

IS IT SO?

To Linda, Paul, Richard, Marc and Bryn

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FOREWORD

Why did I decide to publish this book at this time? I thought that the 400th anniversary of the King James Version of the Bible was something that I should celebrate as all my work on religion uses this version as its English text. I also celebrate this year my 65th birthday and I thought that this was a good time to publish what I had written so far on the subject.

All the texts found here are also available with very limited emendation on FaithfulFool.org but as most people do not like to read long texts on their computers and still prefer the good old book format, I decided that it was high time to publish a paper version.

I feel that this book is my most important written contribution to the people around me. While I wrote more than four textbooks while teaching Physics at Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf, I believe that what I wrote here is far more important as understanding correctly Jesus' message is far more important than understanding Physics.

Although I retired as a teacher quite some time ago, one does not retire from being a Roman Catholic and a Christian. My Church tells me that I must use my talents and money for the furthering of God's Kingdom; this is what I am doing here to the best of my abilities.

I was born a French Canadian in Montréal, Canada, from a prosperous and pious family. I was taught for fourteen years in schools where religion was on the curriculum, and so it was always on my mind. This said, my greatest influences on this subject were two lay people: Blaise Pascal, with his Pensées and his Mémorial, the latter a report of a religious experience by the great physicist, and later Henri Bergson with his Les deux sources de la Morale et de la Religion. Both brought me to the realisation that religion is indeed an experimental science for those who actually want to experience God and live according to His message. From there my next crucial influence was Father Henri Caffarel's Présence à Dieu.

After a three year undergraduate degree in Physics at Université de Montréal, I won a Rhodes scholarship to Oxford, where I stayed for two and a half year. The Oxford Roman Catholic Chaplaincy was manned at my arrival by Fathers Michael Hollings and Crispian Hollis. Father Michael was a truly remarkable man, available to all 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The Chaplaincy was always open, and he welcomed warmly everyone. He left Oxford the

year after I arrived for a parish in a poor sector of London, where again he was available to anyone whatever the hour of day or night. Father Crispian continued in his predecessor's ways and later became Bishop. With shepherds like that, we learned a lot about how to live our Faith.

The Chaplaincy also held daily masses, usually with a sermon as well as tea open to everyone, even tramps. Many non-Catholics joined the Church there, among them my future wife, Linda Nadin, brought there by some of her Catholic friends from her College, St. Anne's; among them was Karen Armstrong, who later made a name for herself on the subject of religion, although she was then writing a thesis in English Literature.

I could also attend Mass at Blackfriars, the Oxford Dominican Convent, where I met outstanding people like Fathers Simon Tugwell and Geoffrey Preston, whose books I was to read later. Also at Oxford, I was introduced to Evensong and so the Book of Common Prayer in my college, Corpus Christi, where the Reverend John Austin Baker was Chaplain. He later became Bishop, and wrote The Foolishness of God, a book I read twice.

I came back to Montréal after Oxford to teach Physics at the *collégial* level of my alma mater, Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf. I found the textbooks used very dogmatic in approach: the Law to be studied was first stated, followed by its applications and consequences and by problems that often described conditions that could not be experimentally met.

My study of religion had made me very wary of that approach: I wanted Physics to be more practical in its applications, more towards Engineering; and I wanted to find out how these Laws had been found and formulated, how the various concepts had evolved, how we knew for a fact that such and such a process takes place.

Oxford had shown me how unsatisfactory was my grasp of Physics. I decided to further my practical understanding of it, to figure out with what apparatus and how the various physicists discovered such and such an effect and how from these experiments the fundamental Laws were construed. I wanted to show my students what these Laws meant for us in our everyday world by problems which were based on conditions that could actually be reproduced. These goals required me to write my own textbooks, which evolved

as my knowledge and understanding increased. My last two are available on JacquesBeaulieu.ca.

During all the years I taught Physics, I read about my religion, be it the lives of the saints, their writings, the Bible, the New Catechism, the texts of various scholars already mentioned and many others. During most of these years, my daily reading included the Liturgy of Hours, also known as the Breviary, first in Latin, then in English. I found great solace in this wonderful book of the Catholic Church.

I was first instructed in the pre-Vatican II Church but was reformed by the Council just like the Church. I assimilated the new emphasis on the laity, on the early Church, on the actual sources of our Faith. From the fundamental principle that Jesus is our Teacher, that He and only He is really God's Word, in fact God-Made-Man, I understood that He is far above the Pope, the Bishops, the philosophers, the theologians or this or that organization. Christians must refer to Him if they want to know God; all the accretions that came from the Fathers of the Church and others based or not on philosophies that were foreign to Jesus are just that: additions. All that others have produced in their meditations on Jesus are but the fruit of their human understanding.

Sometime after I retired from teaching Physics, I decided that it was time for me to have a go at trying to further my understanding of Jesus' words and actions by putting pen to paper, by analyzing as carefully and as honestly as possible what He said and did. I wanted to really understand His message, what He stood for, using all the tools that I had developed in my various studies. This was especially important to me as I found that lots of Christians acted or reacted to events in ways that seem to me contrary to Jesus' teachings.

I am not an ordained minister of my Church. This gives me the freedom to make suggestions and come up with insights that may not square perfectly with the official view. I am not a holder of a degree in Theology. Again this gives me the freedom to challenge some tenets of today's biblical scholars and theologians which to me make no sense. Whether I am right – as I believe that I am – or not is to my reader to decide for herself. She is ultimately the judge of my writings, my analysis and my arguments; she ultimately will decide what of it she will consider valid and what she will consider unacceptable.

Of course the Magisterium of my Church can also decide that such and such an idea is acceptable or not; after all, that is one

of the reasons the Magisterium exists, that is, to test so called “new ideas”, which I believe in my case to be but the original ones – and see if they are plausible.

I hold a Masters in Physics from Oxford. But I studied Latin and Greek at *Brébeuf* and I think that I have learned how to think correctly with time and effort, and what I learned in figuring out things in Physics I have definitely applied here. Scholarship is scholarship whatever the subject.

To finish, I feel I have something important to contribute to the subject of Theology. I feel I was compelled by God to write these texts as well as to publish this book at my own cost with the help of my family. I pray that this work is, as it was intended, to God’s greater glory. It is to you, my dear reader, to be the judge of its value, and to decide if *it is so*.

As found in the Book of Common Prayer at the close of Evensong, “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, be with us ever more. Amen.”

Feast of the Transfiguration of our Lord, August 6th, 2011

Jacques Beaulieu

CHRISTIANS AND SCRIPTURE

WHY THIS ESSAY?

In this day and age, like in any other for that matter, devout Christians read the Scriptures to try to understand God's message. And now, just like before, they struggle to understand many of the Scriptures' statements, especially as quite a few seem to contradict each other.

Of course, we can just rely on the interpretation which is handed to us by the representatives of our various Churches. The problem with such an approach is that these representatives have often modified their Churches' official understanding. All the Churches, for instance, used to profess Creationism. My Church, the Roman Catholic, has now repudiated a literal reading of the Creation story found in Genesis while quite a few Churches still accept it. All Churches used to consider homosexuality a grave sin, while now some bless homosexual unions using the Scriptures to back their position. Some claim that Scripture teaches that Church Ministers must be males while other Churches do not agree with such an interpretation.

So who is right? Who is wrong? How can we tell? Are there actual objective criteria by which any Christian should be able to evaluate the various official readings?

While Christians often fight over the meaning of this or that passage, some individuals, including many scholars, put in question the authenticity and validity of the texts used to fuel these disagreements. As an example, a school of theologians, The *Jesus Seminar*, has decided after long discussions and argumentations that most of the Gospel texts are fantasies or distortions of the actual events and that most of the words attributed to Jesus are definitely not His. How can we answer them? Or can we? Is our faith based on anything solid? These are the questions I want to examine in this essay.

I will start with the Gospels, as I believe these to be the most important texts for Christians as they are the only ones which claim to report Jesus' words and deeds. I will try to demonstrate that these texts are truthful. Then I will try to gauge the importance of the other texts accepted by Christian Churches as sacred and thus, part of the Christian Scriptures.

But before I can proceed, I have to choose which English translation of the Bible to use. There is no doubt that a great number of Christians are especially fond of the King James Version of the Bible, also referred to as the Authorized Version. It is the version of choice of most Evangelicals and it is the most important English text in existence. I will thus use that version exclusively.

PRODUCTION OF THE GOSPELS

I want to examine how, when and why the Gospels were produced. I intend to work these problems from a very down to earth point of view, asking fundamental questions about people's needs in the environment found at the time of Christ and then using these answers to make my "educated" guesses.

What was the role of "scribes"?

Any society needs some form of "bookkeeping": there are financial transactions, deeds, official documents, religious documents, letters, etc. to be written in a neat and orderly fashion. Scribes were people who provided these services. They were secretaries, notaries and accountants.

Someone who required their services was not necessarily unable to read or write; scribes provided texts that were far superior in presentation to what the casual writer could produce. They provided expert handwriting as well as grammatical and spelling accuracy. They also knew how to express the thoughts of others while writing a text easy to understand.

Scribes could have been used as "reporters": people who took down what was going on and what was being said. Their employers could then be admirers of the speaker or religious and state Authorities intent to keep abreast of what was going on in their jurisdiction.

What was the language in Palestine in Jesus' time?

In Jesus' time, most inhabitants of Palestine probably spoke the Greek of the time, known as "*koiné*", the "common" language, as well as their own dialect, which varied with their particular area. At the time Hebrew was probably a mostly dead language, still used at the Temple, but not very much elsewhere.

The Hebrew Bible had been translated into Greek in Alexandria by 200 BC. According to tradition, this translation was accomplished in a short time by seventy Jewish scholars, and so it became known as the Septuagint, a term that means seventy. Now, why was this translation necessary, if not because Hebrew was dying as a spoken language among Egyptian Jews?

Jews did not live only in Palestine and Egypt but all over the known World. It follows that their original language, Hebrew, was rather useless nearly everywhere they lived. Furthermore, Palestine and Egypt had been overrun by the Greeks centuries before Christ; so the “official” language there, the one spoken in the courts, by army officers, tax collectors, rich people, etc. was certainly Greek. Business transactions were in Greek as were the official records. In fact, some of the Jewish books of the Roman Catholic Bible were written directly in Greek and so lack a Hebrew version. This lack explains why they were removed later by Jewish rabbis from their official Hebrew “Bible”.

When in Jesus’ time, pilgrims came to Jerusalem to pray at the Temple, the language by which they could communicate with other pilgrims and the locals was Greek. The Roman authorities spoke Greek. If Jesus spoke directly to Pontius Pilate, it would have been in Greek. This was surely the language spoken by the Jewish authorities to the governor and the language by which he communicated with the crowd. The three languages of the Cross were Latin (to signal that the sentence was handed down by the Roman governor), Hebrew (to spite the Temple Priests) and Greek (to be understood by most who could read).

So when it came time to write down what Jesus did or said, and later what His followers did or said, it had to be in Greek. Any other language would have had very limited use. So why it is so improbable to many that the Gospels would have been written in Greek from the beginning? Who knows, the Sermon on the Mount might have been given in Greek also. Is not this as plausible as Aramaic?

Notice that Jesus’ followers writing in Greek does not entail their immersion in Greek culture any more than the use of English in India, for instance, entails that its peoples know or accept the English culture. Greek was just their language of communication. Using the Septuagint meant that Jews could keep their identity and religion while using the Greek language. After all, the Gospels’ writers could not have been exposed to Greek ideas even if they wrote in Greek as this would have required them to be part of the idle rich.

The Septuagint, have I said, is a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made by Jewish scholars two hundred years before Christ. Unfortunately, the Greek text they produced is somewhat erroneous and thus does not say exactly the same thing as the original Hebrew. This is one of the reasons the Jewish Scholars later re-

jected it. On the other hand, it has been shown that the various Gospel writers usually quote the Septuagint version as they quote the bad Greek translations of the original Hebrew. This again seems to reinforce the idea that they would have worshipped in Greek rather than Hebrew, and thus would have used the Septuagint as their “Hebrew” Scriptures.

The fact that the Gospel writers refer to the Jewish Scriptures in their Septuagint version is the first reason why I will from now on refer to the Hebrew Scriptures as the Septuagint. The second is that my Church, the Roman Catholic, recognizes as part of Scripture all the Jewish books that formed the Septuagint in Jesus’ time. The third is that I want to avoid the term “Old Testament” to describe these books as I find this term derogatory to the Jewish people: the term “Old” is not meant here as a term of fondness; on the contrary, it implies that that their Scriptures are *passé*, “history”.

When and why were the Gospels written?

I do not see how the time of writing of the Gospels can be dissociated from their purpose. Texts cost money; they require “paper” and a scribe. It is thus something that is produced only when there is a real need.

The followers of Jesus were not all poor; and some were educated. Scribes are mentioned constantly in the Gospels. They were there to take down what was said, at least the same day as it was said. Obviously not everything that Jesus said was written down. But what some considered most relevant was taken down during His ministry, just as was done for the Prophets. It follows that the core of Jesus’ sayings and actions were written down during His lifetime, in one form or another, but obviously not in the form of our Gospels.

Soon after Jesus’s death and resurrection the disciplines started preaching outside Jerusalem and Palestine. And quickly their followers were thrown out of their old synagogues. What were they to do?

They needed their own places to meet for prayer as well as their own prayer services. They kept using the Septuagint which they read not only as predicting Jesus’ actions, death and resurrection but also as the basis of Jesus’ teaching. But if Jesus was what made them outsiders to the Jews, and if the Septuagint was the Book of the Jews, doesn’t it follow that Christians needed a sacred book that would distinguish them from the Jews? The story of Jesus was what

convinced them to become Christians. This story caused them to be kicked out of their synagogues, frowned upon by their friends and attacked as trouble-makers. Was it not imperative that this story be written down for use as a written witness to Jesus?

So the Christians' ejections from the Jewish synagogues would have forced the writing of the Gospels in their present form.

It is also the case that Christians preachers needed authoritative texts on why one should be (or become) a Christian as they started to preach far and wide. You try to convince the people of the Book by a book, the one of the Good News.

The way the message was quickly disseminated in different towns and villages, East and West, and in different countries by a lot of different people makes it more likely that the Christian Book would differ according to the region and the "writer"; but I believe that the four Gospels that all the Christian Churches consider authoritative form a coherent whole, without any inherent contradiction as far as the essential points. That the Gospel texts do not agree word for word on lots of sayings of Jesus does not worry me. What would worry me is if they would have to be interpreted in such a fashion that a fundamental contradiction would appear.

As time goes by the more likely it becomes that outside influence, different in each community, would interfere with the final texts, causing ever greater discrepancies. Great variants could mean that the texts would have been a long time evolving before finding their present form. We could thus find fundamental contradictions between the Gospels.

Some important Christian preachers met in Jerusalem around year 45 AD. No disagreement regarding the story and sayings of Jesus is found in the Acts' report of this meeting. Furthermore none is mentioned during the time of the writing of the various Canonical Epistles or of those of the Apostolic Fathers.

The only problem for the proclamation of the Gospel that needed to be addressed at Jerusalem around 45 AD had to do with the degree of Judaization that pagans had to fulfill to become Christians. As this problem is not treated by Jesus in any of the Gospels, the major players in the proclamation of the Gospel needed to meet to decide what to do about something not covered by their sacred books.

Indeed Jesus did not say that one was to do away with circumcision as this is not one of the prescriptions of the Law that He either did away with or changed by something else. Both He and His apostles had been circumcised. On the other end, circumcision applied to Jews only as it differentiated them from *goyim*. So a debate followed.

No Gospel author invented a story where Jesus solves this problem. Luke, for instance, could have done so instead of having Peter and Paul debate it in the Acts of the Apostles. This he obviously could not have done if he had finished his Gospel years before or, of course, if he was truthful and honest.¹

It has been noted that Paul's expectation of the end of the world changes as he gets older. While in his first letters he suggests that it will happen very soon, he admits his ignorance in his last ones. Jesus seems to say that the end will be soon.² Editorial changes could have been done to correct such passages. This again requires dishonesty as well as late writing.

For all these reasons, I conclude that all the Gospels were in their final form by 38 AD. But I do acknowledge that this conclusion is totally at odds with all the biblical scholars. So I will try to show that their dates (something like two generations later) are not at all believable.

I consider that all four Gospels had to exist in their final form at the very latest around 65 AD as there is no mention of the siege of Jerusalem or the destruction of the Temple, facts that would have been mentioned as they were the proof that the Old Covenant was naught and that Jesus was right.

The author of the Acts of the Apostles, who states that he also wrote the Gospel according to Luke, describes events up to around 62 AD. Even the Book of Revelation does not mention the destruction of the Temple, something that would have fitted very well

¹ Something that many modern scholars find difficult to believe

² For example: "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh. And he spake to them a parable; Behold the fig tree, and all the trees; When they now shoot forth, ye see and know of your own selves that summer is now nigh at hand. So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand. Verily I say unto you, This generation shall not pass away, till all be fulfilled. Heaven and earth shall pass away: but my words shall not pass away." (Luke 21:27-33) This text fits better with the earlier Pauline writings.

in such a book. So it is a fair bet that the whole of the texts of the New Testament were written before 65 AD.

I know that this is not what is generally accepted by biblical scholars; but I just do not see how people would have waited even 30 years to produce the Gospels: that is an exceedingly long time. By then the Gospel was being preached in probably more than a hundred places. Could all that happen without any books?

I consider that the reading of Paul's letters to congregations started after that of the Gospels. These letters would first have been read only to their intended recipients, and certainly not over and over. Copies were then made available to other congregations as they were highly thought of. While this process is described in the writings of the Apostolic Fathers, there is no mention of such a process about the Gospels. Why? Because their introduction was not news as they had been read from the beginning.

This is also why Paul does not mention it as such. He mentions teaching the "Good News" which he himself received. This could refer to the teaching found in a book, though, I must admit, not necessarily. But why is it that it does not matter who preaches, Apolo or Paul? Is it because the same message, the same "Good News", the same book is expanded upon by one or the other? Rabbis taught in their synagogues after prayer with and reflection on a text of Scripture; would not Christian preachers have done the same? Would they not have reflected on a written passage from the Gospels in whatever shape it was then? The Jews read from the Torah in their services; would not Christians have done the same from their Holy Book, whether we call it Gospels or the Apostles' reminiscences as Julian Martyr did?

It is said that the reflections found in the Gospel of John require it to be of late date. I do not see why. The later a document like a Gospel appears after the others, the more it would be looked upon with suspicion.

John's main objective is to make crystal clear the fact that Jesus is the embodiment of God, God's Expression, God's Word. He considers that this point was not emphasized enough by his fellow Gospel writers. He assumes that his readers already know the Synoptics as he does not mention the sayings of Jesus already found

there as long as he finds them well reported. But, as a first-hand witness,³ he corrects and complements the Synoptics.⁴

If the Gospels were all written before 40 AD, there would indeed be some witnesses to the actual events to consult and to vouch for their accuracy on the essential points.⁵ It certainly makes sense to assume that those who had been part of Jesus' group during His lifetime and believed in Him after His resurrection would have wanted to report what Jesus said and did and what He meant to them. Those people would have wanted their experience of Him put down for others. We are not here talking about a trivial event like the death of a ruler or the fall of a city or even a great event like the destruction of the Temple, but about something they considered crucial to them and others, a matter of life or death for all.

The message Jesus proclaimed is fundamentally different from most of the Septuagint. The claims He made about Himself are either true or false: if they are false, He is mad; if they are true, He is the most important human in history. As His followers were certain that He was that Human, they could not wait to write His sayings down nor could they start inventing them (which means very simply lying about Him). So His claims have to be His.

Of course this argument does not guarantee absolute textual fidelity. I do not go as far as suggesting that we have in the Gospels the actual words of Jesus but rather that the Gospel text is a satisfactory report of what He said and did, written by someone who had had the chance to hear the same message given many times as

³ "And he that saw it bare record, and his record is true: and he knoweth that he saith true, that ye might believe." (John 19:35)

⁴ I show in Life, Love and Law that John seemed to have assumed the knowledge of the Gospel of Luke. That Luke and John would have worked together makes a certain sense as Luke mentions events relating to Mary, whom John took on as his mother after Good Friday and as John's Prologue has much in common with Luke's three Gospel Canticles. They also both categorically claim to have been witnesses to the events of Jesus' public life which they describe.

⁵ much as Luke describes in the opening passage of his Gospel: "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration of those things which are most surely believed among us, Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word; It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, That thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed." (Luke 1:1-4)

Jesus preached from community to community as well as having had the chance to ask Him questions privately.

In conclusion, it seems to me that the reporting of Jesus' life, death and resurrection was for His followers a pressing business. They could not wait to cap the Septuagint by the Story that made sense of it all by revealing God in His infinite Mercy.

Do the Gospels make any difference?

Many will say that my analysis so far is flawed. Scholars all seem to agree that my time frame is wrong. If the scholars' time frame is right, the gospels' value as authentic documents is doubtful.

This point has been proven by Crossan's experimental analysis; he found that the process by which a story is passed on orally causes the actual words used each time to vary in a quite remarkable way. From that it follows that the last oral version can be considered to represent but only vaguely the original. So between my arguments which would permit me to date the Synoptic Gospels before 35 AD and the John Gospel before 37 AD while being all based on earlier written documents so that they can all be considered truthful, and those of them who would date them after the 70 AD if not well after, there is a choice: either these texts can be truthful, or they are quite doubtful.

Either the gospels are telling us the truth about Jesus' ministry concerning all the essentials or they do not. Countless humans in the span of twenty centuries have lived their lives in accordance with Jesus' ministry as stated in the Gospels; theirs have been lives spent in peace, joy and effective work for their fellow humans; theirs have been lives that have been looked at with awe by many who, though unable to follow suit, sensed their inner value and admired those who could live in such a way.

There must be something in the Gospels that is of great intrinsic value if those who live according to them live more fully than those who do not, if those who follow their sayings are transformed by them and so ready to suffer pain and death to remain faithful to them.

The early Christians did not fight to protect either themselves or their religion, unlike the Jews of about a century before⁶ or the Muslims of about six centuries later.⁷ The early Christians espoused complete non-violence, just like Jesus had before. They were persecuted and they flourished under persecution as the witness of their lives brought people to believe in the Gospels' truth.

How can these lives, based as they are on the Gospels, really be based on nothing but lies, fairy tales and inventions of a group of men who, just some time after Jesus' death according to them, were so scared that they were living in hiding? Where did they find this courage to preach what they said was the truth? Where did they find the perseverance to go on in the face of hardship and persecution? Why did they manage to convert people to their message? This message was not an easy one to follow; there was nothing to gain in the short term.

Conversion to the life of the Gospels is simple to understand if they are God's authentic message: in them Jesus says very clearly that He (God Incarnate, the Expression of the Father) gives His followers the strength they need to live like Him.⁸ These texts say that God Himself supports His followers, fashions them like Him. These identify the Agent for that change in these individuals.

But if the Gospels are all deceit, why are they effective? Where does the strength to change come from? If the Gospels misrepresent Jesus, they very simply tell lies. Can saintly lives be built on lies? Perhaps, but is it very likely?

⁶ The Macchabees, for instance, fought for their faith, killing their *goyim* oppressors as well as the Jewish traitors to their faith.

⁷ Muhammad fought his oppressors and won wars against them.

