsequent generations, even though the basic problem might remain throughout history.

One thing further that needs to be clarified before my

comments make sense: It has been taken for granted by practically all Biblical scholars that seven is the number of totality or perfection, on the grounds that it is $4 + 3$, or “earth” + “God.” On this view, six ($= 7 - 1$), as the number of the beast, is imperfection striving to reach perfection and failing.

I think this is wrong, on three counts. First of all, these two numbers would then be the only numbers in the work arrived at by addition or subtraction, and not multiplication. Secondly, if 7 were the number of perfection, why is the heavenly Jerusalem full of the number 12 (4×3), while sevens, used throughout the rest of the book, do not appear there at all?²⁰ Thirdly, six is 3×2 , a much more logical way of reckoning the number than $7 - 1$, and more consistent with the way other complex numbers are arrived at (even such numbers as 1260); and the number is perfectly consistent with a creature that sets itself up as God. But it turns out that from the words repeated six times or multiples of six times (including “angel” = 66), the number seems to imply the wrath of God. On this showing, the beast is not only the anti-God, but is the subject of the wrath of God, which certainly fits his role in the book. “Beast,” incidentally, is used 38 ($= 19 \times 2$) times, and 19, a prime, seems to be reserved for words like “woman” and “blood,” which can be either good or bad depending on the context. This would mean that political power is not of itself evil; it is only so when it sets itself up in place of God—as it inevitably does in practice. But then what of seven? The obvious Theological reference for seven is the seven days of creation in *Genesis*; and so that is what I think the number means. Thus, things that occur seven times, or some multiple of seven times, are things that occur throughout history, according to God’s plan of creation-salvation.

²⁰There are a couple of words repeated either seven times or a multiple of seven that appear in this section: honor₇, tree₇, and slave₁₄; but these are completely overwhelmed by the words repeated twelve times, as well as the objects (gates, foundations, dimensions, etc.) twelve of which explicitly appear.

And this is why I think *Revelation* is a Theology of history. It is a poetic look at the multiple meanings of what history (creation) is, until it reaches its fulfillment in the New Jerusalem, when there are no more sevens, and God and the world come to rest at the end of evolution.

The fact that the series of septets of disasters (the seals on the scroll of history, the trumpets, and the bowls of God's wrath) dovetail into one another, with the seventh seal introducing the scene of the trumpets and so on, is an indication that these are not successive events, but different perspectives on the *whole* of history up to the end. This is reinforced by the strange sequence of tenses one sees in the book, often written off as bad Greek mangled by one who did not know the language. But such sequences, going from future to present to past, as in the scene of the two witnesses in chapter 11, are (a) less likely for one who does not know the language, since he would be prone to keep a given tense once he adopted it, and (b) too systematic and located too precisely to be the vagaries of one who had no grasp on Greek verbs. What they do is confuse the sense of time, mixing up the past, present, and future—which is just what one would want to do if he was writing from a perspective which was true at all times throughout history.

If we look, then, at the book, we find first the letters to the seven communities in Asia (minor), indicating various attitudes people had taken toward the good news in relation to the secular world, and comments on how God views those attitudes. The fact that there are seven such letters indicates that these attitudes prevail throughout history, and are subject to the same rewards and punishments.

Then John is taken to heaven, with the 24 representatives of the Old and New Testaments, and also the four animals that represent nature; and the first thing he sees in God's hand is a scroll, completely covered with writing, but sealed with seven seals, which no one can open except the standing-slain lion-lamb, who represents Jesus. The word "scroll," not incidentally, appears 21 (= 3 x 7 = God's action upon history) times in the book; and it clearly

represents the facts about creation or history, which Jesus reveals.²¹ When the lamb opens each of the first four seals, one of the four animals calls out “Come!” evoking the vision of one of the horsemen; and operative words used during these curses are “horse₁₆” are “victor’s wreath₈,” “saber₄,” “wine₈,” “land of the dead₄,” and this horseman is given control over a *fourth* of the earth; and the sixth seal introduces the vision of the *four* angels controlling the earth’s *four* winds at its *four* corners. Clearly, a plethora of fours. Thus, one can conclude that what John is trying to tell us here is that from one point of view, the disasters that happen on earth are the result of the laws of nature.

The next series of curses come from angels₆₆, who are given seven trumpets₆; and the disasters destroy a *third* of the earth, turn a *third* of the sea into blood, killing a *third* of the “creatures with souls,” embitter a *third* of the rivers, darken a *third* of the sun and moon and stars, and take light away from a *third* of the day and night; and then the eagle introduces *three* woes upon the earth. Obviously, this series is in terms of threes. The conclusion from this series is that, from a different perspective, one can look at those same disasters of the first series as the result of the wrath of God because of sin.

At this point (the sixth trumpet—the one representing the wrath of God, of course), history splits in two, with the two witnesses and the 3-1/2 (half of seven) days₂₁ ($21=7 \times 3$; i.e. God intervening in history), the 42 ($7 \times 6 = \text{God’s wrath throughout history}$) months₆ ($= 3\text{-}1/2$ years), and the 1260 (either 10^3 [persecution], 13×20 [evil x earth (4) x punishment (5)], or 6^2 [wrath of God] x 5 [punishment] x 7 [history]) days₂₁ (also = 3-1/2 years).