⁸ For instance: "At that time Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes. Even so, Father: for so it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered unto me of my Father: and no man knoweth the Son, but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him. Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:25-30)

What I have just said does not imply that the Qur'an is a lie or that a proper reading of the Septuagint, as done by the great rabbis, is unable to provide people with a saintly way of life. I can accept that Muhammad got revelations from God by the intermediary of the Archangel Gabriel. I joyfully acknowledge that a great many Muslims live saintly lives, just like a great many Jews and Atheists for that matter.

Indeed God speaks to all who want to hear Him, each in a different way. God does not demand uniformity but on the contrary loves diversity, as His creation clearly shows. No two people are alike, no two lives are alike and God never acts in the exact same way twice. This said, I am not a Muslim, a Jew or an Atheist but a Roman Catholic Christian, and it is my Christian faith and my Holy Books that concern me here.

Disagreeing with some of the statements made in this Chapter is not of great consequence on the next except for one exceedingly important point. It is based on the assumption that the Greek Gospel texts of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John are trustworthy as they inform us correctly about what Jesus preached and did inasmuch as these help our understanding of Him and His message. If this is not true, there is no point in being a member of one of the Christian Churches and of following Jesus' "message" as it is simply false.

THE CHRISTIAN BIBLICAL HIERARCHY

The Christian Bible is a library composed of the Septuagint, the Gospels and a set of other Christian texts (the Acts of the Apostles, some of their letters, a sermon and a strange book called Revelation). The Church Fathers decided that these alone constituted the Christian sacred library, though they considered some books more important than others.

The Primacy of the Gospels

The Gospels tell Jesus' story. His story is fundamental to all the Churches including mine, the Roman Catholic Church. So the four Gospels occupy a very special place in all of them. I will here take as an example of this special place some of the liturgical practices of the Roman Catholic Church, practices which send a definite message to the faithful. During Mass, the most important assembly of this Church, the congregation rises only for the proclamation of the Gospel but not for that of the other texts of Scripture. The same happens for the Gospel Canticles at the Morning, Evening and Night prayers of the Divine Office.

We Roman Catholics believe that Jesus is God Incarnate. The Gospel writers also believed that. Not only is it clearly stated in the beginning of John's Gospel⁹ as well as at its end¹⁰, it is apparent on every page.

After all, why were these written if not because they contain a very important message, so important that people were ready to forgo everything, even life, to pursue it? The Gospel message had to come from God as they were for the Jews the only messages worth dying for. While the other messages from God start with "Thus says the LORD God," Jesus' sayings start with "I say."¹¹

Nowhere in the Gospels does Jesus complain about His mission or get His marching orders; He does pray and is far from happy

⁹ "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." (John 1:1;14)

¹⁰ "And Thomas answered and said unto him, My Lord and my God." (John 20:28)

¹¹ "Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matthew 5:38-9)

about the prospect of torture, but then who is? Nowhere in the Gospels does God speak to Jesus; only to others.¹² In John, Jesus is unequivocal: He and the Father are one.¹³ He speaks for the Father.¹⁴ He is God's Voice.

So His sayings are the most important ones there is, because they are God's own sayings. They are what God wanted known of Himself and His purpose. Jesus' life is also part of God's self-revelation. His life is an example not only of how a Christian should live but also of how God acts, in His intercourse with humans and their society, be it at the religious, political or individual level.

This is why the Gospels are so important to Christians. They express who God really is, and what humans really should be to have eternal life,¹⁵ that is, to be taken up in God.

What I say here is that Christians cannot put a text from the Septuagint *on par* with a text from the Gospel. The Gospels override the Septuagint; they also override the other Christian texts which should derive from the Gospels.

This statement is very important. If true, it means that finding out what we must be to be saved only requires looking at four books in the whole Christian library. It is not that the others are not beneficial or useful; just that they are not at the core of what it means to be a Christian.

Of course, the Gospels are immersed in the Septuagint. They constantly make reference to it. Jesus often comments it or uses it as the basis for His arguments. So there is a way one can say that a proper understanding of the Gospels requires a good knowledge of the Septuagint. This being said, the reading of the Septuagint is then made from the perspective of a Gospel text rather than

¹² For instance: "And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is my beloved Son: hear him." (Mark 9:7). None of God's utterings are directed at Jesus alone, but at the bystanders.

¹³ "I and my Father are one." (John 10:30)

¹⁴ "For I have not spoken of myself; but the Father which sent me, he gave me a commandment, what I should say, and what I should speak." (John 12:49)

¹⁵ "Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life." (John 6:68)

per se and one can still note that a great many Septuagint texts are never referred to in the Gospels.

The concept of original sin, a concept Christians associate with the action described in Genesis of Adam and Eve eating of a forbidden fruit while in Paradise, is not found in rabbinical literature. The Christian interpretation of this text is thus very different from that of the rabbis. Furthermore, Christians do not interpret the Septuagint as rabbis do from within their rich Talmudic tradition but from a very different one indeed.

This said, my statement on the supremacy of the Gospels stands logically only if there is nothing in the Gospels to contradict it. There is found in them no reference to other sacred texts written by Christians (hardly surprising, as the Gospels refer to a period prior and were, I believe, written before) so there is no mention of these being *at par*. But can we find something in the Gospels to contradict what I have said about the Gospels overriding the Septuagint? Some people would answer by an emphatic “yes”.

Before I look into this point, there is another that must be examined first.

The Principle of Coherence

I consider it is impossible to accept any interpretation of any text in any Gospel which would contradict any other Gospel text. This is what I call the principle of coherence. Contradictions cannot have been introduced in the text by the author or by Jesus Himself. As Jesus Himself said: “Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand.”¹⁶

This is a most important principle in reading each of the Gospels: any interpretation of any excerpt that involves a contradiction of another excerpt is a false interpretation. The only acceptable interpretations are those which permit the entire text to stand as a coherent whole.

This means that the reading of verses must not be done in isolation but within the context of the whole passage and of what else Jesus said or did. Only then can we know the all-important inflexion in His voice that can change the meaning of a text completely.

¹⁶ Matthew 12:25

The Gospel authors never described such a thing as His tone of voice, but anyone who reads a novel knows how important this is.

This has to apply to the four Gospels taken together as they represent the life and sayings of the same Person by people who were in agreement over His message. There is one *caveat*: this does not apply to incidental details, details that do not change the meaning of the story, details that the normal reader of such texts would find irrelevant.

Jesus rewrote the Septuagint with His message

We can now come back to our problem about the Septuagint's status. The text that people would quote to prove that the Septuagint has to be considered *on par* with the Gospels is this text from Matthew:

[17] Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill.
[18] For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. [19] Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.¹⁷

In verse 18, Jesus states that nothing from the Law, however small, shall disappear until the physical world as we know it disappears. He adds in verse 19 that one has to live by and teach all the Law's commandments to be great in the Kingdom of Heaven.

In verse 17, Jesus says that He has not come to dissolve, destroy, overturn or make obsolete the Law and the Prophets as these terms translate the Greek verb used "katalusai" (καταλυσαι). Jesus says He has come to fulfill, complete the Law and the Prophets as these are the translation of the Greek verb "plêrôsai" (πληρῶσαι) which, by the way, could also be translated as fecundate (as a man makes a woman pregnant).

What does Jesus mean by fulfilling the Law and the Prophets? That question needs an answer if we are to make sense of this text. The verse that follows the ones already quoted: "For I say unto

¹⁷ Matthew 5:17-19

you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven”¹⁸ gives the answer. The commandments of the Law, lived in their entirety by the scribes and Pharisees, are not complete but miss some crucial elements. Jesus then proceeds to fill a few of them. They all have to do with interpersonal relations. He starts with what was incomplete “Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time,” and follows it by “But I say unto you” which fulfills the original commandment by making it much stronger as in the following case:

Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment: But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.¹⁹

or by changing it completely as in this case:

Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.²⁰

It is thus clear that in these instances, Jesus fulfills the Law by rewriting it! And rewrite He goes on doing, as in this other excerpt from Matthew:

The Pharisees also came unto him, tempting him, and saying unto him, Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause? And he answered and said unto them, Have ye not read, that he which made them at the beginning made them male and female, And said, For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh? Wherefore they are no more twain, but one flesh. What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. They say unto him, Why did Moses then command to give a

¹⁸ Matthew 5:20

¹⁹ Matthew 5:21-2

²⁰ Matthew 5:38-39

writing of divorcement, and to put her away? [8] He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so. [9] And I say unto you, Whosoever shall put away his wife, except it be for fornication, and shall marry another, committeth adultery: and whoso marrieth her which is put away doth commit adultery.²¹

Verse 8 of this last quote makes it clear that for Jesus the Law – of Moses, not of God – is flawed; He fulfills it, makes it what it was meant to be. Verse 9 makes clear that for Jesus the Law of Moses condones pure and simple adultery.²² So Jesus corrects the errors from Moses and others, so as to make the Law what it was meant to be.

Someone could say that the Law Jesus refers to in the verses 17 to 19 previously examined is the “real” Law of God, while the Jews were following the “error-filled” Law given by Moses and so manage to reconcile His statements that way. While I have to agree that this is possible, I do not find this very convincing, as He would not then say that all the Law must be obeyed. So I maintain that Jesus was not serious about that statement but just said what some wanted to hear before He got down to the business of “fulfilling” the Law.

It should be apparent that I have applied here my Principle of Coherence: I have refused to take a verse like “Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill” out of context. It is only in its context that this verse can be understood as what Jesus meant it, as a piece of irony. Jesus is pulling the leg of His hearers as He really came to make clear a message that had not been clearly understood. And the proof of that is in the following verses, where He attacks quite a few verses of the Law of Moses. He renews His attack elsewhere, as I will show later in this Chapter.

There are many other examples of Jesus’ irony in the Gospels. He enjoys poking fun at His hearers. He says things He does not mean so as to grab His hearers’ attention, finds them all taken in, and then humours them.

²¹ Matthew 19:3-9

²² This quote by itself should make it evident that there are some verses of the Septuagint which cannot be the word of God for a follower of Jesus.

That my understanding corresponds to that of Christians is proven by the fact that they do not follow the various laws that Jews follow to this day. If they really took the verses 18 and 19 seriously,

[18] For verily I say unto you, Till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. [19] Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.²³

they would have to follow the whole Law, all the various Jewish feasts as well as observe the Sabbath as observant Jews do. And, with perhaps a few exceptions, they do not.

We have examined a first way in which Jesus fulfills the Law and the Prophets. But there is a second one, also very important. The risen Jesus says: "These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning me."²⁴

Jesus states categorically that He fulfilled in His life and sayings all that was written about Him in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms. This is the other way He fulfilled the Law.

The Septuagint must be read in the Gospels' light

Any Christian reading of the Septuagint must be done within the Gospels' perspective; first because Jesus rewrote what was badly done or flawed in the Law of Moses, and second, because it must be understood in many cases as referring to Him. Which parts refer to Him? We find: "And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself."²⁵ So it seems from that text that the Christian understanding of the Septuagint as found in the Gospels and other Christian sacred texts go back to Jesus Himself.

²³ Matthew 5:18-19

²⁴ Luke 24:44

²⁵ Luke 24:27

So for the Christian the Septuagint is completely subservient to the Gospels: it cannot stand alone.

This is very important indeed. Jesus did not condone stoning for adultery; so Christians do not. Christians cannot just go to the Law of Moses and apply it. They have to see what Jesus said and did about it first and foremost. He is their authority; and it is in the Gospels that they find His sayings and actions.

This, I gather, is the true position of the Roman Catholic Church since the Resurrection. The Church Fathers searched the Septuagint to find various symbols of Christ, the Church, etc. The Suffering Servant of Isaiah is read as a prophecy about Jesus; the crossing of the Red Sea, as a prefiguration of the sacrament of Baptism rather than as events pertaining to the Jewish people. The Church does not obey the laws concerning the Sabbath, Passover, *Succoth*, etc. We are not told to go to pilgrimage to Jerusalem. We do not eat *kosher* even though this was a requirement for all Christians according to the First Jerusalem Council attended by the Apostles James, Peter and Paul as reported in the Book of Acts.²⁶

This of course does not mean that the Septuagint is not important for us; just that the texts that are important for us are the ones that shine in the light of the Gospels. Some of the most beautiful pages of the Christian Bible are to be found in the Septuagint. The Church Fathers always had a predilection for the Book of Psalms, predilection that is made obvious in the “Liturgy of Hours” of the Roman Catholic Church (and the Book of Common Prayer of the Church of England). But it is also a fact that some Psalms, or excerpts of Psalms, have been banned from the latest “Liturgy of Hours” and that many texts of the Septuagint are not read at Mass or in the Office of Readings.

Let me finish this chapter with two sayings of Jesus found in the second chapter of Mark’s Gospel. There the Gospel’s author clearly wants to show how different Jesus’ actions and sayings are from the Judaism of His time. In it, Jesus cures a paralytic after forgiving his sins,²⁷ calls Himself a “physician” trying to bring “sinners”

²⁶ “But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.” (Acts 15:20) The fact that this requirement has long since been dropped shows that apostolic decisions are not final, even when found in the Bible.

²⁷ Mark 2:1-12

to repentance as He eats with them,²⁸ does not fast like His religious Jewish contemporaries,²⁹ and plucks ears of corn on the Sabbath and calls Himself "Lord... of the sabbath".³⁰ In every one of these occasions, Jesus is attacked, and rightly so, by the religious people of His day for breaking the religious rules set by Moses. There is no doubt that Jesus is not a good observant Jew.

Jesus' two sayings are:

No man also seweth a piece of new cloth on an old garment: else the new piece that filled it up taketh away from the old, and the rent is made worse. And no man putteth new wine into old bottles: else the new wine doth burst the bottles, and the wine is spilled, and the bottles will be marred: but new wine must be put into new bottles.³¹

Jesus considers His message as totally different from the Judaism practiced in His day. He sees the old religious mold as obsolete because His new message does not fit in it. His new message, the new wine, would break the present religious set-up, the old bottles, if you tried to fit it in them. Put differently, the rent in the old garment, the inadequacy of the old message, cannot be fixed by His message as it will only make the tear worse.

So I suggest that Jesus Himself considered that He was overhauling everything that had been said before and rewriting not only the message but the way to live it (the religious institutions that would go with it). This surely puts the Septuagint totally subservient to the Gospels, which carry Jesus' message.

To finish, the other Christian texts must also be subservient to the Gospels as you cannot expect the disciples to be greater than their Master.³² There is no way that the authors of the other Christian texts could have improved on the Gospels by making within their

²⁸ Mark 2:16-17

²⁹ Mark 2:18-20

³⁰ Mark 2:23-28

³¹ Mark 2:21-22

³² "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord." (Matthew 10:24)

texts more accurate statements of the thoughts of Jesus than those found in the Gospels.

To sum up so far, I consider that the whole of the Christian life must be based first and foremost on the Gospels, which I consider accurate renditions of the preaching and actions of Jesus as long as they are understood as a coherent whole. Christians must pick and choose in the rest of their Bible just as Jesus did with the Septuagint, by basing this process on Jesus' life and message. Christians cannot pick and choose within the Gospels: any passage of the Gospels must be understood in a way that it is in accord with the rest.

A POSSIBLE READING OF SOME OF THE SEPTUAGINT

This chapter shows the pitfalls of a Christian reading of the Septuagint which is not anchored in the Gospels. I will assume in this chapter, contrary to my belief but in line with Fundamentalists, that each verse of the Bible must be taken as is. I will produce an indictment for Crimes against Humanity of a certain Jehovah Sabaoth, also known as LORD. I characterize this Jehovah Sabaoth basically as the Jewish god of war, the "LORD of Armies". I will pick some of the many excerpts that portray God in the Septuagint as this god who fights for the Israelites to make a name for himself by his victories.

I understand that this will not impress some American Fundamentalists who, like many Americans, consider that a Super Power is not subject to such trifles as Crimes against Humanity. Jehovah Sabaoth is nothing for them if not a Supreme Power, someone who does not have to answer to any accusation of wrong-doing. But there are people like me who think that everyone is subject to such laws, including the One from whom these laws emanate.

So let us proceed. I will make here a very incomplete list of crimes; in each case the evidence will prove beyond a shadow of a doubt the guilt of the said Jehovah Sabaoth. The dates of the events mentioned below are those believed as correct by Fundamentalists.

How can I be certain of the value of the evidence? It comes from the Bible which is, as we all know, a Book entirely trustworthy. Furthermore, the accused cannot deny the evidence given because He is its author, again according to Fundamentalists and many other Christians.

We will find the accused guilty of genocide, of having ordered the mass killing of civilians, of ethnic cleansing, of having used biological and chemical warfare on civilians, and of having assisted a mass killer.

Case for crimes against humanity against Jehovah

So here are the various crimes against Humanity I was able to put forward against Jehovah Sabaoth (also known as LORD):

- 1) Genocide: destruction of the whole world's creatures save a family of humans and a pair of each animal in 2349 BC.
Evidence:

[7] And the LORD said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repenteth me that I have made them...
[17] And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die.³³

And all flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: All in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died. And every living substance was destroyed which was upon the face of the ground, both man, and cattle, and the creeping things, and the fowl of the heaven; and they were destroyed from the earth.³⁴

2) Genocide; use of chemical weapons of mass destruction against the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah in 1898 BC.
Evidence:

Then the LORD rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire from the LORD out of heaven; And he overthrew those cities, and all the plain, and all the inhabitants of the cities, and that which grew upon the ground.³⁵

3) Killing of civilians; economic warfare; use of biological weapons of mass destruction (with co-defendant: Moses, of the tribe of Levi, warlord) in the plagues of Egypt in 1491 BC.
Evidence:

And the LORD did that thing on the morrow, and all the cattle of Egypt died: but of the cattle of the children of Israel died not one.³⁶

And the hail smote throughout all the land of Egypt all that was in the field, both man and beast; and the hail

³³ Genesis 6:7;17

³⁴ Genesis 7:21-3

³⁵ Genesis 19:24-5

³⁶ Exodus 9:6

smote every herb of the field, and brake every tree of the field.³⁷

And Moses stretched forth his rod over the land of Egypt, and the LORD brought an east wind upon the land all that day, and all that night; and when it was morning, the east wind brought the locusts. And the locusts went up over all the land of Egypt, and rested in all the coasts of Egypt: very grievous were they; before them there were no such locusts as they, neither after them shall be such. For they covered the face of the whole earth, so that the land was darkened; and they did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left: and there remained not any green thing in the trees, or in the herbs of the field, through all the land of Egypt.³⁸

And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle.³⁹

4) Ethnic cleansing (with co-defendant: Joshua, son of Nun, warlord) in the mass destruction of the people of Canaan in 1491 BC. Evidence:

a) City of Jericho:

And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword.⁴⁰

b) City of Ai:

And when Joshua and all Israel saw that the ambush had taken the city, and that the smoke of the city ascended, then they turned again, and slew the men of Ai. And the other issued out of the city against them; so they were in the midst of Israel, some on this side,

³⁷ Exodus 9:25

³⁸ Exodus 10:13-5

³⁹ Exodus 12:29

⁴⁰ Joshua 6:21

and some on that side: and they smote them, so that they let none of them remain or escape. And the king of Ai they took alive, and brought him to Joshua. And it came to pass, when Israel had made an end of slaying all the inhabitants of Ai in the field, in the wilderness wherein they chased them, and when they were all fallen on the edge of the sword, until they were consumed, that all the Israelites returned unto Ai, and smote it with the edge of the sword. And so it was, that all that fell that day, both of men and women, were twelve thousand, even all the men of Ai. For Joshua drew not his hand back, wherewith he stretched out the spear, until he had utterly destroyed all the inhabitants of Ai.⁴¹

c) City of Makkedah:

And that day Joshua took Makkedah, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof he utterly destroyed, them, and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain: and he did to the king of Makkedah as he did unto the king of Jericho.⁴²

d) City of Libnah:

Then Joshua passed from Makkedah, and all Israel with him, unto Libnah, and fought against Libnah: And the LORD delivered it also, and the king thereof, into the hand of Israel; and he smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein; he let none remain in it; but did unto the king thereof as he did unto the king of Jericho.⁴³

e) City of Lachish:

And Joshua passed from Libnah, and all Israel with him, unto Lachish, and encamped against it, and fought against it: And the LORD delivered Lachish into the hand of Israel, which took it on the second day, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and all

⁴¹ Joshua 8:21-6

⁴² Joshua 10:28

⁴³ Joshua 10:29-30

the souls that were therein, according to all that he had done to Libnah.⁴⁴

f) City of Gezer:

Then Horam king of Gezer came up to help Lachish; and Joshua smote him and his people, until he had left him none remaining.⁴⁵

g) City of Eglon:

And from Lachish Joshua passed unto Eglon, and all Israel with him; and they encamped against it, and fought against it: And they took it on that day, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and all the souls that were therein he utterly destroyed that day, according to all that he had done to Lachish.⁴⁶

h) City of Hebron:

And Joshua went up from Eglon, and all Israel with him, unto Hebron; and they fought against it: And they took it, and smote it with the edge of the sword, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof, and all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining, according to all that he had done to Eglon; but destroyed it utterly, and all the souls that were therein.⁴⁷

i) City of Debir:

And Joshua returned, and all Israel with him, to Debir; and fought against it: And he took it, and the king thereof, and all the cities thereof; and they smote them with the edge of the sword, and utterly destroyed all the souls that were therein; he left none remaining: as he had done to Hebron, so he did to Debir, and to the king thereof; as he had done also to Libnah, and to her king.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ Joshua 10:31-2

⁴⁵ Joshua 10:33

⁴⁶ Joshua 10:34-5

⁴⁷ Joshua 10:36-7

⁴⁸ Joshua 10:38-9

j) From Kadesh-barnea to Gaza:

So Joshua smote all the country of the hills, and of the south, and of the vale, and of the springs, and all their kings: he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed, as the LORD God of Israel commanded. And Joshua smote them from Kadesh-barnea even unto Gaza, and all the country of Goshen, even unto Gibeon.⁴⁹

k) City of Hazor and others:

And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms. And they smote all the souls that were therein with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them: there was not any left to breathe: and he burnt Hazor with fire. And all the cities of those kings, and all the kings of them, did Joshua take, and smote them with the edge of the sword, and he utterly destroyed them, as Moses the servant of the LORD commanded. But as for the cities that stood still in their strength, Israel burned none of them, save Hazor only; that did Joshua burn. And all the spoil of these cities, and the cattle, the children of Israel took for a prey unto themselves; but every man they smote with the edge of the sword, until they had destroyed them, neither left they any to breathe. As the LORD commanded Moses his servant, so did Moses command Joshua, and so did Joshua; he left nothing undone of all that the LORD commanded Moses. So Joshua took all that land, the hills, and all the south country, and all the land of Goshen, and the valley, and the plain, and the mountain of Israel, and the valley of the same; Even from the mount Halak, that goeth up to Seir, even unto Baal-gad in the valley of Lebanon under mount Hermon: and all their kings he took, and smote them, and slew them. Joshua made war a long time with all those kings. There was not a city that made peace with the children of Israel, save the Hivites the inhabitants of Gibeon: all other they took in battle. For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they

⁴⁹ Joshua 10:40-1

might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses. And at that time came Joshua, and cut off the Anakims from the mountains, from Hebron, from Debir, from Anab, and from all the mountains of Judah, and from all the mountains of Israel: Joshua destroyed them utterly with their cities. There was none of the Anakims left in the land of the children of Israel: only in Gaza, in Gath, and in Ashdod, there remained. So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the LORD said unto Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance unto Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land rested from war.⁵⁰

5) Suicide and mass killing of civilians (with co-defendant: Samson, son of Manoah, warlord) in the mass suicide killing of men and women during a celebration in 1120 BC. Evidence:

And it came to pass, when their hearts were merry, that they said, Call for Samson, that he may make us sport. And they called for Samson out of the prison house; and he made them sport: and they set him between the pillars. And Samson said unto the lad that held him by the hand, Suffer me that I may feel the pillars whereupon the house standeth, that I may lean upon them. Now the house was full of men and women; and all the lords of the Philistines were there; and there were upon the roof about three thousand men and women, that beheld while Samson made sport. And Samson called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes. And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars upon which the house stood, and on which it was borne up, of the one with his right hand, and of the other with his left. And Samson said, Let me die with the Philistines. And he bowed himself with all his might; and the house fell upon the lords, and upon all the people that were therein. So the dead which he slew at his death were more than they which he slew in his life.⁵¹

⁵⁰ Joshua 11:10-23

⁵¹ Judges 16:25-30

6) Ethnic cleansing (with co-defendant: Saul, son of Kish, warlord) in the mass killing of Amalekites in 1079 BC.
Evidence:

Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. And Saul gathered the people together, and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand footmen, and ten thousand men of Judah. And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and laid wait in the valley. And Saul said unto the Kenites, Go, depart, get you down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them: for ye shewed kindness to all the children of Israel, when they came up out of Egypt. So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. And Saul smote the Amalekites from Havilah until thou comest to Shur, that is over against Egypt. And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.⁵²

7) Use of biological weapons of mass destruction against his own people (with co-defendant: David, son of Jesse, warlord) in the mass killing of Israelites by pestilence in 1017 BC.
Evidence:

So the LORD sent a pestilence upon Israel from the morning even to the time appointed: and there died of the people from Dan even to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men. And when the angel stretched out his hand upon Jerusalem to destroy it, the LORD repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed the people, It is enough: stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD was by the threshing-place of Araunah the Jebusite.⁵³

Jehovah Sabaoth's sadism

It should be obvious that Jehovah Sabaoth is guilty of all these crimes described by his own words. But not only do the texts

⁵² 1 Samuel 15:2-8

⁵³ 2 Samuel 24:15-6

say that Jehovah Sabaoth did all these terrible things, they add that he manipulated his enemies so that they would make their predicament worse: "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go"⁵⁴ is followed by a worse plague; "But the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, so that he would not let the children of Israel go"⁵⁵ is followed by the murder of innocent children who just happened to be Egyptian first-borns; "For it was of the LORD to harden their hearts, that they should come against Israel in battle, that he might destroy them utterly, and that they might have no favour, but that he might destroy them, as the LORD commanded Moses"⁵⁶ is followed by a massacre.

So we have a Supreme Power who toys with people to crush them utterly. This is a god like the Greek and Roman gods. He is a god who takes great pleasure in crushing his enemies and in taking revenge. He is not a nice person to say the least, but a god made in men's image, very much like the present and ancient worlds' supreme rulers.

The different pictures of God in Scripture

Of course, this picture does not square at all with other pictures of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob found in the Septuagint. The God who is worshipped by the Jewish people is not a murderer nor is He vindictive.

Some will say that He did these things out of love for His people; that He had to free them from oppression; that He had to give them a place to live. The end does not justify the means. Furthermore, He did not "save" His people from Hitler⁵⁷ or from lots of other tyrants who oppressed them, before as well as after the coming of Jesus. So why would He have done so then in such a terrible way?

⁵⁴ Exodus 10:20

⁵⁵ Exodus 11:27

⁵⁶ Joshua 11:20

⁵⁷ Or did He do just that in the Holocaust? Could the fact that these millions of poor people died destitute and in agony without fighting back, just like Jesus on the Cross, be a sign that God was taking them to Himself just like He did His only Son Jesus, a destitute Jew in agony killed by the Roman Reich? Why should "saving" mean "saving from death"? Why could it not rather mean "saving from this valley of tears"? Why is not God Saviour when He takes us "to the wedding feast of the Lamb", when He takes us away from this life to His loving embrace?

We know that there was a major flood at one time in Mesopotamia. We also know that some Jews went from Egypt to Palestine. We do not know exactly what happened then. The Torah was written a very long time after those events. Its writers produced weird and wonderful stories from their oral traditions where Jehovah, the god of the Jewish people, saves the day for them. In it all the successful acts of war by the “good guys” are attributed to their god of war, Jehovah Sabaoth, the god of armies.

But their god of armies is less and less successful as time goes by. Why? It must be because the Jewish people have not followed the rules he gave them. So they blame themselves. But then Prophets turn up who show an evolving visage of God, a vision that permits quite a few glimpses of the figure of Jesus Christ,⁵⁸ our Lord and God. May His Name be blessed forever!

I hope that I have made my point; that it suffices that I examine the Gospels to answer all the important questions about what it is to be a Christian, about who is the God of the Christians and about what one has to do to be saved - that is, how to enter Heaven.

This next step is the object of my book Life, Love and Law, where I try to establish Jesus' core message.

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, June 6th, 2004

⁵⁸ who, to be His Father's voice in the flesh, became a Jew, as He was born of a Jewish woman and conceived in a Jewish womb (the only condition, according to the Law, to be a Jew).

LIFE, LOVE AND LAW

WHY THIS BOOK?

We live in an unforgiving world where some seek closure by witnessing the execution of their loved one's convicted killer while others sue benevolent foundations because they helped people who had contact with assumed members of a "terrorist" group. Some countries go even further as their foreign policy is to attack anyone they perceive as a threat.

Western advertisements instill in us the need of products to keep us young, sexy, content and proud while most of the planet's population has not enough clean water, food, electricity and few of what we consider the bare necessities of life.

How is a Christian to react? Where is she to turn for guidance when Christian institutions are crippled by scandals and Christian values seem obsolete in our new world?

For some, Christian values are even dangerous as they go against our science and our consumer society. According to some economic theory, those who refuse to buy and thus spend hurt others as economy's vitality depends on spending. For others, helping the disadvantaged and the marginalized goes against evolution as that theory is based on the "survival of the fittest".

Capitalism and ownership are considered essential to our present and future freedom and well-being. Ambition, greed and competition are absolutely required if our wonderful "world order" (social, political, economic) is to flourish.

What is Jesus' position on these topics? What does He say to the devout Christian about our world? What is really His message? Why did He come?

WHAT “GOOD NEWS”?

What I was thought as a child

I was born a Roman Catholic in 1946. I went to a good parochial school run by a religious congregation and then to a Jesuit College in a prosperous part of Montreal.

I was taught that Hell, pain for ever and ever, was the penalty for one act or thought of masturbation, for missing Mass on one Sunday as well as for a whole catalogue of other sins. I remember terrifying nightmares about Hell. The only way to avoid Hell was either not to sin in such ways or if you did, to get absolution as a result of confessing these sins to a priest and promising to really try not to sin again.

Going to Purgatory was the penalty for one lie or for hitting my brother. It meant pain until God was satisfied. God was the One Who Punishes humans for their sins. Of course, Purgatory would be followed by Heaven, where we would be forever happy with God.

We humans found sinning easy. As God was hurt by our sins, He would get angry at us. Jesus came to stop His Father's wrath.⁵⁹ He came to pay the price required so that some might be saved, the good Roman Catholics who died without un-absolved mortal sins.

We would pray to Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was in Heaven with Him, that she would intercede for us sinners with her Son. We would pray to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, and were taught that Jesus is God, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity. To be united to Him in Heaven, we had to receive Baptism, go to Communion at least once a year, and not die in mortal sin. Nearly all others would go to Hell: “out of the Church, no salvation”.⁶⁰

The good people who never had the option to become good Roman Catholics would go to limbo, a place where they would not be unhappy forever but neither would they be with God while the ones who had a chance to convert and did not were bound for Hell.

⁵⁹ “Et de son Père arrêter le courroux” (And stop His Father's wrath) From the “Minuit, Chrétiens!”, (O Holy Night!) written in 1847 by Placide Clappeau (music by Adolphe Adam)

⁶⁰ “Salus extra ecclesiam non est.” (St. Augustine, De Bapt. IV, c. xvii. 24)

What I now believe

I now consider that most of those views are incorrect, that God cannot condemn even the worst human offender to eternal torture (Hell) and that this is part of the “Good News” Jesus brought us.

Before I try to prove such a point, permit me to express my revulsion for someone who would condemn a lower life-form’s transgressions of some laws that he had set up by transforming it into a higher life-form so as to punish it more than would be possible within the framework of its initial existence. Humans are not eternal; their sufferings for transgressions are thus limited to this life. What kind of sadism is required from someone who would recreate these beings so that their sufferings would be magnified and everlasting? How can a human wish such a fate on anyone without also being a sadist? And is not this the wish often expressed by many “God-fearing Christians”?

The Church made a point of talking about Jesus’ compassion. We had the Feast of the Sacred Heart and now also that of the Infinite Mercy. But even today we talk as if Jesus had to placate His Father. This position is untenable and I can prove it as it is written: “I and my Father are one”⁶¹ and “Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works.”⁶²

So here is my thesis, which I will prove in the following pages: If Jesus is the Expression, the Word of the Father, He cannot placate the Father. The simple fact that Jesus came to save us shows us that God the Father is Saviour. *God is the “One Who Loves unconditionally and equally” the good and the bad, the just and the unjust.* Jesus is God Incarnate. He and the Father are one. And His name means “LORD saves” because this is who God is: one who saves, not one who condemns. While humans condemned God to death by crucifixion, He raises humans to Eternal Life, a Life of Being Loved, not a life of eternal torture.

How I intend to prove my thesis

I now have to show conclusively that this thesis is true. As a Roman Catholic, I must base my proof on Sacred Scripture. My Church recognizes as Sacred Scripture the books found in the Sep-

⁶¹ John 10:30

⁶² John 14:10

tuagint (the books of the Old Testament in Greek), the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John and other texts considered written by the Apostles (Epistles, Hebrews and Revelation).

Some people doubt that the Gospel texts represent what Jesus said and did. They consider that they were written late, after all the Epistles. So they doubt their value: how could an oral tradition be accurate? The best you can hope for would be to keep the gist of the story most of the time. Who could trust such documents? Of course, if the story of Jesus is untrustworthy, theologians are wasting their time studying it and Christians who live according to Jesus' sayings are living according to a lie.

I have examined this problem in my essay Christians and Scripture from a Christian point of view and found solutions that, at least, satisfy me.

The Bible was one of many books that my Church forbade me to read when I was a child. The reasons were that I did not have the knowledge required first to choose the sound interpretations among all the possible ones and second, to decide which of its stories, commands and laws I was not to follow.

My Church is right in denying that in the Bible all possible interpretations are valid and all possible excerpts are relevant. Again I have tried to find in my essay Christians and Scripture what validity conditions a Christian interpretation must satisfy. (These will be necessary, not sufficient.) I consider that the results I worked out there provide a workable method to read Scripture so as to check if indeed the God of Jesus is incapable of condemning.

In a nutshell, I have determined there that (1) the Gospels' texts are trustworthy in that they convey correctly the words and actions of Jesus as far as they pertain to His message; that (2) these texts have absolute precedence over any other texts found in the Christian Bible and so are the only ones required to fathom God's Message as expressed in His Son and Word; that (3) any interpretation of any text of the Gospels must face successfully the test of coherence with the other texts found there: an interpretation which contradicts another text found in the Gospels just cannot be correct.

In short, the value of this work written to the "Greater Glory of God" (*Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*) depends on the correctness of my

methodological assumptions and the soundness of the Gospel texts. Anyone who does not accept both will be unconvinced.

May God, Who came in our wretched world to be condemned to die by us, help me find the right words to express what He wants me to say about Him, our Suffering Servant who was tortured to death without fighting back and acts towards us as if we had done none of those terrible things, terrible things we continue to do to Him as we do them to our fellow humans whom He loves absolutely and unconditionally. Amen.

GOD'S PERFECTION AND PRESCRIPTION: TO LOVE EVERYONE EQUALLY

Jesus' message about God's perfection

Who is God? What defines Him best? Or, said differently, what constitutes God's perfection? We only have one passage from Jesus on this important subject, in an excerpt of the Sermon on the Mount:

But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust. For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so? Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.⁶³

For Jesus, God's perfection lies in Him loving the just and the unjust equally, a perfection He exhibits when He makes His sun rise equally on the evil and the good or when He sends rain equally on the just and the unjust. We also must love equally our friends and our enemies. We are to love those who curse us, use us despitefully and persecute us because this is how God acts and so this is how His children must act.

The Greek word "teleios" (τέλειος) translated by "perfect" would be better translated by "finished", "accomplished" or "matured". It refers to the quality of someone who is completely what she is meant to be. In other words, if we want to be as we are meant to be, as God is as He is meant to be, we have to love the same each and every human on this planet, good or evil.

The Greek verb "agapaō" (ἀγαπάω) translated by "love" means "treat as a friend, with affection", "love", "cherish". This Greek verb is not only used by Jesus to describe how to treat one's enemies. It is also used in the Septuagint to describe the love humans must have toward God, as in the great exhortation "*Shema Israel*"

⁶³ Matthew 5:44-48

("Hear, O Israel" in Hebrew).⁶⁴ It is also the Greek verb found in both verses 37 and 39 quoted below where Jesus answers the question "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?"⁶⁵ by:

[37] Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. [38] This is the first and great commandment. [39] And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. [40] On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.⁶⁶

In verse 40, Jesus states that the foundation of the Law and the Prophets is love of God as found in the great exhortation, to which He adds in verse 39 a form of the "Golden Rule": "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." He also says in verse 39 that love of neighbour is similar, alike to love of God. Loving your neighbour, the people that you actually have to live with due to the circumstances of life, is for Him the same as loving God.⁶⁷

To recapitulate, God by His Very Self loves everyone the same: this is how He Is. We are to do likewise as children of God our Father. This message is what the Word was trying to get across in the Law and the Prophets – with limited success as we can find in the Septuagint many texts where God is said to treat sinners very differently than the righteous.

Jesus' message about God's love

Let us look at the equivalent passage of Luke's Gospel, passage which is part of his version of the Sermon on the Mount:⁶⁸

⁶⁴ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God is one LORD: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up." (Deuteronomy 6:4-7)

⁶⁵ Matthew 22:36

⁶⁶ Matthew 22:37-40

⁶⁷ A fact succinctly echoed by the writer of John's first Epistle who calls that neighbour "brother": "And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also." (1 John 4:21)

⁶⁸ This Sermon is only found in Matthew's and Luke's Gospels.

[27] But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, [28] Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. [29] And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not to take thy coat also. [30] Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. [31] And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise. [32] For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. [33] And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. [34] And if ye lend to them of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. [35] But love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil. [36] Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.⁶⁹

Again the object of this sermon is to tell people how to behave as children of God and so how to behave as God behaves, as children copy their parents. So this text is about God's behaviour just like the one of Matthew's.

But, instead of saying to be perfect as your Father is perfect like in Matthew, Jesus says in verse 36 to be "merciful" like your Father is "merciful" according to this translation of the Greek word "oik-tirmon" (οἰκτιρμον), which can also be translated as "compassionate". So the text could read to be compassionate as God is compassionate.

In verse 35, Jesus says that the Father is "kind" to the unthankful and the evil. The Greek word "chrestos" (χρηστος) translated as "kind" means "of service", "good", "devoted", "obliging", "willing to help" or "attentive". So it seems to me that "kind" is not strong enough. God is actually of service to humans, whether good or bad. In verse 35, Jesus says that God is a servant, a devoted servant or, better still, an attentive father; and that He is so to everyone, including the unthankful and the evil.

⁶⁹ Luke 6:27-36

Basically God acts towards everyone in the same way, with the same love and affection, without making any distinction. This is not to say that God does not know that some are good and others are bad, but that this in no way stops Him from loving every one of His humans with all His heart.

If we are to love our enemies just like our friends, and act towards our enemies just as towards our friends, it follows that there is no difference for us between enemies and friends. That distinction exists only in the mind of others.

But let us go back to the text quoted. We are to do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, pray for those who despitefully use us.⁷⁰ This was also found in Matthew. But there is more: if hit on one cheek, we are to offer the other; if we are robbed by someone, we are to offer her more; we are to give whatever is asked by anyone without wanting it back.⁷¹

In other words, Jesus says that we must agree to be taken for a ride. We must reckon that all are entitled to everything we have as we are there for them, either to be hit, abused or stolen from. We are not to expect to get back what we lend.⁷² We are not to think that anyone owes us anything.

Acting like God means acting in a way totally opposite to what today's experts consider healthy human behaviour. A Christian should act like a doormat, accepting to be used and abused, beaten and killed, raped and tortured without fighting back. This is how Christian martyrs lived for centuries as they understood this fact well. Why? Because that is how God acts, as He is the exact opposite of the Jewish God of war Jehovah Sabaoth that I portrayed in the third chapter of my essay Christians and Scripture using selective excerpts from the Septuagint.

Jesus' "retreat" in the desert

Jesus, we are told in two of the Gospels, went into the desert to fast for forty days before He began His public life. He took some time out to figure out how to proceed with His mission. The three

⁷⁰ Luke 6:27-8

⁷¹ Luke 6:29

⁷² Luke 6:34

temptations that are mentioned encapsulate three of the options He had, examined and rejected as they would not bring Him “to perfection”, would not make Him who He was meant to be.

I think it is very important to examine carefully these options and see why He rejected them. Or, put differently, why these options were from the Devil and thus, temptations.

But who is the Devil? The Greek word “diabolos” (δίαβολος) translated by “devil” means “the one breaking the bonds of unity”, “one who inspires hatred or envy”. The related Greek word “diabolè” (δίαβολη) means “division”, “quarrel”, “enmity”, “aversion”, “loathing”, “repugnance”, “accusation”, “slander”, “calumny”. Here the Devil seems to refer to one individual, who is also referred to as “Satan” and as the “Prince of this world”. The Greek word for “Satan” means “Enemy”, “Opponent”. The Greek term “archôn” (αρχον) for “Prince” means “chief” and derives from “archè” (αρχη) which means “beginning”, “principle”, “origin”, “foundation”, and then “command”, “power”, “authority”. The Greek term “kosmou” (κοσμου) translated by “world” means “order”, “good order”, “order of the universe”, “world”, used in all its social, biological, economic and geological senses, as these are all ordered according to laws, either natural or social. “Kosmos” can thus quite accurately be translated by “world order”. And, if we want to make the Devil a little less a Being and a little more a Principle, we could translate “Prince of this world” by “Foundation of this world order”.

So we already have some knowledge of who the devil is. To add to this, Jesus gives him two attributes that permit us to understand even better who he is. Jesus retorts to some who were considering Him to be a devil:

Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.⁷³

Jesus clearly states that the Devil is (1) a murderer from the beginning and (2) a liar, incapable of telling the truth as he is the source of lies as he begets them.

⁷³ John 8:44

The Devil is called a murderer from the beginning. What can that mean? Most probably that he is the inspiration of all murders, as the inspiration comes first, before the actual act. In other words, the Devil is the foundation of all violence that ends in the killing of humans. Our world order is, as we know, based on force: those who break the laws are punished against their will; some are killed. Our “world order” is based on brute force as this is the only way the state can impose its will on the individuals that it wants to control.

Jesus calls this foundation the source of all lies. He claims that this “world order”, an “order” based on violence, is an illusion of order, an illusion of a life-giving universe. In fact, it only brings forth death. This world order is a pseudo (the Greek word for “lie”) life-giving universe. Jesus came to tell us about the true life-giving universe, the Kingdom of God, based on love for all without exception, on the Golden Rule and non-violence.

This being determined, I will now examine the temptations in Matthew’s version. The first one could be said to be that of self-sufficiency as the Devil suggests that Jesus can very easily feed Himself and so be of independent means:

Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God.⁷⁴

Jesus is hungry after His fasting; so He is tempted to provide food for Himself, something I do when I am hungry. While I do, Jesus decided not to as He considered this action a temptation. Why? What about His answer? I have no problem with Him saying that bread is not enough to sustain a human life and that God’s word is also required. But how does this stop Him from feeding Himself?

We know that Jesus ate and drank. Just like us, He needed food to stay alive; just like us, He got hungry and thirsty. So in what way can this be considered a temptation? What was basically wrong in Him doing a miracle to His own advantage, something that is

⁷⁴ Matthew 4:1-4 (also Luke 4:1-4)

never reported in the Gospels? It is as if He would not be true to Himself if He did so.

Perhaps a better look at the text Jesus quotes can help. Here is the complete verse of the text of Deuteronomy from which He quotes:

And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know; that he might make thee know that *man doth not live by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD* doth man live.⁷⁵

The Greek verb “*ekakōsen*” (εκακωσεν) translated by “humbled” means “get in a bad shape”, “mistreat”, “put in a painful predicament”, “make miserable”. The Greek verb “*elimagchonēsen*” (ελιμαγχονησεν) translated by “suffered to hunger” means “exhaust, wear out by hunger”. So we see God making sure that His people’s lives are totally miserable as they are famished. But why should He acts thus?

The text seems to mean that the Jewish people in the desert were required to put their total trust in God. They were humbled in the sense that they had been put by God in a position where they were totally incapable of looking after themselves, of saving themselves by feeding themselves. They were to trust that God would provide for them, and so He did, in His good time, after they had suffered the pangs of hunger. Just as the Jews in the desert had to rely entirely on God to keep them alive, Jesus had to rely entirely on His Father to keep Him alive. He had to act like humans are to act: that is, by relying totally on God their Father and not on their own actions.

Matthew’s version concludes the whole episode with the verse: “Then the devil leaveth him, and, behold, angels came and ministered unto him.”⁷⁶ In His good time, God His Father sends Jesus angels to feed Him.

We have looked at this text in the perspective of Jesus the man. But He is also the Son. From that perspective, the text implies that the Father can look after the Son and the Son can serve the

⁷⁵ Deuteronomy 8:3

⁷⁶ Matthew 4:11 (not mentioned in Luke)

Father, but the Son cannot serve Himself: this is against His very Being. Jesus is only for others, not for Himself. Using His divinity to His own personal human advantage is a contradiction of what He is: the One for Others. It is against divine nature. God is Love; not Self-Love, but Love of Others.⁷⁷

Jesus clearly understands that He must decide now, at the beginning of His ministry, to put His complete confidence in His Father, and not in Himself. He trusts that His Father will provide for Him; He knows that He does not have to worry about food and drink.

So He decides to live from hand-outs and not from the carpentry job He learned from Joseph. He has nowhere to live.⁷⁸ He becomes nothing but a beggar as far as His contemporaries are concerned. He decides that all His time will be spent for the work His Father sent Him to do. He is to spend all His time trying to elucidate for people what His Father's Kingdom, the real life-giving order, is all about.