That is, there is a turning-point in history, occasioned by Jesus’

²¹That this is not accidental can be seen from the fact that there is another small scroll (βιβλαρίδιον), which is used 3 times (it is the one John eats, giving him a private revelation); and also the word βίβλος, which is used twice.

appearance, who is clearly indicated by the death of the witnesses in the “great city . . . where their Master was crucified.”

And when the seventh angel sounds his trumpet, there is the appearance of the woman robed with the sun (symbolizing the Church) who gives birth to the male and is taken away from the python into the desert for the 1260 days; there is the war in heaven in which Satan is driven out and thrown to the earth, the appearance of the beast and the smaller beast, the false prophet, and the victorious lamb upon Mount Zion. The earth’s harvest is reaped, and then there appear the angels with the bowls₁₂ of the seven last curses—which are “last, because in them God’s fury₁₀ is brought to completion.”

These, which are a slightly modified version of the disasters of the previous septets, are now in terms of 12 (completeness: earth-heaven) and 5 or 10 (persecution, punishment). The imagery is also that of a battle between the forces of the lamb and those of the beast, with the defeat of the beast assured.

And what this means is that there is a third way of looking at history because of what happened to Jesus: that of a battle between God (especially in the person of Jesus, after his appearance) and secular authority, which attempts to take over God’s place in people’s lives.

It is significant for our purposes that the imagery here is ambiguous; in one sense, John seems to be talking about the Christian half of history; but the numbers and other aspects of the images seem to indicate that what he is saying deals with the whole of history, even before Jesus.

And this, of course, fits perfectly with the thesis of this study. Granted that Jesus was rejected (the “witnesses” killed), then the *whole* of evolution—at least as regards the earth—has been affected in such a way as to have within it, not only human disobedience to God’s will, but the attempt by humanity to depose God from his throne: to deny his existence and take over his authority. What John is saying is that this rebellion is doomed to failure from the start, even though it will always *seem* to be succeeding, and even though

it will create many martyrs. He also is telling us that the natural disasters that occur in this world are not only a following of the laws of (wounded) nature, nor merely natural laws that plus a punishment for the sin which wounded the nature, but also the conquest by nature's Master over creatures trying to set themselves up as the creators.

This could perhaps be illustrated by a modern example. AIDS is, as the AIDS activists rightly say, an infection by a virus, and so is something that follows the laws of nature. In this sense, those quite innocent of any wrongdoing can catch it (e.g. by blood transfusions); because, as John says, "If anyone is taken captive, he will go into captivity. . . . Here is the persistence and faith of the sacred people." But AIDS is also God's punishment for disobedience of his laws. But there are at least three senses in which this is true: In the first place, if Adam had not sinned, there would be no such thing as AIDS. Secondly, if no one violated God's laws about sex and drug taking, then even if the virus existed because of Adam, then it wouldn't be in a position to be able to infect people. Thirdly, if individual people did not violate these laws, they would be extremely unlikely to contract the virus. So in those three senses we can consider AIDS a punishment from God, which is consistent with the fact that (a) not everyone who in fact violates God's laws catches AIDS (only a small percentage of the world and people are harmed by the disasters John imaginatively speaks of), and (b) some of those who do not violate God's laws catch it.

And finally, who can deny that AIDS is the result of the activism of those who recognize no God and set up their own choices as the ultimate arbiters of what is right and wrong, however unrealistic this might be? We find ACT-UP invading the Catholic churches and trampling on the sacramental Body of their Master—because the Bishops who preside over these churches presume to say that the way to avoid AIDS is to stop engaging in the kind of activity that puts you at risk of it. The people who are react so violently about this are furious that they can't do the thing that gives them AIDS and not get AIDS—because, after all, aren't we autonomous? "Autonomy,"

after all, is just a way of saying that I am the sole person who gives myself laws; I am God. Those who claim to be autonomous simply *pretend* that they are autonomous; and God, who gives authority to all laws, thwarts this attempt.

That is, John is saying that it is no coincidence that diseases such as syphilis and AIDS “happen to” occur at times when humans take the moral law into their own hands. God is not mocked, and he will not allow his creation to be mangled by those who wish to turn it into the travesty of “autonomy, self-creativity, and human fulfillment.” There are facts about creation, wounded as it is, and these facts will defeat anyone who tries to deny them, even while they seem to be defeated by those very skeptics.

And in the end, the New Jerusalem will appear, when the final tally of those who are to belong to it is made complete; and God will say, “Now I am making everything new,” and “what is in the spring of the water of life will be available to anyone at no cost”—that is, “the one who wins the battle will inherit this, and I will be God for him, and he will be a son to me. As for cowards, skeptics, the impure, adulterers, prostitutes, sorcerers, idol-worshipers, and every sort of liar, their fate is in the lake burning with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”

Death, then, has been overcome by resurrection into a transformed world for those who persevere; but it has been transformed into a hideous perpetual dying, one might say, for those who were defiant.

John, of course, is not talking about the way things would have been, but the way they actually are, given the choices we have made, and the way they will in fact be, based on these choices. But his picture fits nicely into the reconstruction of the Kingdom we made, in the sense that it shows the responsibility we have for the world we now live in, and gives us the assurance that in spite of our perversity—indeed, even to some extent because of it—we have an unimaginable future facing us, not only where “every tear will be wiped away,” but the joy of a bride on her wedding day.

As John has Jesus say in his Report, “When I see you again,

your hearts will be full of joy, and no one will take your happiness away from you. —And that will be the day you have no more questions to ask me.”