That this is so can be construed from the fact that this is what He asks from His disciples when He sends them preaching His message as reported in Matthew,⁷⁹ Luke⁸⁰ and Mark:

And commanded them that they should take nothing for their journey, save a staff only; no scrip, no bread, no money in their purse: But be shod with sandals; and not put on two coats.⁸¹

⁷⁷ This is why God is Trinity: to be God-for-Others, He has to be more than one perfect Person. Being perfect Love, this Love of Others means an unbreakable Unity of His Persons. God as Love is Father; from Whom comes forth the Son as the Person for the Father to love and Who, also perfect Love, loves Him perfectly in return. From this Unity of perfect Love between these two Persons comes forth this Person who is their Unity, their Spirit of Love: the Holy Spirit. This is why God as Love has to be Three in One.

⁷⁸ "And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." (Luke 9:58)

⁷⁹ Matthew 10:5-20

⁸⁰ Luke 9:1-6

⁸¹ Mark 6:8-9

The second temptation can be called that of the need to control:

Then the devil taketh him up into the holy city, and setteth him on a pinnacle of the temple, And saith unto him, If thou be the Son of God, cast thyself down: for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and in their hands they shall bear thee up, lest at any time thou dash thy foot against a stone. Jesus said unto him, It is written again, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God.⁸²

Let us picture the scene: Jesus, on the Temple's pinnacle, in full view of the priests and the people. He wants to make a statement: God is on My side; believe in Me; My message is God's message. This said, to prove His statement, He throws Himself from His perch and God's angels come and take Him gracefully to a soft, dignified landing. That would have been a Hollywood entrance into public life if there ever was one! What a publicity stunt! That would definitely have been a stunt worthy of the great prophets, like Moses and others, whose links to God were proven by a great number of "special effects".

This is thus a seemingly acceptable way of doing things. It happened over and over in the history of the Jewish people if you believe the Septuagint. Surely Jesus' *rôle* in the history of salvation would justify such a startling beginning. But Jesus decided that this too was a non-starter.

Why? To begin with, Moses and the prophets never demanded that God provide them with "special effects". God decided to do so without their input. It would never have come to Moses' mind to ask for such a thing. He did point out to God that neither the Jewish people nor Pharaoh would believe him, but he did not venture to suggest some stunts to turn things around; God Himself came up with those according to the Septuagint.

But there is more if we look at the whole verse from which Jesus quotes: "*Ye shall not tempt the LORD your God, as ye tempted him in Massah.*"⁸³ What happened in Massah? The Jewish people were in the desert. As we have seen in the previous quote from the book of Deuteronomy, the people had been fed with manna

⁸² Matthew 4:5-7 (also Luke 4:9-12)

⁸³ Deuteronomy 6:16

after they complained bitterly of being hungry. This should have shown them that God would provide them with what they needed. But they complained all the more that they were going to die of thirst. Again they did not believe in God's constant care for them. They had already lost their faith in God as their Saviour. They again did not believe that God would provide, and so demanded that they be brought right away to where water would be found.

Jesus knew He had a mission. He either could believe that His Father would provide so that He would attract some followers or He could force His hand by a stunt to make Himself famous by jumping from the pinnacle of the Temple and forcing His Father to rescue Him. This action would have been the one of someone who wants to control His destiny, not of someone who is there to serve His Father and just do His will in all humility. Jesus had to submit His will to His Father. By the way, the Arabic word "Islam" means "submission", and derives from the Arabic word "salaam" meaning "peace". In a religious context, it means a complete submission to the will of God,⁸⁴ a total submission which naturally brings with it peace as there is no point in fretting.

So Jesus decided that He had to submit Himself to His Father, thus finding peace. His Father would provide. He did not need to worry, He did not need stunts.

Jesus could have spread His message very successfully by a method founded on this world order; this way constitutes His third temptation:

Again, the devil taketh him up into an exceeding high mountain, and sheweth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And saith unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me. Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve.⁸⁵

The key to success in this world is to embrace this world's order. It means to worship the principles of power, conquest and ambition or, in theological terms, Satan, the principle ("prince") of this world order. Alexander conquered most of the world and imposed on

⁸⁴ slightly modified from an Islamic website

⁸⁵ Matthew 4:8-10 (also Luke 4:5-8)

it his Hellenic background. Jesus could have conquered the whole world and bring His religion to its subjugated peoples. But Jesus decided that this was to be avoided like the plague. Why?

Many times in history have Christians successfully used the method mentioned above. As their armies conquered such and such a new territory, their missionaries were able to bring Christianity to the indigenous population. Those subjugated people decided that the God their victors introduced had to be more powerful than theirs. The defeated population understood that refusal of this religion was as dangerous as rebellion against their new overlords as the penalty for non-conversion was Hell according to its preachers.

Country rulers often decided the religion of their people. The Roman Emperors ordered the definition of Christian dogmas through Church Councils to ensure the cohesiveness of their State by imposing uniform social, political and religious institutions on the peoples under their dominion.

What Jesus considers unacceptable has thus been put into action by Christians often enough. Why was it intolerable to Jesus? It is certain that the principle on which the State is based is violence, that is, the threat of punishment for those who violate its decrees. In no State can we count on the absolute absence of crime, on love for each other and the pursuit of the common good. So we need laws and police forces to protect the social and political order as well as armies to protect the State from others who might be bent on attacking it. So by "necessity" the State is based on violence. This world order cannot but be founded on violence. And this foundation, this basic principle, is what is encapsulated in the "person" of Satan, the Prince of this world. Satan (as all human societies for that matter) knows for sure (though, as we have seen, this is a lie) that violence is the only way to create order out of chaos.

But Jesus does not want to live a life based on violence. He thus cannot in any way find support in and so worship this world order. This interpretation, it seems to me, is in agreement with Jesus' solution to His last temptation, another verse from Deuteronomy:

Thou shalt fear the LORD thy God; him shalt thou serve, and to him shalt thou cleave, and swear by his name. He is thy praise, and he is thy God, that hath

done for thee these great and terrible things, which thine eyes have seen.⁸⁶

Jesus decides to dedicate Himself completely to His Father, putting all His eggs in one basket, refusing to play by the rules of our world, refusing to please any authority. Mind you, He is not the only one to have done so. He is the first to acknowledge that so did the prophets. This is why they ended up the way they did; and this is why He knows that He will get the same treatment.

Jesus understands clearly that His Father is the One who loves each and every one of His humans without limit or conditions. As He has to keep completely to His Father's game plan, He must base His whole life on love and resist the temptation of violence.

Jesus' reaction to violence

Let us now go right at the end of Jesus' life and see if, when the crunch came, He lived by the rules He had set for Himself. Here we have the litmus test. Here we see if Jesus meant what He said.

All the Gospel writers put a huge emphasis on Jesus' last few days on earth, which implies that they considered them of the greatest importance. This is quite surprising when you consider that it is the story of the disciples' treason and of their beloved leader's sufferings and ignominious death. Not a story to make someone good publicity!

In all four Gospels an incident is reported to have occurred the night Jesus was arrested. The incident is the cutting off of the ear of a man in the police party by one of Jesus' followers. Mark's report is: "And one of them that stood by drew a sword, and smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his ear;"⁸⁷ Matthew's is: "And, behold, one of them which were with Jesus stretched out his hand, and drew his sword, and struck a servant of the high priest's, and smote off his ear;"⁸⁸ Luke's is: "When they which were about him saw what would follow, they said unto him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? And one of them smote the servant of the high priest, and cut

⁸⁶ Deuteronomy 10:20-21

⁸⁷ Mark 14:47

⁸⁸ Matthew 26:51

off his right ear;”⁸⁹ and, finally, John’s is: “Then Simon Peter having a sword drew it, and smote the high priest’s servant, and cut off his right ear. The servant’s name was Malchus.”⁹⁰

What happened then is somewhat different according to the source. Jesus’ reaction according to John was “Then said Jesus unto Peter, Put up thy sword into the sheath: the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”⁹¹ Luke’s report is: “And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And he touched his ear, and healed him.”⁹² Mark’s report says: “And Jesus answered and said unto them, Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but the scriptures must be fulfilled.”⁹³ Finally, Matthew’s report is: “Then said Jesus unto him, Put up again thy sword into his place: for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels? But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?”⁹⁴

All the gospels report that no more blows were given by Jesus’ supporters. Furthermore, in three instances there is an explanation: Jesus told his supporter to stop fighting. In Luke’s account, the injury is reversed by Jesus: the ear is put back in place. In John’s account, He tells why the fighting must stop: “the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?”

Mark, who does not mention Jesus telling his followers to stop fighting, reports Jesus saying: “Are ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and with staves to take me? I was daily with you in the temple teaching, and ye took me not: but *the scriptures must be fulfilled.*” And Matthew has Jesus adding as an explanation to why His bellicose follower must stop fighting: “for all they that take the sword shall perish with the sword. Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve

⁸⁹ Luke 22:49-50

⁹⁰ John 18:10

⁹¹ John 18:11

⁹² Luke 22:52

⁹³ Mark 14:47-48

⁹⁴ Matthew 26:52-54

legions of angels? *But how then shall the scriptures be fulfilled, that thus it must be?*"

So here we have this *leitmotiv*: "the scriptures must be fulfilled" which was examined in the second chapter of Christians and Scripture. We saw then that it referred to the fact that the Scriptures needed correction so as to fully represent God's reality.

Jesus' revelation of God through His passion and crucifixion

So in what way does this episode show the real nature of God? Jesus says that He must drink the cup that the Father has given Him. What is this cup? It is the sufferings and the death that are to come. He is to face torture, shame, to be beaten to a pulp by these savages in uniform which were Roman soldiers, men who loathed the Jews and so loved to beat them up. Crucifixion is no piece of cake either: it is one of the most painful and shameful types of executions available.

But in what way does that fate fulfill the scriptures? Why does He need to die an ignominious death, totally powerless in the hands of His enemies, letting them use Him for their own agendas (Pilate, to show the Jews the result of trying to defy his forces; the Jewish religious classes, to get rid of a trouble-maker, someone who was getting too popular, who was being a reproach to their way of thinking and living). Jesus was to be disposed of as any enemy is, without a second thought. The state must go on. Organized religion must go on. The non-conformists must be taught a lesson they will not soon forget. Jesus was another of many examples necessary to protect the world order, an order based on force and violence.

But that begs the question. Why did He have to go through this? Why is this needed to "fulfill the scriptures"? The Septuagint gives many images of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and as any reader can tell, those images do not form a coherent whole. As I showed in Chapter 3 of my essay Christians and Scripture, one of those images is that of a god of war called Jehovah Sabaoth who gets his kicks by crushing the Israelites' enemies. This god is like a Roman *imperator*, living for his victories and relishing in the destruction of his enemies, the plundering of their goods, and the taking of their wives and children as slaves. A god who insists on total obedience from his people just like a Roman general insists on total obedience from his soldiers. In both cases, disobedience is immediately punished by death as an example to others. A powerful and implaca-

ble brute of a god who has favourites and enemies, boasts of his successes and exacts vengeance to the full.

Now here we have God-made-man, the Expression of God, submitting Himself to the kind of world order exemplified by the image of Jehovah Sabaoth just given and accepting all this brutality without lifting a little finger to save Himself. Here we have God Himself being bullied by Roman soldiers, made fun by them and the Jewish religious classes and mob and hanged to die, naked, after having been beaten up by brutes⁹⁵ and whipped.⁹⁶

This God does nothing to save Himself or to assert His power. He does not fight back. It is not that He could not theoretically do so or that He could not have found a way to just get out of there. No; He has to go through this: it is the Father's will. This is so because God is not He who lords over others. No, God is the One who serves others. He does not act violently; He is the One who suffers violence: He is the Suffering Servant.

This is the message that corrects the image of God given much too often in the Septuagint. Jesus, the Expression of God, now exorcises this image of the God of war, the God who condemns, the God who crushes those who cross Him. He, God Incarnate, dies on the cross like a criminal to express clearly that He is a God of non-violence, a God of Love, of Service. This way, He shows that His Kingdom (that is, His set of ways, of action, His set of priorities, His regime of government) is not of this world order.

This world order is based on power,⁹⁷ injustice and death. God's kingdom is an order of unconditional love. Indeed, if His kingdom was of this world order, He would have had His soldiers fighting

⁹⁵ "Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus into the common hall, and gathered unto him the whole band of soldiers. And they stripped him, and put on him a scarlet robe. And when they had platted a crown of thorns, they put it upon his head, and a reed in his right hand: and they bowed the knee before him, and mocked him, saying, Hail, King of the Jews! And they spit upon him, and took the reed, and smote him on the head. And after that they had mocked him, they took the robe off from him, and put his own raiment on him, and led him away to crucify him." (Matthew 27:27-31)

⁹⁶ "And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus, when he had scourged him, to be crucified." (Mark 15:15)

⁹⁷ "La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure." (The reason of the strongest is always the best) Jean de la Fontaine, Fables, i. 10 Le loup et l'agneau

for His freedom;⁹⁸ this is made very clear in John's Gospel where words to that effect are said by Jesus to Pontius Pilate:

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world: if my kingdom were of this world, then would my servants fight, that I should not be delivered to the Jews: but now is my kingdom not from hence.⁹⁹

Jesus then states categorically that He was born to show the truth about Who God is:

Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice.¹⁰⁰

This is what He showed by His Blessed Passion and Death! The point I am trying to make comes out beautifully in Luke's report of Jesus on the cross. You have the soldiers and the Jewish rulers taunting Him:

And the people stood beholding. And the rulers also with them derided him, saying, He saved others; let him save himself, if he be Christ, the chosen of God. And the soldiers also mocked him, coming to him, and offering him vinegar, And saying, If thou be the king of the Jews, save thyself.¹⁰¹

This is the voice of the present world order: show your power, save yourself.¹⁰² If God really loves you as you claim, He will

⁹⁸ "Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew **26:53**)

⁹⁹ John **18:36**

¹⁰⁰ John **18:37**

¹⁰¹ Luke **23:35-6**

¹⁰² From Matthew: "Likewise also the chief priests mocking him, with the scribes and elders, said, He saved others; himself he cannot save. If he be the King of Israel, let him now come down from the cross, and we will believe him. He trusted in God; let him deliver him now, if he will have him: for he said, I am the Son of God." (Matthew **26:41-43**) and from Mark: "Likewise also the chief priests mocking said among themselves with the scribes, He saved others; himself he cannot save. Let Christ the King of Israel descend now from the cross, that we may see and believe. And they that were crucified with him reviled him." (Mark **15:31-32**)

save you; if He does not, you are surely a phoney and deserve death for making a false claim. The proof of God's love in this world order is success, power, riches. The proof He does not is defeat, powerlessness, poverty. We see clearly that their God is the God of this world order, a God that is still worshipped and glorified everywhere. Their God is one who gives success, fame, power and riches to his faithful adherents and crushes their enemies.¹⁰³

Then you have the Voice of God saying from the cross, while being derided and mocked by those who enjoy seeing Him suffering and slowly dying: "Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."¹⁰⁴ He, the Expression of God, cannot but forgive these humans for what they are doing to Him because He loves them unconditionally.

That love is made manifest again when He says to the murderer crucified with Him who asks to be in His kingdom "Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."¹⁰⁵ God wants everyone with Him as He loves everyone whatever they have done.

The various images of God

So Jesus lived the last day of His life the way He urged in His sermon on the Mount. He did not fight back. He prayed for His persecutors. He loved those who considered Him their enemy. He fulfilled the Law and the Prophets by showing Who God Is. No wonder that day is called "Good Friday". May the name of Jesus ("the LORD saves" indeed!) be blessed for evermore! The image of our blessed God nailed to the cross is indeed the most powerful symbol to remind us Roman Catholics Christians who God really Is. Jesus came to perfection on Good Friday. There and then He perfectly showed to all who God really Is.

There are many possible images of gods. One is gods very much like us but stronger, much more powerful: the gods found in the Iliad and the Aeneid. These gods are not more just than we are. No, they can be bought, cajoled. They are just like the very important people in this world, who can make or break countries and peoples.

¹⁰³ a God too often preached among Christians and definitely found in most of the Septuagint

¹⁰⁴ Luke 23:34

¹⁰⁵ Luke 23:43

The Jehovah Sabaoth I described in Chapter 3 of my essay Christians and Scripture fits in this category except he is said to be all-powerful and the only real god.

Another image is of a just God, who makes sure that the good are rewarded and the bad, punished. He is a God of integrity, who judges according to the facts, who cannot be bought or cajoled. This is the God mostly found in the Septuagint. This is the God of the scribes and the Pharisees and of too many Christians but is *not* the God of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, there is the God Who Serves, loves, suffers with those who suffer and cannot condemn as He is Love. He is also found in the Septuagint, sometimes mixed with the previous image, sometimes alone. He is the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God Who is expressed by Jesus in His life and death. And that is Good News indeed!

JESUS' SACRIFICE

We hear that Jesus offered Himself to His Father for our sins. I find this very strange. The reason is that, from a Roman Catholic Christian standpoint, you have Jesus, the Expression of the Father, offering Himself to God His Father! What you end up with is God offering Himself to Himself!

I would rather say: Jesus accepted to be offered by the High Priest as a sacrifice to the Jewish God of Justice, the God who instituted the Law that states: "And thine eye shall not pity; but life shall go for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot."¹⁰⁶

Let it be said that there are many texts in the Septuagint itself where God tells His people to stop offering Him sacrifices as He neither needs nor wants them, where He states clearly that He is not at all interested in the end products of this religious *abattoir* called the Temple of Jerusalem as He does not eat the flesh of animals nor does He drink the blood offered to Him,¹⁰⁷ that His people does not have to serve Him as He needs nothing.

As humans continue to insist on sacrificing to their God of justice and vengeance by killing animals or other humans, God decides to provide Himself as the victim of the so-called "needed" sacrifice. The One to Whom the sacrifice is offered by His humans becomes its Victim! God gave Himself as a sacrifice to us. The *rôles* are reversed! It is we who need His service, we who need to be fed by His blood and His flesh.

Jesus' execution as a sacrifice offered by the High Priest

All the Gospel writers insist that although the sentence of death by crucifixion was passed by the Roman governor Pontius Pilate and carried out by Roman soldiers, it was the High Priest who forced his hand and whipped the Jerusalem mob to demand His execution by crucifixion.

¹⁰⁶ Deuteronomy 19:21

¹⁰⁷ "If I were hungry, I would not tell thee: for the world is mine, and the fulness thereof. Will I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats? Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High: And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me." (Psalm 50:12-15)

The notice affixed on the cross “THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS”¹⁰⁸ indicates that Pilate had Jesus crucified for insurrection. Jesus’ crucifixion was a clear warning from him to those who might want to fight Roman rule. But Pilate did not instigate the whole affair. He had Jesus crucified because He had been handed to him by the High Priest who sent the party who arrested Him.

Two Gospel writers mention that some Jewish religious leaders met to discuss Jesus’ case under the presidency of Caiaphas, the High Priest.^{109, 110} Their predicament is succinctly put thus: “What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place¹¹¹ and nation.”¹¹² The writer of John’s Gospel reports that Caiaphas, as High Priest, retorted: “Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.”¹¹³ This pronouncement by the High Priest decided the Council that Jesus had to die to prevent the disaster that the Romans would inflict if Jesus’ actions were to bring about the political and social unrest expected of a people under occupation. They foresaw that the Romans would crush the rebellion and destroy the Temple and so, the Jewish people.

The author of John’s Gospel then comments on the pronouncement made by the High Priest:

And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.¹¹⁴

¹⁰⁸ Matthew 27:37; also Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19

¹⁰⁹ Matthew 27:1-5

¹¹⁰ John 11:47-52

¹¹¹ that is, Jerusalem and the Temple (the Greek term “*topos*” (τοπος) refers to a location)

¹¹² John 11:47-48

¹¹³ John 11:50

¹¹⁴ John 11:51-52

For the writer of John's Gospel, the High Priest's statement that Jesus is to die for the Jewish nation is seen as a prophecy. But he also adds that this prophecy is incomplete as Jesus is to die not only for the Jewish nation but also for all God's children as well.

The religious group headed by the chief priests bring Jesus to Pontius Pilate and whip the Jerusalem mob^{115, 116, 117, 118} to demand His execution by crucifixion in every one of the four Gospels. In all the Gospels Pilate has some qualms about condemning Jesus. To these, the Priests reply in John's Gospel: "but the Jews cried out, saying, If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend: whosoever maketh himself a king speaketh against Caesar."¹¹⁹ Pilate, after talking to Jesus in private, comes back to meet the mob and the Jewish leaders:

And he saith unto the Jews, Behold your King! But they cried out, Away with him, away with him, crucify him. Pilate saith unto them, Shall I crucify your King? The chief priest answered, We have no king but Caesar.¹²⁰

Here we have the Chief Priest sealing Jesus' fate in the name of the people: He is to be crucified.

It might appear strange that Pilate would have been reluctant to have a Jew executed; after all, such executions manifested Roman power, an important ingredient in controlling unruly natives. But the Gospels all insist that Jesus is killed by the reluctant Romans at

¹¹⁵ "But the chief priests and elders persuaded the multitude that they should ask Barabbas, and destroy Jesus." (Matthew 27:20)

¹¹⁶ "But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them. And Pilate answered and said again unto them, What will ye then that I shall do unto him whom ye call the King of the Jews? And they cried out again, Crucify him." (Mark 14:11-13)

¹¹⁷ "And they were instant with loud voices, requiring that he might be crucified. And the voices of them and of the chief priests prevailed." (Luke 23:23)

¹¹⁸ "When the chief priests therefore and officers saw him, they cried out, saying, Crucify him, crucify him." (John 19:6)

¹¹⁹ John 19:12

¹²⁰ John 19:14-15

the instigation of the Jewish religious authorities¹²¹ as they all understand Jesus' crucifixion to be a sacrifice offered during the Passover period by the High Priest to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Jesus executed for blasphemy

How is that? Though the Chief Priests had argued among themselves that Jesus had to be liquidated for political reasons, they still had to be able to justify it to themselves; they did not want to be guilty of the death of an innocent man. They had to find Him guilty of some charge that carried the death penalty according to the Law. These people were pillars of their society; they were good, law-abiding, religious, moral, exemplary individuals. They really wanted the best for their people as well as to be the best of their people.

Only the writer of John does not report this interrogation. In the words of the author of Matthew's Gospel:

And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven. Then the high priest rent his clothes, saying, He hath spoken blasphemy; what further need have we of witnesses? behold, now ye have heard his blasphemy. What think ye? They answered and said, He is guilty of death.¹²²

The author of Mark has the High Priest asking the fatal question¹²³ and rending his clothes while the author of Luke has the question asked by the whole assembly.¹²⁴ All have the Council condemning Jesus for blasphemy, including the author of John¹²⁵ for claiming

¹²¹ Every gospel writer states that Pilate offered to let Jesus go as a Passover good will gesture from the "benevolent" Roman power but that the crowd demanded the release of Barabbas instead.

¹²² Matthew **26:63-66**

¹²³ Mark **14:61-64**

¹²⁴ Luke **22:66-71**

¹²⁵ in the following report to Pilate of why they want Him crucified: "The Jews (i.e. the chief priests ... and officers) answered him, We have a law, and by our law he ought to die, because he made himself the Son of God." (John **19:7**)

to be the Son of God. The Council members firmly believed that they were being good and obedient servants of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in seeing this blasphemer executed according to the Law given to them by Moses.

In the Matthew Gospel we have Pilate wanting to free Jesus while the mob wants Him crucified. Pilate washes his hand of the whole thing, stating that: "I am innocent of the blood of this just person: see ye to it."¹²⁶ Then comes this damning verse: "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children."¹²⁷

This last verse has had terrible consequences over the centuries; some have suggested that it laid the ground work for the *Shoah*.¹²⁸ I will come back to it but let me say that it fits marvellously in what I have been saying: the mob demanded Jesus' crucifixion in the four Gospels. They did so because their religious leaders told them that this was the pious and right thing to do, that this was what the Law prescribed. They followed their leaders. The formula used in Matthew indicates that this was a collective decision of the whole Jewish people, from the High Priest to the children.¹²⁹

Jesus' crucifixion is ordained by the High Priest (though carried out by the Romans) on behalf of the whole Jewish people to obey the Law of Moses given to them under Covenant by the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

It is totally unfair to suggest that their action was unwarranted or unjustifiable; on the contrary, they did what they had to do as good religious Jews. Jesus put the Jewish religious authorities in a bind by His claims to soon sit at God's right hand and come on the clouds of Heaven: He was not just claiming to be the new anointed,

¹²⁶ Matthew 27:24

¹²⁷ Matthew 27:25

¹²⁸ This verse has been surreptitiously expurgated from the Gospel text read at church in some Roman Catholic dioceses for Passion (Palm) Sunday.

¹²⁹ The Greek word "tekna" (τεκνα) translated as "children" is not the word used to specify unborn children (seed). This verse does not refer to unborn Jews. It cannot be "used against" Jews who were born since, as this is simply not what this text says. Furthermore, if Jesus, the Voice of God Himself, gives them His forgiveness, how can anyone who claims to be His follower impute any guilt to those who saw that He be executed?

the new and real King of the Jews; His claim was to be equal to God, equal as He would be sitting at His right hand.

They had a choice to make: they either accepted His claims, forsook their traditions and risked the wrath of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or kept to the Law and traditions that their fathers had handed on to them. It was obvious to them, as it should be to us that either Jesus was right or Moses was.

Jesus was an upstart fellow coming from nowhere with no good family or social background, making outrageous claims while they came from good families and followed old and proven traditions. How could anything good come out of Nazareth?

Jesus is thus executed by the Romans around the Feast of Passover but after the High Priest found Him guilty of blasphemy against the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He is sacrificed by the High Priest in the name of the Jewish people. But I submit that He is also sacrificed by God to the Jewish people and those who associate with them.

The problem surrounding the eating of Jesus

All four Gospels agree on the following points: Jesus had His last meal with his disciples on a Thursday evening, just before His arrest. His condemnation follows on Friday morning after interrogations by the High Priest and Pilate. It is immediately carried out: He is crucified and dies on that Friday afternoon.

Unfortunately, the four Gospels do not agree on when Passover was! Furthermore, the Synoptics mention only one Passover that Jesus shared with His disciples and say that it was Jesus' last meal with His disciples on that Thursday evening. The author of John on the other hand mentions three Passovers, the last one being the one Jesus just missed by dying on that Friday, the day of its preparation.

The Synoptics all agree that Jesus' last meal with His disciples was on the evening following the first day of the Feast of Unleaven bread and that this meal was the Passover meal that had been prepared that same afternoon.

The Law states that the ones who prepare the meal are to take their lamb to the Temple to be slaughtered by the priests during the late afternoon, around three o'clock. The lamb is killed in such a

way that it loses all its blood; the priests give some of its blood to those who bring back the slain lamb so that they can put some of it on the lintel and doorpost of the room where they will eat the lamb the same evening (not its blood, as this was against the Law) roasted with bitter herbs and *matzah* (unleaven bread).

The Synoptics' account implies that the first day of Passover was a Thursday and that the Passover meal was eaten after sundown. As all Gospel writers agree that days start just after sundown and finish at sundown as is still the custom for the Jews, it implies that they ate the Passover meal at the beginning of the second day.

The author of John has Jesus eating His last meal before the Passover¹³⁰ and has the killing of the Passover lambs on Friday afternoon, coinciding with Jesus' death. He states that the following Sabbath (Saturday) was the first day of Passover. The Passover meal would then have been eaten that Friday evening after sundown, and so at the beginning of the Sabbath. This is much more in line with the prescriptions given in the Torah which put the Passover meal on the first day of Passover.

I believe, rightly or wrongly, that the reason why the Gospel of John is so different from the Synoptics is that its author did not want to repeat what had been said in the previous Gospels but wanted to correct what he considered errors or omissions. One of those was that the three years of Jesus' ministry seemed to be just one.

If what I have assumed is correct, the fact that the author of John's Gospel does not mention the institution of the eating of Jesus means that he considered the other Gospels' account of it as truthful. Three Gospel texts as well as one by Paul mention the "breaking of the bread" by Jesus after the blessing and the "sharing of the cup of wine". In Matthew, we find:

And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of

¹³⁰ John 13:1-2

this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.¹³¹

while in Mark we find:

And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is my body. And he took the cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them: and they all drank of it. And he said unto them, This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God.¹³²

while in Luke we find:

And he said unto them, With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer: For I say unto you, I will not any more eat thereof, until it be fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and said, Take this, and divide it among yourselves: For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come. And he took bread, and gave thanks, and brake it, and gave unto them, saying, This is my body which is given for you: this do in remembrance of me. Likewise also the cup after supper, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood, which is shed for you.¹³³

and finally, we find in Paul's first letter to the Corinthians:

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this

¹³¹ Matthew **26:26-29**

¹³² Mark **14:22-25**

¹³³ Luke **22:15-20**

bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.¹³⁴

These four authors all agree on the essentials; that Jesus took bread, gave thanks, broke it and gave it to those who were attending the meal saying: "Take, eat, this is my body." They also all agree that He did that on His last Passover meal with His disciples, on His last meal just before He was handed over to be crucified.

He also took a cup of wine, said the blessing and passed it to His disciples to drink stating that its content was His blood that would seal a new covenant when it would be shed. They also all agree that this happened on the same occasion(s). And Paul is very clear that the bread and the wine are really "the body and blood of the Lord". The author of Matthew adds that Jesus' blood is shed for the remission of sins. Luke and Paul that Jesus said to do it in memory of Him.

As already noted, the author of John's Gospel does not mention Jesus instituting this eating of Himself. On the other hand, he mentions Jesus going to Jerusalem for the Passover on three successive years. His first trip is found in his Chapter 2 from verse 13; it is then that Jesus had His altercation with the merchants at the Temple (and not just before His death as the Synoptics seem to imply); already then did He say cryptically that He would rise after three days.

It is close to but before the last Passover He celebrated with His disciples, the year before He was killed, that Jesus multiplied the loafs of bread¹³⁵ which He followed a day or two later by a discourse where He compares Himself to manna, the bread "from heaven" given by God to the Israelites in the desert. He states that He is the real bread from Heaven, the bread that comes from the Father, the bread that gives real life and real nourishment.

He says that it is essential to life eternal to eat His flesh and drink His blood. He adds that He will raise on the last day those who drink His blood and eat His flesh:

[32] Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Moses gave you not that bread from heaven; but my Father giveth you the true bread from

¹³⁴ 1 Corinthians 11:23-27

¹³⁵ John 6:4-14

heaven. For the bread of God is he which cometh down from heaven, and giveth life unto the world. Then said they unto him, Lord, evermore give us this bread. And Jesus said unto them, I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst... [48] I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat? Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever.¹³⁶

This text is very different from the others quoted. There is no association of bread to His flesh and of wine to His blood. Although it is imperative that we eat His flesh¹³⁷ and drink His blood, He does not state how this is to be done! This text comes soon after the multiplication of the loaves required to feed the hungry crowd and before His eating of the Passover.

If the author of John's Gospel basically writes only about what is wanting in the Synoptics, we can make a certain sense of why he does not refer to the institution of the eating of Jesus as such; after all, all three other Gospels had touched on this point in what he considered a satisfactory manner as all indicated that bread

¹³⁶ John 6:32-35; 48-58

¹³⁷ The Greek word "sarks" (σάρξ) for "flesh" means human or animal flesh as opposed to blood, intestines, bones: it is the part of the animal that is eaten.

would become Jesus' flesh and wine would become Jesus' blood and all indicated that this happened when He ate His last Passover meal and on the meal before Jesus was handed over. And he agreed with these facts but knew that these two events were separated by a year!

The Synoptic writers did not stress that the bread and wine are really Jesus' body and blood (contrary to Paul, who, I claim, wrote later). So the writer of John stresses this. He insists that Jesus is to be eaten as He is real food (and real drink). Furthermore, the assimilation of this food and drink by the body of those who partake of them gives them real strength, life, energy. And this life will continue forever.

Paul gives us an account of something that was going on in Corinth around 59 AD. One can assume that it was standard practice. But Paul did not invent such a ceremonial. Could it have been invented by Peter or John? This seems hardly likely.

There is a world between what is reported in the texts already quoted and the creation of a ceremonial that would have become a weekly if not a daily affair. There is nothing in Matthew's or Mark's accounts to suggest that this eating of Jesus should be repeated. In Luke's case, while Jesus adds "Do this in memory of me," He does not say when. Is it to be on each Passover? at each meal? daily? each time the disciples meet as a group for a meal?

John and the Synoptics all link Jesus' talk of Him being bread of Heaven, His flesh as food and His blood as drink with the time of His last Passover on earth. The Passover ceremonial comprises the eating of unleaven bread (*matzah*) and the drinking of cups of wine as well as the lamb's blood being bludgeoned on the doorposts.

Jews never drank blood: it was against the Law as clearly stated in Leviticus:

For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that maketh an atonement for the soul. Therefore I said unto the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood, neither shall any stranger that sojourneth among you eat blood. And whatsoever man there be of the children of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, which hunteth and catcheth any beast or fowl that may be eaten; he shall even pour out the blood

thereof, and cover it with dust. For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: therefore I said unto the children of Israel, Ye shall eat the blood of no manner of flesh: for the life of all flesh is the blood thereof: whosoever eateth it shall be cut off.¹³⁸

This is why they eat *kosher*: the animal to be eaten must have lost all its blood. The words “life” and “soul” in this text are the translation of the same Greek word “psyche” (ψυχή). Its original meaning is “breath”, “breath of life” and thus “life”. To most, “soul” is what makes a person alive rather than dead. Without blood, flesh is dead as it is breathless, lifeless, without “soul”.

Atonement for sins is done by the killing of an animal: its death is offered by the sinner to God. The proof of its death is the blood offered on the altar. It seems that only by killing is atonement for sins possible and that this precious liquid essential to the animal's life is not something that a human can partake of as it is reserved to the master of all life, God Himself.

Jesus' idea of giving His blood to drink to humans is a direct attack on the divine prerogative expressed in Leviticus. Anyone who drinks His blood is automatically excluded from Israel.

Wheat bread is the fundamental food of the Middle East and wine, one of its most common drinks. Humans cannot do without these in that part of the world. This is as material as it gets.

The whole idea of eating Jesus' flesh and drinking His blood (while still being alive!) in the form of bread and wine is strange to say the least. How could sane people come up with such an idea within the context of their Jewish religious background? Such a move requires a complete and radical change of the religious landscape of the time, something that seems to me well above the heads of these ordinary people without a rich education and a lot of leisure that were Jesus' disciples.

Jesus did not go around preaching from town to town on His own. He must have stayed with some supporters on and off. They must have had communal meals. After the multiplication of the bread, Jesus could make the point that He could give over and over from at least what seemed like a limited source of food; that He could physically feed the multitude from precious little.

¹³⁸ Leviticus 17:10-14

Eating together is an act of friendship, of *camaraderie*, of love for each other. The one who invites the others shares some of what she has with her friends. Jesus decided to share Himself with His friends. He decided to physically give Himself by satisfying the most fundamental needs of Humans, that of eating and drinking something real, something filling. He could do that for the same reason He could provide enough bread to the multitude.

By His last Passover with His disciples, a year before His death, He introduced this giving of Himself to His friends at their communal meals. He would say the blessing on the loaf of bread; break it and pass it around; and add something like “take and eat: this is my body.” He would take a cup filled with wine; say the blessing on it and add “This is the cup of my blood” and pass it around. His words would probably vary from meal to meal and according to circumstance.

By the end of His life, as Jesus made it clearer and clearer that He was going to die for others, He added to what He said to make that point. He added the “do this in memory of me” as He wanted His disciples to continue this giving of Himself even after His death.

This interpretation has at least the advantage of making sense of what is found in the Gospels and in Paul’s letter as well as in the Acts of the Apostles.

In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus Himself is talking on the road to some of His disciples who do not recognize Him. He stops at an inn with them “And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them,”¹³⁹ at which point they recognized Him.¹⁴⁰ Why, if not because they were used to Him doing so?¹⁴¹

The author of Acts (who says he is also the author of Luke’s Gospel) states that sometime later the tradition of the “breaking of

¹³⁹ Luke **24:30**

¹⁴⁰ “And they told what things were done in the way, and how he was known of them in breaking of bread.” (Luke **24:35**)

¹⁴¹ According to some Gospels, the Apostles would have been the only ones at table with Him for His last meal; so these disciples could not have been present. If Jesus had done this only on that occasion, these disciples would probably not have known about it. Surely Jesus’ arrest, condemnation and crucifixion (and rumors of resurrection) would have been the only topics of discussion with the Apostles.

bread” continued with the community¹⁴² in Jerusalem. It is also found in Troas around 60 AD. I want to stress what I consider the obvious: the Apostles were not the kind to invent something as bold as this ceremonial: they had to have it from Jesus Himself. By the end of His life surely, the “Do this in remembrance of me” would easily have made sense to His Apostles as He had told them over and over that He was going to His death.

A new testament?

“Do this is memory of me” is straightforward enough: in this, Jesus tells His disciples that they can give Him to others as well as to themselves that He can and will continue to feed them. But the saying about a new testament is more difficult to understand.

The Greek word “diathèkès” (διαθήκης) translated by “testament” means “disposition”, “arrangement”, as in the case of a will, or a pact, a convention, an agreement, a covenant. This leaves quite some room for interpretation. Still this “pact” or “convention” is clearly sealed with His blood: “For this is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.”¹⁴³

The covenant brought forth by Moses was also sealed in blood:¹⁴⁴ that of oxen, which was sprinkled on the people with the words: “Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.”¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² “And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42)

¹⁴³ Matthew 26:28

¹⁴⁴ “And Moses came and told the people all the words of the LORD, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the LORD hath said will we do. And Moses wrote all the words of the LORD, and rose up early in the morning, and builded an altar under the hill, and twelve pillars, according to the twelve tribes of Israel. And he sent young men of the children of Israel, which offered burnt offerings, and sacrificed peace offerings of oxen unto the LORD. And Moses took half of the blood, and put it in basons; and half of the blood he sprinkled on the altar. And he took the book of the covenant, and read in the audience of the people: and they said, All that the LORD hath said will we do, and be obedient. And Moses took the blood, and sprinkled it on the people, and said, Behold the blood of the covenant, which the LORD hath made with you concerning all these words.” (Exodus 24:3-8)

¹⁴⁵ Exodus 24:8

In the same way the new covenant is sealed in Jesus' blood, which the Jewish people assembled with the High Priest in Jerusalem said should fall on them and so be sprinkled on them: "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children."¹⁴⁶ These are the words that we, as Christians, have to make our own if we want to live under this new covenant sealed in Jesus' blood. Just as the author of John's Gospel noted that the High Priest prophesied unwittingly about Jesus,¹⁴⁷ we have here the people of the first covenant unwittingly accepting the new one for us, a point of the utmost importance.

Of course, we can ask: what is this "new covenant"? We have part of the answer in "for the remission of sins". This new covenant is a statement about Who God really is and how we can become like Him so as to be with and in Him. It is a statement about the fact that God being Love cannot but forgive each and everyone their failings as well as provide them with Himself as nourishment to help them get the strength to become more what they are meant to be.

The Father's sacrifice of His Son

So we have Jesus dying on the cross; first, as a sacrifice by the High Priest to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; sacrificed (for blasphemy) on the eve of Passover, but sacrificed with the passover lambs so that God would pass over their sinfulness and keep them alive while killing the first-born of their enemies to bring them into the Promised Land; sacrificed so that a new covenant might arise in His blood, a covenant that shows God's infinite love for each and every one of His humans.

There is also a human sacrifice in the Septuagint: the sacrifice of Isaac, the first and only son of Abraham and Sarah, the child that God gave them in her old age:

[1] And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am. And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of... [6] And Abraham took the wood of

¹⁴⁶ Matthew 27:25

¹⁴⁷ John 11:51-52

the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together. And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering? And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together. And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood. And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son. And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I. And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me. And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.¹⁴⁸

In this story found in Genesis God demands that one of His humans kills his only son. The son who will be sacrificed by his father carries himself the wood of the sacrifice on his back. But *in extremis*, as Abraham is going to kill the boy he loves so much, God intervenes to stop this travesty because He is not like that. The Torah makes it absolutely clear here, as the Septuagint in many other places, that God does not want humans to kill their children to appease Him: He is not like humans who sacrifice their children by sending them to war, by abusing them, by selling them. No: God is Love; it is He Who offers us His own Son, His only Son, Who carries the wood of the sacrifice on His back; and in this case the sacrifice goes through because this is the way the human world is:

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁸ Genesis 22:1-2; 6-13

¹⁴⁹ John 3:16-17

Humans are the ones who demand blood; so they get it: God's own! They want death for those who cross them; so they get it: God's death! Religion as we know it is brought upside down by Jesus' life: He, God-made-man, pays the price; He is the victim for all the sins that have been perpetrated against us. God talks forgiveness while we talk vengeance.

Jesus turns cultic rituals around. While in the Temple it is God to whom the blood of goats is offered and it is His humans who offer it, with Jesus it is His blood that God offers to His humans. In Leviticus, only God can receive blood; with Jesus, humans receive and drink God's blood. God's prerogative becomes His humans' as they partake of the blood of the Lamb Whom was sacrificed for them.

To sum up, we see that Jesus' God by His Very Self loves everyone the same and wants all to be like Him. God acts with the same compassion towards all His humans. He is the One who serves all. He does not act violently; He is the Suffering Servant. He, the Lamb of God, feeds us with His blood and His flesh. He is the victim of our vengeance for all the sins that have been done to us as He sacrifices Himself to us. God does not condemn: through His Son's example, He wants us humans to be like Him and so to be one with Him.

FROM LOVE TO LIGHT

Service

God's life of service towards His Humans is lived to the full by Jesus. He says explicitly "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister"¹⁵⁰ where the Greek word "diakonēsai" (διακονᾶν) translated by "minister" means "be a servant".

Jesus also wants His disciples to be servants to others. He wants them to look after each other in pragmatic ways. Jesus made this very clear on His last evening with His disciples when, in John's Gospel, He washes His disciples' feet as an example for them:

Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you.¹⁵¹

In this episode, only mentioned in John's Gospel, Jesus washed His disciples' feet after the meal, although before Judas' departure.¹⁵² This is an odd time to wash guests' feet; one would normally do that before the meal, when people gathered. It is as if Jesus did this as a response to something that had just happened.

I believe, rightly or wrongly, that John's author basically corrects what he considers were the omissions in the other Gospels. If this is so, we can find the solution to our problem by looking at Luke's account of Jesus' last meal with His disciples. In it, we find that, after the meal, after Jesus told His disciples that He was going

¹⁵⁰ Mark 10:45

¹⁵¹ John 13:13-15

¹⁵² "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded." (John 13:1-5)

to be betrayed that same night, they started bickering about who among them was the greatest:¹⁵³

And there was also a strife among them, which of them should be accounted the greatest. And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors. But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve. For whether is greater, he that sitteth at meat, or he that serveth? is not he that sitteth at meat? but I am among you as he that serveth.¹⁵⁴

Jesus had to tell them yet again that they had it wrong; upside-down in fact! In God's order, the leader is the one who serves, just as God Himself is their Father, the One who looks after them, and just as His Son is their Servant. They still thought according to this world's order instead of God's; they had not understood Jesus' message; they needed it to come to perfection on Good Friday. O that this message would be really understood by Christians!

Jesus is a Servant who wants all to do likewise to all as He does not set limits as to whom He serves. He is there to serve all, evil as well as good in the passage already referred to "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." After all, he did wash Judas' feet at a time when He knew full well what decision Judas had taken.

Seeking sinners

There is something pointedly absent in the Gospels. While God readily acts as a Father and a help in many passages of the Septuagint, in each and every one He only does so only with deserving humans: those who follow His law, call upon His name. In the Gospels however, Jesus never checks someone's morals or state of sinfulness before doing a miracle of healing for them (surely an act of service).

Jesus does not only heal whoever asks Him, He spends His time in "shady" company, with people of ill-repute to the scandal of

¹⁵³ They probably all wanted to take over after Jesus' betrayal! What concerned individuals for Jesus' welfare!

¹⁵⁴ Luke 22:24-27

the “good people”, those who follow zealously the prescriptions of the law:¹⁵⁵

And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners *to repentance*.¹⁵⁶

Jesus makes clear in His answer to the Pharisees’ objections that He is sent to those who need Him. He is a physician: the people He meets are not strong; they are unwell, not as they should be. He is there to heal them. He then quotes from the Septuagint and adds (I here paraphrase the Greek text) “for I have not come to call the ones who conform to the rules, the Law, those who fulfill their obligations towards God and men. I have come to call the ones who are going the wrong way, who are in error, who are at fault.”

While my paraphrase of the word “righteous” can be said to be useless, the one of the word “sinners” definitely is not: the Greek word “amartôlous” (αμαρτωλους) is better translated by “those who err”, “those who are lost”. Those terms are less moralistic, more matter of fact though they still mean that those people are on the wrong road, do wrong things.¹⁵⁷

So Jesus (God) is a doctor who makes house-calls! He goes to visit the sick and brings them help. His goal is to see that everyone is well. This is far from a God who promulgates a Law on a mountain with lots of “special effects” and finishes by cursing those who would dare to transgress it!

¹⁵⁵ also reported in Mark 2:15-17 and Luke 5:29-32

¹⁵⁶ Matthew 9:10-13. The original Greek text which is translated in the quote does not mention the word “repentance” in any of the three references: the non-existent words are in italic.

¹⁵⁷ It could be said against me that this Greek word is used in the Septuagint time and time again. So it is plausible that the term had by the time of Jesus a religious and moral connotation close to our use of the word “sinner” rather than the more general translation that I favour.

There is another interesting incident on the same theme. Again we have good God-fearing people who are really upset because Jesus spends His time not with them but with “publicans and sinners”:

Then drew near unto him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And he spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.¹⁵⁸

Jesus says that anyone who has sheep will leave the others and go looking for the lost one: this is what people do *naturally*. They seek what they have lost, even if it means spending a lot of time to find it. No one accepts to lose something without putting a lot of effort in finding it. Such a person will rejoice when she finally finds her lost sheep. She will celebrate with her friends her recovery of the one sheep she had lost out of the hundred.

Jesus says that God is like that. He seeks “sinners”, He looks for “those who are lost” until He finds them. He brings them back on the right path until the sheep are “home” where He can look after them (pasture). Then God calls His friends and they party.

“Repentance” is the translation of the Greek term “metanoia” (μετάνοια) which means “change of mind”, “regret”, “repentance”. So God helps those who err to have the change of heart required to get on the right track and so be well again. This makes clear that God wants all to come to salvation and that He will go the extra mile to bring all “home”.

Another interesting case is that of the Publican Zaccheus. This story can be divided in three sections. In the first part, Zac-

¹⁵⁸ Luke 15:1-7

cheus, a very rich Publican, climbs up a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus as He passes by, an undignified way of seeing Him:

And, behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus, which was the chief among the publicans, and he was rich. And he sought to see Jesus who he was; and could not for the press, because he was little of stature. And he ran before, and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him: for he was to pass that way.¹⁵⁹

Zaccheus does not mind making a fool of himself to see Jesus as he is not a kid to climb on trees but a very successful businessman. Jesus sees him, tells him to come down and invites Himself at his house for the day!¹⁶⁰ Zaccheus is exceedingly happy to have Jesus at his place, but the “good people” complain that Jesus is making Himself the guest of a sinner:

And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up, and saw him, and said unto him, Zacchaeus, make haste, and come down; for to day I must abide at thy house. And he made haste, and came down, and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all murmured, saying, That he was gone to be guest with a man that is a sinner.¹⁶¹

The result of Jesus’ visit: His host announces that he gives half his goods to the poor and will restore fourfold what he got through false accusation. The simple fact that He makes Himself available to this man, that He lets him entertain Him, has as a result a complete turn-around of this man’s life. Thanks to His attention, the “sinner” has a change of heart, of perspective:

And Zacchaeus stood, and said unto the Lord; Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor; and if I have taken any thing from any man by false accusation, I restore him fourfold. And Jesus said unto him, This day is salvation come to this house, forsomuch

¹⁵⁹ Luke 19:2-4

¹⁶⁰ Something that is frowned upon in many passages of the Septuagint as mingling with sinners is seen as endorsing their way of life, giving them legitimacy. No wonder the “good God-fearing people” of Jesus’ days could not accept His behaviour; the Septuagint does not either!

¹⁶¹ Luke 19:5-7

as he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost.¹⁶²

Jesus makes it clear to all that Zaccheus is “saved”: he is now of the Kingdom, living according to God’s ways. Again He makes it clear that He is there to “seek and to save which was lost”.

Faith in God’s attentive service

Not only does Jesus say that He is His humans’ servant, doctor and shepherd. He also makes this statement about God’s service to His creation in general and His humans in particular:

And why take ye thought for raiment? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Where-withal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things.¹⁶³

Jesus says that God looks after His humans; He knows their needs and sees to them. His children should not worry about their material needs but trust in their Father. Such is God that we should not worry about food, clothes, etc. any more than do the lilies of the field.

He also makes clear that the *rôle* of prayer is not to tell God what we need as He is already well aware of everything that concerns us:

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶² Luke 19:8-10

¹⁶³ Matthew 6:28-32

¹⁶⁴ Matthew 6:7-8

Three times in a few verses Jesus uses the sentence “and your Father, which seeth in secret”.¹⁶⁵ That should make it clear that for Jesus, God as Father knows everything that is being done. The God of Jesus is not only one who acts like a human Father; He acts like a Father who knows every one of our needs and actions; from Whom nothing is hidden.

Everything done by everyone will be known by everybody

What is hidden is not only known to God but will also be revealed to all. It is one thing that God knows about our deeds but quite another that everyone else does as well! This is exactly what Jesus says:

For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops.¹⁶⁶

Jesus insists that all will eventually be revealed. Where, how and when is not specified. Jesus thought that it was important for us to grasp this point. Experience teaches us that such a revelation of others’ deeds does not usually happen in this life. So it seems that Jesus expects this revelation to be made in the life to come.

Jesus’ view of this earthly life is very different from that found in the Septuagint. While Jesus believes the afterlife is more important than this earthly life which is only its preparation, most of the authors of the Septuagint believe at best in the existence of an underworld of “shades”, an afterlife which is a mere shadow of this present life, with nothing to commend it. So it is this earthly life that is really important for them.

While the authors of the Septuagint demand justice from God in this life, Jesus tells us about the future. For Jesus, God does not have to be “fair” in this life: He does not have to make sure the “good” get their reward and the “bad” get their punishment while in this life. For Jesus, bad things can happen to good people. In fact, He seems to think that bad things always happen to good people in

¹⁶⁵ Matthew 6:4, 6, 18

¹⁶⁶ Luke 12:1-3. The first part of this text is also found in Matthew 10:26

this life. It is in the afterlife that the good will get their reward just like it is in the afterlife that the bad will get theirs.

To come back to our original point, the following quote “I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance”¹⁶⁷ makes it clear that God is not alone in Heaven but that there are people there with Him, people who are rejoicing with Him. Jesus states that those who are with God in Heaven know what happens on earth. They know who the ninety-nine sheep are as well as who is the lost one.

God loves us enough to come and seek “sinners” to make them “whole”. Just as God is extremely aware of our every deeds, thoughts and needs, so are all who belong to Heaven. This is hardly surprising as Jesus tells us that there we will be like Him and His Father. If God is in love with each and every one of His Humans, so must all those in Heaven.

Summary

I argued in my essay Christians and Scripture that the Gospels are the only texts that can be used to determine Christian belief as they are the only texts that give us the words and acts of Jesus Christ, God’s Voice. This, of course, is based on the fundamental belief that Jesus is God’s perfect Voice, God the Word. I also argued there that the Gospels cannot be interpreted in any way that bring about a contradiction in the various sayings and deeds of Jesus. I think it is fair to say that the way I have interpreted the texts examined so far does not create a contradiction.

I think it is fair to conclude from the various Gospel texts examined so far and the assumption that Jesus is the Expression of God, God’s Word, that: (1) God loves everyone the same, good or bad; (2) God seeks those who err as He loves them unconditionally; (3) God’s love consists of acts of service (like washing feet); (4) God considers it is essential for us to do and be like Him; (5) God knows all our actions and thoughts and (6) God will reveal all in the afterlife.

¹⁶⁷ Luke 15:7

These facts have definite consequences in the afterlife, consequences that can be either heavenly or hellish according to an individual's state. This is what will be argued in the next Chapter. This will be done on only one hypothesis: that God is the One who loves unconditionally every one of His creatures.

OF HELL, PURGATORY AND HEAVEN

The consequences of God being Love

What can we say about God? John tells us that God is “Love”;¹⁶⁸ another way to put it is that God is “Father”,¹⁶⁹ and a third is that God is “slow to anger”,¹⁷⁰ “merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness”.¹⁷¹ The fundamental point is that God is the Absolute Lover.

Absolute Love reveals all as the Lover partakes of the whole of the other’s life. There are no secrets to this Absolute Lover. So all that was thought or done, in secret as well as in public, is known by God and so revealed to all He loves as they are one with Him. Again, Perfect Love manages to know the loved one perfectly, even as He holds no grudges about the sins or failings of the beloved. This Lover shares all, so all is known to all. This is why God is said to be Light: that which makes everything known. This is why people who do not love want to hide in the darkness, where, they hope, they and their lives are kept hidden.

A lover feels for the beloved. If the beloved is happy, her lover is happy with her; if the beloved is sad, her lover is sad with her. If the beloved is in pain and agony, the Lover, perfectly identified with His beloved, feels her pain and her agony. It becomes His pain, His agony.

Human reactions to God as everyone’s Lover and Light

At our death we live the Meeting of that God who is Infinite Love and as such makes everything known, all our acts and thoughts, all those of all the others, His sufferings in everyone who suffered, His joy in everyone who rejoiced. God wants us with Him in His Love and Light. He wants us to partake of His love, rejoice in His love for all and sundry. He wants us to be happy with Him, to love everyone with Him.

¹⁶⁸ “He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love.” (1 John 4:8)

¹⁶⁹ “That ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:45)

¹⁷⁰ “The LORD is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and plenteous in mercy.” (Psalm 103:8)

¹⁷¹ “And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.” (Exodus 34:6)

He wants us to rejoice in His love of us, love that is not at all thwarted by our acts or thoughts against His Humans or creation.

But how will we react once placed in that situation? To start with, how will we react to everyone knowing us exactly as we are, knowing exactly all we did and did not do?

We can recoil and refuse to be known by the Lover as we do not want to be known for what we are. But as the Lover by His very Nature of Lover cannot but reveal us as we really are, and so uncover our sinfulness, we can experience shame, anger and hatred at being discovered and exposed for all to see. In which case this experience where every one of our failings is constantly in full public view will be a living Hell. For us, the living with this reality of God's presence will be a terrible judgement.

Not only are we naked to all and sundry; we also find that all the bad things we have done have been done to God as the other's Lover, and all the good as well. He knows everything because He was in the other in her need. If all our life we have been demanding justice and revenge for the bad things that others have done to us, we will feel that He will want to punish us for all the wrongs it turns out we have done to Him as the other's Lover. We will not believe Him when He says He loves us anyway; we will constantly be expecting to be terribly punished even though no punishment is forthcoming. We will live a self-inflicted torment because of what we wrongly anticipate.

Of course, we can accept to be exposed for the rotten persons we really are, and humble ourselves in front of all. More: we can actually rejoice with everyone that God is so great that He loves us in all our rottenness! But the pitfalls are not over yet.

Not only are we exposed in such a fashion but everyone else as well as God's love is for all. We might recoil at God's love for our enemies or for the people we loathe. We might call God's love into judgement. How can He love such a person? Our hatred or loathing for that person will make it Hell for us to live with this constant realization that God loves with an infinite love the other notwithstanding her sinful behaviour. If we are not able to forgive her, we will be incapable of forgiving God for "siding with her"; so we will rage forever against Him and her. We will be judging God and finding Him in the wrong, just like the devil does.

Let us assume that we can accept that God loves these terrible people as well as us. They are now always present to us in God's presence; hating them will make this experience Hell for us. We have to love them just as anyone else. It is one thing to accept that God is so love-crazy as to love these terrible people; it is quite another to have to do likewise. But God as Love wants all to be one in Him. So we have to be ready to rejoice with them, to be part of their joy of being loved by God.

We also have to accept that God loves equally each and every one; that He has no favourites. We have lived a better life than someone else: we deserve a better reward, our justice says. But God says: My Love is the same for all; as Absolute Love, I cannot but love everyone equally, whether they live Hell or not because of it. If we cannot accept this, this state of affairs will be our Hell and we will rage forever against God's perceived unfairness.

It should be clear that this scheme's requires of us what Jesus demanded of us in the two previous chapters. It does seem so far that this scheme has definite value.

To go back to it, things are not always black or white; in fact, they rarely are. We might need to swallow our pride, but manage to do so painfully with the help of others. We might be able to forgive others after a very arduous process of change. We might accept to let go of our notions of justice after overcoming agonizing difficulties. This painful change of self, required for full acceptance of this Reality, God's Reality, God's Kingdom, would necessarily be transitional. This painful transition is what the Roman Catholic Church calls Purgatory.¹⁷²

Heaven is, of course, the total acceptance of God's reality, of God's Kingdom: not only accepting God's absolute love for every one of His creatures, however sinful and blemished, but rejoicing in it with everyone else, as one body. And sharing that Love with all equally because He is so.

Our death is a passage from the present world into Reality (Truth). Reality means finding out Who God Is and what everyone did, thought, omitted to do, and so on. This Reality illumines all that has been and is, as well as God's absolute, unconditional, unchanging and unflinching Love for all, sinners and saints. We can either

¹⁷² as is clearly shown in Dante's Purgatorio, the purging of our wrong attitudes and ways

accept His love for us and all others or we can rebel and rage. Our world order prepares us for the latter; Jesus' message, for the former.

The Septuagint, as any text for that matter, can be interpreted in such a way that we will rebel and rage against God's Love if it is for all and sundry.¹⁷³ Jesus' message more clearly than any other message found in the Bible teaches us not to rebel and rage but to love and act like God acts by His very nature.

Jesus' urgent message: the reality of Hell

We have seen that the fact that God loves everyone the same irrespective of their sinfulness and baseness has different results on different people; for some, this is Hell, for others, it is Heaven, and for a third group, Purgatory: something that takes great effort to accept. The same can be said of the complete history of one's life been seen by all for what it really is and the fact of seeing others' histories as they really are, by the loving but absolutely revealing glare of God. The various people's reactions will thus be as varied as there are people. It thus follows that each will experience this according to her uniqueness. No two people will experience God in the same way, though each will experience the same Reality and thus the same Love and Light.

That God loves and wants every sinner to be saved is one thing. That all will accept the Reality of His Love and Truth due to His Light is far from obvious. But it is not God who refuses to give His Loving Presence to all; it is them that find it Hell because they cannot accept it. In this scheme, Hell exists; this is no wishy-washy scheme where all are saved regardless of what they have done so it does not matter what kind of life you live as God will give you a ticket to the Show anyway as He is such a sugar-daddy.

Jesus came to save sinners. He came to tell us what we need to do to be saved. For Him, there was great urgency: God wants everyone to find His Presence a joyful and liberating experience; not Hell. And too many do not see how to get ready for this Meeting. That is why He came and gave us an example of the life we should follow.

¹⁷³ Although the wonderful lives of so many all-compassionate religious Jews throughout the age bear witness to another way of understanding.

In this scheme, God does not judge; He only forgives. It is humans who judge, it is them that condemn. God is Love, but some humans hate.

What I learned as a child

With this I have produced a scheme that makes a certain sense of the normal concepts of Hell, Heaven and Purgatory, but from a radically different perspective than the usual one. All is based on the Reality of God's Nature, that is, Love. This scheme should be able to "explain" why this or that behaviour will bring us closer or farther from the Kingdom.

This is not what I learned as a Montreal-born Roman Catholic child in the 1950s. In that scheme there are laws that have to be followed; if they are not followed while knowing about them (which you were supposed to), you sinned. The sin could be of small or large consequences. Small consequences meant the pain of Purgatory; large consequences meant Hell, everlasting pain. You could, of course, have your offenses remitted by confession and absolution as the only thing that counted was the state of your slate at the moment of death: an un-confessed and un-absolved mortal sin sent you straight to Hell; otherwise, you most probably ended in Purgatory except if you had been exceedingly good. The more you gave yourself to God, the better was going to be your place in Heaven. This is why we must strive to be as good as possible so as to get to the best possible seat¹⁷⁴ in Heaven (and avoid as much as possible the pain of Purgatory).

The laws and observances found in that scheme come from the Bible and its interpretation by the Church. These govern good behaviour. Just as you have to be a good citizen in your country, you have to be a good citizen in the Kingdom.

People would say that the traditional scheme mixes the concept of God being loving with that of being just. Just in the sense that sentence is passed: the gravity of the sin decides the gravity of the penalty; even in Hell, not all pain is equal.¹⁷⁵ Love prevails as sins

¹⁷⁴ It is very interesting to note how all the great Roman Catholic saints saw their wickedness as equivalent to that of the great sinners; for them, there was no difference between their lives and that of anybody else. Awareness of God's love for a mere human is a great equalizer.

¹⁷⁵ This is taken by Dante in quite a wonderful fashion.

can be forgiven through absolution; but justice is applied to what was not forgiven through absolution (and to some remnant).

I believe that the traditional scheme evolved from the Gospels buttressed by two traditions: the Jewish and the Roman. The Septuagint contains lots of Laws and Ordinances to be followed. Penalties are clearly given. Romans laws were elaborate and their codification took place at certain times in the history of the Empire. So the Roman Catholic Church, established as a “spiritual” copy of the temporal Imperial Government, produced its own set of laws and penalties. To this day there are volumes of Canon laws, enough to bewilder most.

The Roman Catholic Church’s position on these matters is, obviously, based on Scripture as a whole while mine is based on the Gospels alone. This is why I needed to show in my essay Christians and Scripture that these and these alone are the Christian core texts.

Is Hell without God’s condemnation according to the Gospels?

Why do I want to change the traditional scheme? I made clear at the very beginning of this book that I want to do away with this concept of God as the One who judges and who casts in Hell those that have been found wanting. I made clear that I find this whole idea of God totally repulsive even if based on a certain idea of justice. I want to maintain that God does not judge but just loves. As I have shown, this does not entail that all live Heaven though everyone comes face to face with the Living God. It is this vision that some cannot stand and that others embrace. Though all are faced with the same Reality; only some can rejoice in it.

This is why I had to show in my above mentioned essay that the Septuagint has to be interpreted by a Christian only in the light of the Gospels as it can, by itself, easily be used to refute my position. As far as I am concerned, the non-Gospel books that complete the New Testament as well as the Septuagint have to be interpreted within the context of the sayings and life of Jesus, the Expression of God. Although these texts are Christian texts, they cannot be seen as providing a better understanding of Jesus’ message than that found in the reports of people who actually heard Him talk and actually lived with Him.

I think it is fair to say that the theory I have developed in this chapter is consistent with the examination of the Gospels found in

my two previous chapters. This is not sufficient though to conclude that it is valid as my principle of coherence demands that I be able to come up, for every Gospel text, with a valid interpretation that does not contradict the position I have just laid out, remembering that a Gospel interpretation can be valid only if it does not create any contradictions between the various parts of all four Gospels among themselves. I thus have much work to do.

I have been trying to make very clear that my scheme is based on some assumptions that some might not want to accept. On the other hand, I consider that the principle of coherence is required of anyone who considers that the Gospel texts are truthful: indeed, if they are truthful, how can they contradict each other on any point of importance?

My scheme has one advantage: all can be deduced from Who God Is according to Jesus. There is no need to bring in anything else. Its simplicity satisfies Ockham's razor.

I must be able to "explain" any text from the Gospels that seem to support, in any way, shape or form, the premise that God judges. Some surely will say that it is quite easy. Again, the problem is that of coherence. How can we have a God who condemns and loves at the same time? That God does not condemn anyone because He loves absolutely everyone is easy to understand; that He forgoes His love to those He condemns after trying everything to save them is only possible if God's love is conditional, something that I consider totally contrary to His nature. That it is the individual human who condemns or welcomes God's ways is much easier to accept. It fits with what we have found so far.

How can I validate my position?

My principle of coherence is a huge problem. Indeed, I cannot accept that my theory is right just from what I have examined so far. I have to check that the whole of the Gospels can be read in a way compatible with my theory. So although I have examined previously some of the relevant excerpts concerning God Father in His relationship with humans, I have not examined all of them. Although I have examined some of the excerpts concerning human behaviour, I have not examined all of them.

I will devote my next chapter to what Jesus says about Forgiveness, Chapter 7 to Jesus' Parables on Heaven and Hell, leaving to Chapter 8 the Parables' about God's perceived unfairness. By the

time I tackle Chapter 9, I will have examined all the parables concerning the afterlife as well as all Jesus' sayings and deeds on the subject of forgiveness, checking as I go along if they can be understood in a way consistent with my theory.

Jesus has also said quite a few things about how humans must live their lives. I will examine Jesus' Parables on the subject in Chapter 9 and in Chapter 10, what must be done according to Jesus' other sayings on the subject

I will by then have examined all that Jesus has said about how we are to live and checked if they are consistent with my theory. But this is not enough. Can I find incidents, deeds or sayings of Jesus that are not coherent with my theory? After all, Jesus did some rather odd things. Can I make sense of them in such a way that they do not contradict my theory? I will examine in my Chapter 11 Jesus' oddities and in my Chapter 12 some of the problems my theory encounters.

As I will not have done by then an absolutely exhaustive check of the whole of the Gospels, I will still not be able to satisfy perfectly my principle but will at least have come a long way towards it. Perhaps I will even have satisfied some of my readers that this is worthy of consideration.

FORGIVENESS

Judgment and forgiveness

I started Chapter 2 by examining excerpts from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The text of Luke which I then examined continues with the following verse: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."¹⁷⁶ What can be made of this? What does this text actually say?

The first thing to do is to check the operative verbs found in this verse. The Greek verb translated by "judge" is "krinete" (κρινετε). It means "separate", "sort out", "distinguish", "decide", "accuse", "judge", "condemn", "bring to judgement". The Greek term "katadikazete" (καταδικαζετε) translated by "condemn" means: "pronounce judgement against", "condemn". The two verbs which define what we are not to do are very similar: they both imply a condemnation.

So what Jesus (God Incarnate, the Voice of the Father) says in the first part of this verse is: we are not to find anyone guilty of anything. Why? Because if so, Jesus says, we will also not be found guilty.

The second part of the verse uses the verb translated by "forgive". The Greek word is "apoluete" (απολυετε) which means "untie", "unbind", and so: "absolve someone of an accusation". That the meaning "forgive" comes from the verb "untie", "unbind" is crucial to understand what it is really about. Intricate philosophical and psychological analyses have been done on what it means to "forgive" and, in my personal opinion these have no relevance whatsoever with what Jesus is talking about.

Philosophy in the ancient world was reserved to the very few; and they never turned up with such intricate notions as philosophers have today. Let us see what popular terms are used about the process where forgiveness takes place.

The process is as follows: he does something to her; she wants reparation or revenge. She considers that the one who did this to her "owes" her something: either he "pays" it by reparation or he faces revenge from her so that she can equal the score. He has contracted a debt towards her by doing something to her.

¹⁷⁶ Luke 6:37

If she forgives him, she forgives this debt of his, gives up any claim on him: he owes her nothing. He is free of any revenge or demand on her part. This process of forgiveness requires only a decision from the injured party.

The injuring party can either refuse to accept responsibility for the injury or feel totally justified in his action. That does not matter. There is no problem If he does not recognize his debt and neither does she. If the injuring party refuses to accept the forgiveness while accepting the blame, again there is no problem. His debt is cancelled as far as she is concerned. If the other party is ready to make reparation, she can accept it as a gift with thanks. That pleases everybody.

So what Jesus (again, the Voice of God Father) is saying is: if you cancel the debts owed to you, your debts will be cancelled. You owe nothing to anyone if you cancel what everyone owes you.

This is said again in slightly different form. When in Matthew Jesus tells His disciplines how to pray, He includes “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.”¹⁷⁷ The Greek word “aphète” (αφητε) translated as “forgive” means “let go”, “loosen”, “abandon” and the word translated by “debt” can also be translated by “obligation”.

Jesus quickly reinforces this by “For if ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you: But if ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”¹⁷⁸ Again the word translated by “forgive” is “let go”; the word translated by “trespasses” has as its first meaning “defeat”, “set back” and as its second “error”, “mistake”. (Translated by such terms, this passage sounds much less moralistic.)

So it is clearly stated that it is God as Father who cancels her debts if she cancels the debts people owe her.

The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant

Jesus comes back to this theme, though in a different way, in the following parable about the Kingdom of Heaven that I will divide in three different tableaux:

¹⁷⁷ Matthew 6:12

¹⁷⁸ Matthew 6:14-5

Therefore is the kingdom of heaven likened unto a certain king, which would take account of his servants. And when he had begun to reckon, one was brought unto him, which owed him ten thousand talents. But forasmuch as he had not to pay, his lord commanded him to be sold, and his wife, and children, and all that he had, and payment to be made. The servant therefore fell down, and worshipped him, saying, Lord, have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. Then the lord of that servant was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him the debt.

But the same servant went out, and found one of his fellow servants, which owed him an hundred pence: and he laid hands on him, and took him by the throat, saying, Pay me that thou owest. And his fellowservant fell down at his feet, and besought him, saying, Have patience with me, and I will pay thee all. And he would not: but went and cast him into prison, till he should pay the debt.

So when his fellowservants saw what was done, they were very sorry, and came and told unto their lord all that was done. Then his lord, after that he had called him, said unto him, O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee? And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him. So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses.¹⁷⁹

This parable makes it quite clear that the debt a human is owed by her fellow human is very small compared with the debt that she owes to God but that if she forgives *completely* ("from your hearts") the debt she is owed, God will forgive completely the enormous debt she owes Him.

As she was indebted to God for an enormous sum, she was not able to pay and had to face the consequences and lose everything – that is the judgement according to our world order: you pay your debts or else.

¹⁷⁹ Matthew 18:23-35

She begs for time to repay what she could not as she is desperate; not only does He first let her go instead of keeping her in prison, He then cancels her debt out of compassion. This is the way of the Kingdom of Heaven, of God's way of life.

The Greek word translated by "compassion" here is "spalaghnistheis" (σπαλαγχνισθεις) which means in its passive form "have one's entrails moved", "be moved", "be touched" in a very physical way. God is so strongly moved with pity that He loosens her (the Greek verb used here is "apolusen" (απολσειν) which is translated by "forgive" elsewhere though its original meaning is "loose") and the debt that was owed Him is also let go (translated by "forgive" while the Greek term is "aphēken" (αφηκεν) which means "let go" as we also have seen.)

It is *after* this cancellation of her huge debt by God that she demands immediate repayment of the small debt owed her by a fellow human. This has terrible consequences. The Lord considers that just as He cancels her debt, she must cancel the one of her fellow-servant. She must take example on Him. If she wants to be in the Kingdom of Heaven, a Kingdom where God forgives His humans as is His way of Life, she has to do likewise. If she insists on being repaid, on acting according to our world order, so be it. But then she forfeits the Kingdom. She is in the world she has chosen: this world order. So she has to face the consequences of that world: "And his lord was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him."¹⁸⁰

God acts out of His compassion because of Who He Is. This is God's order, God's Kingdom. But we can insist on living according to our human order, the one where repayment is necessary. In this order, in this way of living, in this world, God cannot be the God who loves and so forgives but has to be the God who insists on each one paying his/her failings to the full. We then make God into our own image. We cannot accept Him for Who He Is. We cannot accept that He can actually forgive us: it is impossible for us to even consider this as we insist on justice and the right of vengeance.

The beam in the human judge's eye

There is another very useful text on this subject in Matthew:

¹⁸⁰ Matthew 18:34

Judge not, that ye be not judged. For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged: and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye.¹⁸¹

The excerpt starts in the same way as the one we saw earlier in this chapter; and again we are told what we will end up being judged on the same terms we judge others. But then Jesus goes further on this theme. Judging is here meant as correcting people: taking the speck out of her eye. It is ostensibly to help her that one is correcting her. But not so, according to Jesus. Because the simple act of judging the behaviour of the other (finding that speck in her eye) means that you have a beam in yours.

This need to judge others is a huge impediment to doing so correctly. (How can you take that speck out if your vision is affected by a beam?) Which translated means that if your judgement is according to this world's order (that beam in your eye), it is impossible for you to do a good job at judging as your set of values is wrong. You pretend to be virtuous but are a hypocrite if you judge others, if you find them faults. If you are sincere, honest, you will concentrate on your faults and failings: there is enough there to keep you busy.

The Pharisee and the Publican

Jesus gave a rather stark example of what He meant. He examined the prayer of a just, honest, God-fearing man thanking God for his good behaviour and comparing himself to a poor wretch who has sinned much, knows it and asks God for forgiveness:

Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

¹⁸¹ Matt 7:3-5

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.¹⁸²

This Pharisee was really a good man. He was a pillar of his society. He gave to the poor, fasted and kept the commandments. He did not sleep around and steal but was just and honest. He was like good, God-fearing Christians. He even thanked God for it just like they do! It is not at all obvious what is wrong with his prayer. As I just pointed out, many Christians pray like that, feeling smug about their progress in the spiritual and the moral life. They have good reasons to compare themselves advantageously to the dregs of our society.

For Jesus, the problem is that the Pharisee is comparing himself to somebody else with whom he is finding faults: he is finding the speck in his neighbour's eye. We saw what Jesus thinks of such a way of doing. It is the way of doing of this world's order, where judgment is paramount and the prisons, full. A world order based on making comparisons and judgements.

Jesus sees the Pharisee's prayer as worthless because it is founded on this world's order. Basically, the Pharisee's prayer is like a presentation given to a superior by an employee bragging about her performance. Jesus sees the Publican's prayer as efficacious because he recognized his sinfulness and begged for mercy. This is why God acquitted him of all his wrongdoings. He assumed that God would be merciful to him, that He cared for him enough to listen to him and grant him his request. He believed in the existence of God's way of life, of God's Kingdom of forgiveness.

This parable ends by: "for every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." The Pharisee thought of himself as good while the Publican thought of himself as bad. In the afterlife, the Pharisee will be made aware that God does not consider him such a success and the Publican, that God does not consider him such a failure. That awareness will come when they both find that God loves them equally, that He has no favourite. The Pharisee will have a huge problem in accepting the fact

¹⁸² Luke 18:10-14

that God loves the Publican as much as He loves him while the Publican will have no problem in accepting that God loves the Pharisee as much as him. So the Pharisee will be scandalized and will condemn God (which is Hell) while the Publican will rejoice in God's love (which is Heaven). For the Publican, God is the One who loves and so forgives; for the Pharisee, God is a God of Justice Who must consider him better than the sinner.

Forgiving sins rather than condemning

While on earth, Jesus was made to judge an adulterous woman who according to the Law of Moses had to be stoned to death.¹⁸³ He should have pronounced this sentence on her as provided for by the Law because she was guilty of adultery having been caught during intercourse with a man other than her husband. After all, there were enough trustworthy witnesses to vouch for the fact that the man they caught copulating with her was not her husband. Not only did He not, but He put it in such a way that no one else could: "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her."¹⁸⁴

After they all left, and Jesus "saw none but the woman, he said unto her, Woman, where are those thine accusers? hath no man condemned thee? She said, No man, Lord. And Jesus said unto her, Neither do I condemn thee: go, and sin no more."¹⁸⁵ Jesus does not pass judgement. And Jesus is the Word, that is, God. Nowhere in the Gospels does He do so. If Jesus does not judge, it is that God does not. He does tell her to change her ways: He is not blind to what she did but He does not condemn.

In many cases, Jesus does more than not condemn, He actually acquits in the sense that He remits debts (forgives sins). A magnificent case in point is the following story of Jesus' supper at a Pharisee's house being intruded upon by a woman well known in that town as a sinner:

And, behold, a woman in the city, which was a sinner,
when she knew that Jesus sat at meat in the Phari-
see's house, brought an alabaster box of ointment,
And stood at his feet behind him weeping, and began

¹⁸³ John 8:7

¹⁸⁴ John 8:3-11

¹⁸⁵ John 8:10-11

to wash his feet with tears, and did wipe them with the hairs of her head, and kissed his feet, and anointed them with the ointment. Now when the Pharisee which had bidden him saw it, he spake within himself, saying, This man, if he were a prophet, would have known who and what manner of woman this is that toucheth him: for she is a sinner.

And Jesus answering said unto him, Simon, I have somewhat to say unto thee. And he saith, Master, say on. There was a certain creditor which had two debtors: the one owed five hundred pence, and the other fifty. And when they had nothing to pay, he frankly forgave them both. Tell me therefore, which of them will love him most? Simon answered and said, I suppose that he, to whom he forgave most. And he said unto him, Thou hast rightly judged.

And he turned to the woman, and said unto Simon, Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment.

Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little. And he said unto her, Thy sins are forgiven. And they that sat at meat with him began to say within themselves, Who is this that forgiveth sins also? And he said to the woman, Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace.¹⁸⁶

I have cut the story in four parts. In the first part we have this woman who comes in and cries copious tears over Jesus' feet. She is obviously there as a suppliant. She abases herself publicly by being at His feet and covering them with tears. She dries them with her hair: she uses the part of her which is normally standing tall to be in contact with what is in contact with the dirt found on the streets; she clearly states that He is well above her. She kisses His feet with ardour. All this must have been sensual if not sexually charged. This woman is submitting herself to Him.

¹⁸⁶ Luke 7:37-50

She definitely wants something from Him. She pours ointment on His feet and massages them. She stays at His feet. She says nothing. It is as if all she wants is to touch Him, to be with Him, right at His feet, like a dog. The host is shocked: Jesus is letting Himself be touched by an impure woman! Surely He should know who she is if He is a Prophet?

In the second part, Jesus answers His host's objection by a story. Someone forgives two people their unequal debts. Who of these two will thank him the most? Will it not be the one who was forgiven more?

In the third part, Jesus points out that the woman has acted towards Him in a more loving fashion than His host the Pharisee. As Jesus' story suggested that the difference in loving is the *consequence* of the different amounts forgiven, we have to conclude that God had *already* forgiven her, and forgiven her more than He forgave the Pharisee.

To make this clear, Jesus, as God the Word, tells her in the last part that indeed her sins are forgiven, that God has answered her prayer, has forgiven her debt. He provides the *assurance* she needs that God has forgiven her many sins, that He loves her. Jesus states clearly that the proof of God's forgiveness is in her love for Him. That she believed that God could and would forgive her is made clear by Jesus who tells her: "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

As she had confidence in God's love and mercy, that confidence was actualized. She accepted God for Who He really is: a supremely loving Being who does not condemn but generously forgives all sins. All Jesus did was to state what had happened. In a way, one could say that Jesus did not forgive her: God as Father did. Jesus only stated what should have been obvious to all. (But of course He and the Father are one!) Of course, for the bystanders, it was Jesus who forgave her her sins; but this is not what Jesus said. He did not say "I forgive..." but "thy sins are forgiven".

So getting forgiveness from God is exceedingly easy (it seems): all one has to do is to believe that God is Who He is, the One Who forgives. Of course, the consequence of this is that one starts to act like God, as His child, by showing love and forgiveness to others.

There is another example where Jesus “forgives” sin. It is found in the Gospels of Mark¹⁸⁷ and Luke¹⁸⁸ as well as Matthew. With great difficulty, a paralytic is brought to Jesus on a stretcher. The paralytic and the people who brought him there did not get through all this trouble without a real hope that Jesus would cure him. They had faith:

And, behold, they brought to him a man sick of the palsy, lying on a bed: and Jesus seeing their faith said unto the sick of the palsy; Son, be of good cheer; thy sins be forgiven thee. And, behold, certain of the scribes said within themselves, This man blasphemeth. And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts? For whether is easier, to say, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins, (then saith he to the sick of the palsy,) Arise, take up thy bed, and go unto thine house. And he arose, and departed to his house.¹⁸⁹

Instead of curing the sick man, Jesus tells him out of the blue that his sins are forgiven!¹⁹⁰ Why should He say such a thing? One could reply that He wants to make the point that He has the power to forgive sin. This would work in the following way: to cure that man requires God’s favour; you do not have God’s favour if you blaspheme, so He cannot have blasphemed as He actually cured the sick man. If He did not blaspheme, He told the truth.

I must agree with this analysis. Jesus states categorically “but you may know that the Son of Man has the power (freedom, faculty) on the earth to let go sins...” But to me it begs the question. He could have forgiven anyone of the by-standers and “proved” His truthfulness by curing the paralytic. The above argument does not require that Jesus forgive the sin of that particular man. One can reply that Jesus wants to show that just as He can cure people of

¹⁸⁷ Mark 2:3-12

¹⁸⁸ Luke 5:18-25

¹⁸⁹ Matthew 9:2-7

¹⁹⁰ The exact sentence in the KJV is “thy sins be forgiven thee” except in Luke where it is “thy sins are forgiven thee” (Luke 5:20). The exact translation from the Greek should be “have been forgiven you the sins of you” which does not state who forgave his sins but just that they have been.

physical infirmities, He can cure them of “spiritual” ones, their sins. I again agree but still think there is more to this story. I have suggested that God loves everyone equally and forgives all.

This does not seem to go well with the fact that Jesus is recorded to have forgiven sins in only the two cases examined here. So let me look at the whole incident from a different angle, which in no way contradicts what has been said so far.

For me, the important words are “Jesus seeing their faith”. It is because of this that Jesus can announce that the man’s sins are forgiven. He and his friends trusted in God’s mercy and this trust is always realized. Again, what Jesus does is state the obvious, God’s infinite forgiveness.

Now He also knows that His statement cannot be verified. To prove it, He shows God’s mercy by curing the man of his infirmity, something for all to see. God makes explicit the fact that this man’s sins have been forgiven because he believed, through faith. Belief in what? in God’s saving power, in God’s love and compassion for him. So Jesus as God’s Voice, as God’s Hand, cures him both of his physical infirmities and his sins.

Conclusion

What Jesus said about judgment and forgiveness can be understood in terms of my interpretation of Who God Is and what Heaven and Hell are. To be forgiven, all one must do is believe that God is a God who, as Love, forgives. But she who really believes this will love God in return and will feel compelled to act as He does and so forgive. The ones who cannot forgive do not believe in the Kingdom but in a world of justice. They cannot accept (believe) that God loves them as sinners. If they cannot accept His forgiveness, they cannot accept that He Is Who He Is. They will also rage against His forgiveness of others; they will rage against Him taking “sides” against them, as they will insist that there be “sides” in which they will force Him into. They will judge God and find Him in the wrong, just like the Devil does. And so being in His presence will be Hell instead of Heaven.

I have started this chapter by this saying of Jesus: “Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned: forgive, and ye shall be forgiven.” It states that what will happen to us will mirror how we acted towards others. It says that we

will be “judged” by our standards. This is easy to understand if the human fully expects to be judged by a God whose standards are hers, a God in her own image. It is also easy to understand if the human accepts and tries to live by God’s standards as defined by Jesus because she will be “judged” by that God whose standards she is trying to incarnate, that God revealed by His Word, our Lord Jesus. The first human will be reacting to an illusion while the second will be reacting to the Truth that God is Love.

THE HEAVEN PARABLES

The Synoptics provide us with a number of parables concerning Heaven understood as the Kingdom of God. They tell us what it is and what to do to be part of it.

Jesus often talks of rewards and punishments in the afterlife after some form of “judgment” as He uses familiar analogies to describe things in ways people can understand.

I believe that the Kingdom is where people are following God’s Ways, acting as God acts. God is the One Who loves completely and equally every one of His creatures, Who rejoices and hurts with each, the One Who, because He is Love, makes clear for all to see everyone’s deeds and omissions.

Death brings us into His Presence. His Presence is a Loving Presence where all are equal whatever their lives have been. His Presence brings joy to those who love others and find happiness at being loved despite their failures and torment to those who cannot accept to be shown for what they are or cannot accept the faults and failures of others any more than God’s love for the people they hate or despise.

I will analyse the parables about the Kingdom, examine every point Jesus is making in each one, and check to see if they are consistent with my interpretation of what comes after death. It only takes one inconsistency to force a rethinking of my interpretation as Jesus’ sayings are the criteria by which all stands or falls.

The Parables about judgment

The main parable on the criteria of entry in “life eternal” rather than “everlasting fire” is the parable of the Last Judgment, found only in Matthew’s Gospel. It reads:

When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: For I was an hungred, and ye

gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. Then shall the righteous answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they also answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.¹⁹¹

This parable's points are: (1) The "Son of Man" comes "in glory" and sits "upon the throne of his glory" with a large retinue of angels. (2) There is a separation of people according to the following criteria: if they have – or not – ministered to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, the prisoner (3) and those who did, the "righteous", inherit the Kingdom while those who did not, the "cursed", are sent in the "everlasting fire" (4) because the One who separates (the "Son of Man", the "King") associates Himself totally with the needy (5) and makes deeds and omissions known to all ("public judgement").

The Greek word for "glory" is "doksá" (δοξα); its first meaning is "opinion", "what one expects", "what one thinks possible", "belief" and so "good or bad opinion", "reputation". It is easy to see how one goes from the meaning "reputation" to "glory" when applied to God. But here this term is not applied to God but to the "Son of Man". Could

¹⁹¹ Matthew 25:31-46

His reputation vary according to the people standing about His throne?
Could He be Love for some and Implacable Vengeance for others?

In verse 40, it says: “as long as *you did it to one* of the least... *you did it to me*,” while in verse 45 it says: “as long as *you did not do it to one* of the least... *you did not do it to me*.” The King considers every act of kindness done to those in need as done to Him and every omission of kindness to those in need as an omission of kindness to Him.

While I have at times looked after people in need, I have avoided doing so at many others. I fit in the first category because I did acts of kindness at least once and in the second because I avoided doing acts of kindness at least once! I think it would be fair to say that this is so for everyone. Hence all fit in one *and* the other category; and nowhere in this parable is there question of scales to weight the acts versus the omissions. I have to conclude that everyone is at the same time blessed and cursed!

What comes of this dilemma within the scheme of my interpretation of Heaven and Hell? God loves each and every one of His creatures and so, each and every one of His humans. Because of His great love, He associates Himself completely with His creatures’ sufferings: they are His. So each time we minister unto others, thus alleviating someone’s sufferings, we alleviate God’s; each time we do not alleviate a fellow human’s, we do not alleviate God’s.

After our death, all is revealed: the times we helped and the times we did not, the hurt we relieved and the hurt we ignored. We will be shown for what we are and did as well as did not become and did not do. God’s love for all will make all known to all. What we did for others will make us feel joy as we will see its results in other’s lives; what we did not do to help others will make us feel terrible as we will see the results of our inaction in other’s lives. All that compounded by God’s complete love and identification for all those we did and did not help.

Seeing that God identifies completely with our enemies will make us seethe with rage, burn with everlasting resentment and fury. He is not for us: He is against us as He identifies with them. How can He?

This, one could argue, holds only with the assumption that one cares about others. As the selfish do not, having not helped others will not make them feel bad.

The selfish get angry when others cause them pain. They want revenge and do so at the first opportunity. They also reason that those who could would act towards them as they do. God is the most strong, "the Almighty". Once the selfish find that their actions and omissions have hurt God, they will fear His revenge and any act of love from Him towards them will be construed by them as part of His torture for them. They will constantly expect that this "love" will savage them and that He will make them pay for eternity. He has to as He is like them: this is His reputation with them.

This seems to fit the parable rather well. All the important ingredients are there: the happiness for the service of those in need, the burning feeling for the lack of service to those in need; all that because God makes everything known, including His love for all.

The parable of the Wheat and the Tares, for which we have Jesus' interpretation, is also about judgment. It is found only in Matthew (Jesus' interpretation follows the parable):

The kingdom of heaven is likened unto a man which sowed good seed in his field: But while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat, and went his way. But when the blade was sprung up, and brought forth fruit, then appeared the tares also. So the servants of the householder came and said unto him, Sir, didst not thou sow good seed in thy field? from whence then hath it tares? He said unto them, An enemy hath done this. The servants said unto him, Wilt thou then that we go and gather them up? But he said, Nay; lest while ye gather up the tares, ye root up also the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest: and in the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, Gather ye together first the tares, and bind them in bundles to burn them: but gather the wheat into my barn.¹⁹²

Then Jesus sent the multitude away, and went into the house: and his disciples came unto him, saying, Declare unto us the parable of the tares of the field. He answered and said unto them, He that soweth the good seed is the Son of man; The field is the world; the good seed are the children of the kingdom; but the tares are the children of the wicked one; The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the

¹⁹² Matthew 13:24-30

end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth. Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Who hath ears to hear, let him hear.¹⁹³

The following points make this interpreted parable: (1) Only the “children of the Kingdom” are originally “planted” in the “world” to grow and “shine forth in the Kingdom of their Father”: this is God’s plan. (2) But the “world” does not contain only the “children of the Kingdom” but also those of the “evil one”. Those are there because of the Devil, God’s enemy. (3) It is impossible to root out the children of the evil one from the world without rooting out those of the Kingdom: both are to grow up together, in close contact in the same physical and social world. (4) At the “end of the world”, “they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth” while “shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father.”

Again we see separation of those who lived in the world into two groups: those who are children of the Kingdom and those who “offend” and “do iniquity”. The Greek word “skandala” (σκανδαλα) translated as “all things that offend” means “trap”, “pit placed on the way”, “obstacle meant to trip someone”. The Greek word “anomia” (ανomia) translated as “iniquity” means “violation of the law”, “illegal” and the Greek word “dikaios” (δικαιοι) translated as “righteous” means “who follows his duties to gods and humans”, “honest”, “just”.

But what does this “gnashing of teeth” mean? What does this refer to? This expression is found three times in the Book of Psalms:

But in mine adversity they rejoiced, and gathered themselves together: yea, the abjects gathered themselves together against me, and I knew it not; they did tear me, and ceased not: With hypocritical mockers in feasts, they gnashed upon me with their teeth. Lord,

¹⁹³ Matthew 13:36-43

how long wilt thou look on? rescue my soul from their destructions, my darling from the lions.¹⁹⁴

The wicked plotteth against the just, and gnasheth upon him with his teeth.¹⁹⁵

The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish.¹⁹⁶

In every case, someone is trying to crush another with his teeth like a lion would do. “Gnashing of teeth” shows anger, murderous intent and confrontation. The people in the furnace of fire are not only in pain and thus wailing, they are angry and want revenge.

This again seems to fit rather well in my scheme: the division of the people in two groups is such that those who hate are on one side and those who share the values of the Kingdom are on the other. The first group does not produce any fruit of value; only the second can bring something to the Kingdom: their grain. They have something to give in the Kingdom of God’s love while the others only tried to stifle the wheat.

What happens at the end of this life is a division between people. The tares are not able to continue suffocating the wheat. They are not able to trip the “just”, the ones who follow God’s ways of love and service, the ones who feed others with the grain they have grown. The just do not have to suffer any more from the injustice visited upon them by the life haters, those who use others as if they were their things.

The same idea is found in the Parable of the net found in Matthew:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a net, that was cast into the sea, and gathered of every kind: Which, when it was full, they drew to shore, and sat down, and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from

¹⁹⁴ Psalm 35:15-7

¹⁹⁵ Psalm 37:12

¹⁹⁶ Psalm 112:10

among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth.¹⁹⁷

Again, we find the division at the end of this life of the good fish and the bad; the good are kept together while the bad are thrown away, where there will “be wailing and gnashing of teeth”, as was said in the previous Parable. The haters, the ones who want to use, hurt others, have revenge on them, the ones who do not belong to the ways of love, are discarded by the angels, God’s messengers, the ones who tell it as it is, show God’s love and the ways of the Kingdom, ways that are intolerable to those who hate.

The Parables of the Sower

The parable of the Sower whose seed falls in different grounds to different results does not seem to be so much related to the last judgment as to how people react to Jesus’ words according to their “situation” in this life. It is found in the gospels of Matthew¹⁹⁸ and Luke¹⁹⁹ as well as Mark’s,²⁰⁰ where it is in three sections. The first section is the parable proper; the second is why Jesus talks in parables and the third, His interpretation. The middle section is not relevant here.²⁰¹ The first and third sections are:

Hearken; Behold, there went out a sower to sow: And it came to pass, as he sowed, some fell by the way side, and the fowls of the air came and devoured it up. And some fell on stony ground, where it had not much earth; and immediately it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth: But when the sun was up, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it withered away. And some fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up, and choked it, and it yielded no fruit. And other fell on good ground, and did yield fruit that sprang up and increased; and brought forth, some thirty, and some sixty, and some an hundred.²⁰²

¹⁹⁷ Matthew 13:47-50

¹⁹⁸ Matthew 13:14-23

¹⁹⁹ Luke 8:5-15

²⁰⁰ Mark 4:3-20

²⁰¹ It will be analyzed later.

²⁰² Mark 4:3-8

The sower soweth the word. And these are they by the way side, where the word is sown; but when they have heard, Satan cometh immediately, and taketh away the word that was sown in their hearts. And these are they likewise which are sown on stony ground; who, when they have heard the word, immediately receive it with gladness; And have no root in themselves, and so endure but for a time: afterward, when affliction or persecution ariseth for the word's sake, immediately they are offended. And these are they which are sown among thorns; such as hear the word, And the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things entering in, choke the word, and it becometh unfruitful. And these are they which are sown on good ground; such as hear the word, and receive it, and bring forth fruit, some thirtyfold, some sixty, and some an hundred.²⁰³

We have the following points in Jesus' interpretation: (1) The word of God is spoken and so is sown in everyone's heart. All who are mentioned after are aware of the same message. (2) The first group is composed of people who are just outside the field itself. They basically do not have any earth where the word can grow; they are a stony ground, a place where growth is impossible. They thus loose the word immediately: Satan, the Prince of this World's order, removes it from their mind. These are the people who live purely and simply according to the rules of this world's order, a hard world where "man eats man". They cannot even give the message a second thought as it is so opposed to all their beliefs and aspirations. (3) The second group shows interest in God's word: it is composed of people who have some earth but only very little. They receive the message as it sounds right to them. On the other hand, they are not ready to sacrifice anything much for it. They lack "staying power": as soon as troubles turn up, they are discouraged and give up. To love one's neighbour is easy when she is nice but intolerable as soon as problems arise. (4) The third group has some depth. The message takes root and starts to grow but thorns share the ground with the good wheat. God's message is not the only one growing in their hearts: the world's messages (in the form of commercials?) are also growing and finally choke God's. These messages are "the cares of this world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the lusts of other things." For God's message to thrive, it must be in first place. She does not have much time for God's message if worried about food,

²⁰³ Mark 4:14-20

clothing, lodging, the price of things, war and peace, the environment. She does not have much time for God's message when checking for good retirement funds, studying the stock market, looking for a bigger house, a better car, remodelling the lounge, renovating the kitchen. If she wants smart clothes, beautiful friends, a well decorated house, some wonderful vacations, great sex, good booze and lots of parties, she does not have much time left for God's message. Indeed, she should have forgotten it! (5) Then there is the last group: the group of people where the earth is deep and where the wheat grows alone. These are committed to God's word, are ready to sacrifice everything for it. These are the ones in which this message grows to fruition because it is not at the mercy of the world. This ground refuses this world's "commercials". The way Jesus puts it in Luke is worth quoting: "But that on the good ground are they, which in an honest and good heart, having heard the word, keep it, and bring forth fruit with patience."²⁰⁴ Patience is needed as this growth is slow.

It should be quite obvious that only the last group has put into practice God's ways. So if it is essential to have lived this message to join the Kingdom, only they will be able to face God in a way that will permit them to find the experience a joyful rather than a terrible one. This being said, this conclusion does not come out of the above parable *per se*.

The idea of the seed planted in the good earth growing to fruition is taken in another parable about sowing:

And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed into the ground; And should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how. For the earth bringeth forth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is brought forth, immediately he putteth in the sickle, because the harvest is come.²⁰⁵

To harvest a plant, a human does not have to know how the seed germinates and grows. It happens as long as she does not interfere with the process. It is the same with us: if we let God do His job, we grow to be what He means us to be. Trusting in God's work and not interfering with it are paramount.

²⁰⁴ Luke 8:15

²⁰⁵ Mark 4:26-29

What we are meant to be is not necessarily small. We might grow into something quite big:

And he said, Whereunto shall we liken the kingdom of God? or with what comparison shall we compare it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which, when it is sown in the earth, is less than all the seeds that be in the earth: But when it is sown, it groweth up, and becometh greater than all herbs, and shooteth out great branches; so that the fowls of the air may lodge under the shadow of it.²⁰⁶

God's work in us can produce something quite stupendous out of very small beginnings. Mother Theresa of Calcutta is an example of a small seed (her own calling in Albania) turning into a big tree (the development of an institute present on all the continents and composed of thousands of nuns doing the work she started).

This idea of growth, this time from an apparently hidden source, is found in the parable of the leaven: "Another parable spake he unto them; The kingdom of heaven is like unto leaven, which a woman took, and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened."²⁰⁷

We find that accepting God's work in us acts in our lives like leaven on the meal: the leaven is invisible, well hidden in the meal. But it will make it rise, grow into something bigger. Though "invisible", God's work is real and effective.

We noticed in the first Parable of the Sower that the only soil which permitted proper growth was the one where no weed was present to stifle it. Nothing else must be in its way. Jesus compares the Kingdom to a buried treasure found in a field that is so valuable that she is ready to give up everything for it: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field."²⁰⁸ The Kingdom of God is so precious that she is joyfully ready to give up everything to get possession of it.

²⁰⁶ Mark 4:30-32 (also Matthew 13:31-32)

²⁰⁷ Matthew 13:33

²⁰⁸ Matthew 13:44

God's ways are her delight. Jesus also compares the Kingdom to a precious pearl that a merchant bought after selling all he had.²⁰⁹

"Be Prepared"

The Kingdom is God's way of life. At the hour of our death, we go from this life to the next, a life where God is no more hidden, where God's ways are the only ones that bring joy. What is in accordance with this world order will then bring grief as it is opposed to God's ways. It is thus paramount to be prepared for this new state of affairs.

There are a few parables about being ready. One is about virgins waiting in the night for their bridegroom:

Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. While the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out. But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves. And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came; and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, I know you not. Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh.²¹⁰

The following points can be found in this parable: (1) Ten virgins with lamps are ready to meet their bridegroom. Ten virgins for one bridegroom! That is an awful lot of virgins for just one man, isn't it? This is how the Kingdom of Heaven is! (2) Five are well prepared as they carry spare oil with their lamp while the others are ill pre-

²⁰⁹ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it." (Matthew 13:45-46)

²¹⁰ Matthew 25:1-13

pared as they are without spare oil. Only some are ready for the long haul. (3) Their bridegroom is very late (obviously Jesus does not believe in the stereotype about women being late!) and so the girls all fall asleep. As time goes by, the oil of their lamps runs dry and the lamps go off. (4) At midnight the girls are told to go and meet their bridegroom who is finally arriving. Only the wise ones are able to light their lamps after filling them with oil; the others have to go away and buy some. (5) The wise ones meet their bridegroom and are taken by him to their marriage feast and the door is shut. (6) The others find their way after filling their lamps with oil but are refused entry at the hall as they were not ready when their bridegroom came. (7) The conclusion is to watch for the time when the Son of Man comes.

This parable states that we have only one chance at getting married to our bridegroom. The marriage is off if we are not ready then. The only event in our lives that happens only once is our death. So the moral of the tale is that we have to be ready for it. We do not know when it will come but must be ready. We need enough oil for the journey. We absolutely need our own oil for our lamp as we all do this "journey", this dying, alone.

Some are eager for this marriage at some point in their lives and are then well prepared. But for all kind of reasons, they do not stay ready. They end up unready when death comes and so are left out. Jesus comes to find that they are unable to join Him, to become one with Him, to be filled by Him; so they are left out in the dark as their mindset is incompatible with God's Kingdom.

The parable of the ten virgins is not the only one on the necessity to be ready. In the following back-to-back parables followed by a punch line, Jesus compares every human life to that of servants who wait for the coming of their lord and to an owner protecting his property against a thief:

Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second

watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants.²¹¹

And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.²¹²

The punch line is: “Be ye therefore ready also: for the Son of man cometh at an hour when ye think not.” We have the same message as in the previous parable: the need to be ready at all times as we do not know the hour of our death, this time when “the Son of Man” comes to us.

In the second parable of the set, Jesus says that if a house-owner knew when the burglar would come, he would be there ready to stop him. As the former does not know when the later comes, the only way not to be robbed is to be constantly on guard.

The first parable is richer. Some servants, dressed and awake, are ready to spring into action as soon as their master returns, ready to open the door to him and do their job. They are eager to welcome him back and be of service to him and they sacrifice their sleep to be promptly there for him.

So far this parable is similar to the other one. But Jesus adds that their lord is so pleased with them that he is the one who starts serving them! Put in different terms, their lord is just as eager to serve them as they are to serve him. In the afterlife, says Jesus, He, the Son of Man, serves gladly those who are waiting to serve Him. What they are ready to give to Him, He gives to them. Again we have this reciprocity between God and His humans as He seems to react as they act.

The Parable of the Wedding: Our reaction to our calling

We have so far examined parables on the selection process that takes place after death. Let us now look at some reactions to the invitation, the parable of the King's son wedding, which I have cut in two parts:

²¹¹ Luke 12:35-38

²¹² Luke 12:39-40

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a certain king, which made a marriage for his son, And sent forth his servants to call them that were bidden to the wedding: and they would not come. Again, he sent forth other servants, saying, Tell them which are bidden, Behold, I have prepared my dinner: my oxen and my fatlings are killed, and all things are ready: come unto the marriage. But they made light of it, and went their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise: And the remnant took his servants, and entreated them spitefully, and slew them. But when the king heard thereof, he was wroth: and he sent forth his armies, and destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city.²¹³

Then saith he to his servants, The wedding is ready, but they which were bidden were not worthy. Go ye therefore into the highways, and as many as ye shall find, bid to the marriage. So those servants went out into the highways, and gathered together all as many as they found, both bad and good: and the wedding was furnished with guests. And when the king came in to see the guests, he saw there a man which had not on a wedding garment: And he saith unto him, Friend, how camest thou in hither not having a wedding garment? And he was speechless. Then said the king to the servants, Bind him hand and foot, and take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth. For many are called, but few are chosen.²¹⁴

This rich parable has a great many points: (1) The original guests all declined twice; (2) some gave business as their excuse and let the servants go back (3) some had the servants mistreated and killed. (4) The murderers were destroyed as their city. (5) As the original guests are now deemed unworthy, all are invited, “both bad and good”. (6) The King finds a guest without “a wedding garment” who cannot explain how he got in without; (7) that man is cast “into outer darkness” where “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth”. (8) The moral of the story is: “For many are called, but few are chosen.”

The first part of this parable is a retelling of the history of the Jewish people as found in the Septuagint. The Jews are the original

²¹³ Matthew 22:2-7

²¹⁴ Matthew 22:8-14

people invited. The invitation is first to them alone. The servants are the prophets. History tells that some were mistreated and others, murdered, that Jerusalem and other Jewish cities were destroyed. Some of the prophets were ignored as the people had more pressing business, like looking after their material needs. So the King decides to invite others; more precisely, all and sundry, all that can be found anywhere, whatever their lineage or morals depending on how one reads the descriptors of these people. This story is standard Septuagint fare. The ideas that the Jewish People is deemed unworthy and that God turns to the *goyim* are found in the Prophets.

This interpretation has the following advantage: this is not a threat by Jesus. The first part of the text applies to the past and to the way the Jewish leaders rebelled against the sound advice given by God through His prophets. In the Septuagint, it is not always God who is seen as having the people killed for killing the prophets: often the disasters that befall the Jewish people are seen for what they really are: the results of their refusal to heed the ways of God. Put differently, they insist on backing the wrong horse in global politics, fighting among themselves instead of being of service one to the other. They want to be important players in global politics without the army to back such a claim, or again they seek the help of a country too weak to help them, and the list goes on and on.

Of course, the text *per se* suggests that God is vengeful. But this text cannot be read coherently that way: after all, it does state that God again and again invites His people to His feast. He wants them to join Him so much that He is very insistent. It is just that they are either too busy or feel threatened by His invitation. After all, you do not kill a messenger without good reason! And this reason is that God's invitation does violence to this world order. Jesus does not really believe that God His Father is vengeful, even if this text seems to imply it. He is retelling the people a tale they have already heard many times.

The second part of the parable is new. All are invited to the Kingdom (the wedding feast). One of the guests there does not wear the wedding garment. He is questioned and remains speechless and so is thrown out in the dark, outside. This is followed by the famous: the many are invited; the few are chosen, and so become guests to the wedding feast, take part in the celebrations, the dance, the food, the merriment.

The others are all outside, in the dark, where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. Weeping is the expression of sadness and

distress due to a loss now understood, rage for having missed something precious, for seeing one's enemies success, for jealousy, for perceived injustice, etc. The gnashing of teeth refers to people trying to crush another with their teeth like a lion would do. It shows anger, murderous intent and confrontation. The people in the darkness are not only in pain and thus are weeping, they are angry and want revenge. They do not belong to the feast because they are murderers.

To belong to the feast, you have to "fit in", be in the right disposition. You have to be ready to rejoice with the bride and groom and to be happy for others and with others, to wish them well. In a word, you have to love them. By wearing a wedding garment you signal that you are sharing in this happy occasion in the lives of others. This you cannot do if you think only about yourself or hate these people. That throws you out in darkness, where you scream blue murder and weep from rage. The simple fact of seeing the King expressing His love for the happy couple makes you mad with envy and throws you out in the darkness. This parable's interpretation is consistent with my scheme.

Lazarus and the rich man

The parable of Lazarus, found only in Luke, has a rather interesting "view" of the afterlife. It is in three sections. The first is about the life of two men *before* their deaths:

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.²¹⁵

We see a rich man well-dressed whose belly is full every day while there is a beggar at his door whom he totally ignores.

There is in this life a total separation between the rich man and the poor. The rich does not even see the beggar at his door: he is not part of his world of beautiful clothes and good food.

In the second section, each situation changes completely with death as the *rôles* are reversed:

²¹⁵ Luke 16:19-21

And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.²¹⁶

We can note that: (1) The beggar is carried by angels to the bosom of Abraham (2) while the rich man is in torments. (3) The rich man pleads with Abraham to let the beggar relieve him in his torments. (4) Abraham answers him that the roles are now reversed. (5) Though people in Hell can see the people in Heaven and vice versa, the people in Hell cannot cross to Heaven and vice versa.

The Greek word "chasma" (χάσμα) translated by "great gulf" is "an obstacle that cannot be crossed", a "chasm". The "geographic" locations of Heaven and Hell found here are very different from the traditional ones illustrated by Dante. Here, Heaven and Hell are on the same level and close by. All that separates them is this canyon wide enough to prevent going from one "location" to the other and narrow enough to exchange words from one location to the other. Those in Heaven see and hear those in Hell and vice-versa but they cannot mix.

It is not the King or the Son of Man who talks to the rich man in this Parable but Abraham. Abraham is not the representative of Jesus' God but of the God of Justice, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

In this parable, the rich man who did not take care of the poor goes to Hell while the poor goes to Heaven (Abraham's bosom). Why does the rich man go to Hell? Or, put differently, what is the rich man's Hell? He sees the poor man he did nothing for in the bosom of Abraham. He sees clearly that God is on the side of this poor man. He knows he did not lift a little finger to help him. If

²¹⁶ Luke 16:22-26

God loves this poor so much, can He be anything but exceedingly angry with him? How can God love him as well, he who did nothing for the poor? How can he be anything but terrorized by what God in His Justice will do to him?

He pleads to Abraham to no avail. Abraham's God said, "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth."²¹⁷ This God cannot forgive him. As he did nothing for the poor man while he could, this poor man can do nothing for him. He is paying the price for not following Moses' Law about looking after the poor. He is facing the Just God he knows, not the God of Love Lazarus knows. He can see God's love in action but cannot comprehend that God loves him as much as He loves Lazarus: this, for him, is impossible. He does not know the real God, and so, languishes in torments, excluding himself from God's love.

²¹⁷ Exodus **21:24**

THE PARABLES OF GOD'S PERCEIVED UNFAIRNESS

There are a few parables in which some protagonist considers the ways of God as unfair. The three principal ones are the Prodigal Son, the Vineyard Workers hired at different times of day and the men given money to increase.

The Parable of the Prodigal Son

A very rich parable from Jesus on forgiveness is that of the Prodigal Son, found only in Luke's Gospel. It can be cut in four parts, which I will examine one after the other.

The first part is the introduction to the story:

And he said, A certain man had two sons: And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat: and no man gave unto him.²¹⁸

We find the following points: (1) A son asks his father for what he would inherit at his father's death. (2) His father grants his wish and gives him "his" money. (3) The son leaves his family for a faraway country (4) where he lives a life of debauchery until ruined. (5) Destitute and hungry, he has to start to work for his living; (6) but the job he manages to find pays below subsistence level and is disgusting for a Jew: looking after swine, unclean animals.

The son is given a lot of money but he manages to spend it quickly and foolishly, living a life of "sin": wild parties with magnificent food and orgies; the "wine, women and song" routine. This is an expensive life as he has to pay not only for himself but also for his "friends" and the girls. This, of course, is very liberating at first. There he is, being able to be the life and soul of the party, generously and

²¹⁸ Luke 15:11-16

liberally doing all the things that he has not been able to do at home. Great fun was had by all.

Unfortunately, the money supply goes quickly with such a life and he finds himself penniless. The girls go away as well as the “friends”: they were only there as long as he could afford them; as long as he was a “somebody”. Now he is nothing but a vagrant, unwanted because useless.

He has to do something if he wants to eat: he finds himself a job. The working conditions are tough and the wages, very low. His boss knows he does not have any choice: either he works for him or he starves to death. So the son takes the job, but finds himself living a life of misery, without enough to get by.

Then follows the second part: the son’s decision in the face of his predicament:

And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father’s have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son: make me as one of thy hired servants.²¹⁹

In this short part, we have the son examining his situation and deciding on a new course of action: (1) He reckons his father’s servants are better treated than he is by his employer (2) so he decides to go back home to ask his father to hire him as one of his servants. (3) He also recognizes that he has “sinned against heaven and before” his father (4) and thus has no right to be considered his son.

The meanings of the Greek word “èmarton” (ἡμαρτον) translated as “sin” are “miss the goal”, “make a mistake”, “have a false opinion”, “misjudge”, “lapse”, “sin”. The son acknowledges that he has made a mistake, has gone the wrong way. He was looking for a good life away from his father, doing the things “forbidden”, and he did not find happiness: he found himself alone and without being able to fulfil his needs. He did what he should not do: in other words, he sinned.

²¹⁹ Luke 15:17-19

How? "Against heaven and before you." He did not do with the money he got what God wanted him to do. He did not use it profitably but dissipated it. He squandered his part of the inheritance. By so doing, he reckons that he has forfeited his right to be his father's son: he certainly did not act like his father would have and he lost everything that his father was to give him. He certainly showed that he did not deserve anything other than "I told you so", "You got what you deserve" and "You made your bed, you lie in it", which is what simple justice would suggest. His reasoning is that of the justice found in this world, among countries with advanced justice systems. He made a mistake; he has to pay for it.

He quits his job and makes his way home. This implies that he is quite sure that his father will take him on as one of his servants. He trusts that he will do that for him. He knows that he can count on that. He has faith that his father will grant him his plea to hire him.

We now get at the third section: the father's reaction and its results:

And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him; and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet: And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it; and let us eat, and be merry: For this my son was dead, and is alive again; he was lost, and is found. And they began to be merry.²²⁰

In this third part, we have (1) The father sees his son making his way home from afar (which shows that he was always on the lookout for him) (2) and, noticing the bad state his son is in, is filled with compassion, (3) and runs to meet his son as he cannot wait another second. (4) Reaching him, he hugs and kisses him. (5) He takes no notice of his son's prepared speech, but (6) he gets him properly dressed (7) and throws a big party to celebrate the return of his son.

The father's behaviour is totally against this world's order. He does not see things according to our justice. What he wants is *the*

²²⁰ Luke 15:20-23

presence of his son. What his son did is irrelevant. He has come back! He can have him with him again! His love is overwhelming: he lavishes kisses on him, makes sure he is well clothed and gives a big party to celebrate his return. Justice has nothing to do with the Kingdom; love only rules, and a love that knows no limits at that.

This party for the sinner who returns to the fold is something we have already examined in our Chapter 4.²²¹ Here it is again.

The fourth and last part is the reaction of the brother to his father's action:

Now his elder son was in the field: and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come; and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in: therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment: and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends: But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.²²²

In this section, (1) the brother is told by a servant what the party is about. (2) He is angry and refuses to join in. (3) His father has to come out and try to coax him in. (4) The brother takes to task his father's actions: he compares himself to his brother and the way his father reacts to both. (5) The father tells him he is missing the point: the party is because his brother, instead of being "dead" is "alive" again; it has nothing to do with each brother's behaviour.

²²¹ in the verses that just precede this parable: "Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance." (Luke 15:6-7)

²²² Luke 15:24-32

This is probably the most important section of this parable. In it we see the “good, God-fearing Christian” absolutely scandalized by what he takes as the Father’s favouritism for the “sinner” who came back after squandering all he was given. This sinner ruined his life and his father gives a big feast on his return home! How unfair! How unjust! While he, the good, who did nothing wrong, followed the commandments while never getting even an acknowledgment! He never got a kid to share with his friends! Well, did he ever ask? Certainly not. He did not think that his father would be generous towards him. He thinks his father only loves his wayward brother! It is so obvious now. This good Christian burns with envy and resentment. He refuses to join in. He judges his father’s actions. He refuses Heaven (the party) as he does not understand what Heaven is all about.

Heaven is rejoicing in the presence of God’s total love for all. There is no such thing as deserving God’s love. There is only accepting it for all, including self, and rejoicing in it. Comparisons, value judgments, justice are irrelevant concepts when it comes to God’s love.

The parable does not say if the “good” son understood his father’s actions and joined in. Let us hope so. Let us hope that we will too, rather than burn with envy and resentment at God’s perceived unfairness.

The Vineyard Labourers’ Wages

Another parable on God’s “unfairness”, one with disgruntled workers rather than a disgruntled son, is the one of the Vineyard Labourers:

For the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which went out early in the morning to hire labourers into his vineyard. And when he had agreed with the labourers for a penny a day, he sent them into his vineyard. And he went out about the third hour, and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, And said unto them; Go ye also into the vineyard, and whatsoever is right I will give you. And they went their way. Again he went out about the sixth and ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out, and found others standing idle, and saith unto them, Why stand ye here all the day idle? They say unto him, Because no man hath hired us. He saith unto them, Go ye also into the vineyard; and whatsoever is right, that shall ye re-

ceive. So when even was come, the lord of the vineyard saith unto his steward, Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto the first. And when they came that were hired about the eleventh hour, they received every man a penny. But when the first came, they supposed that they should have received more; and they likewise received every man a penny. And when they had received it, they murmured against the goodman of the house, Saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and thou hast made them equal unto us, which have borne the burden and heat of the day. But he answered one of them, and said, Friend, I do thee no wrong: didst not thou agree with me for a penny? Take that thine is, and go thy way: I will give unto this last, even as unto thee. Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good? So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen.²²³

The main points of this parable are: (1) at dawn, a man hires workers for his vineyard after agreement on the day's wages. (2) He hires more workers as the day goes on, without specifying what he would pay them. (3) He pays all of them the amount agreed to by the workers hired at dawn. (4) These are unhappy at this "injustice": they consider they deserve more than the ones who worked less though it is the amount they settled for. (5) The complainers are sent away with their originally agreed wages after being told: "Is thine eye evil, because I am good?"

This parable makes it clear that God treats everyone the same: He loves everyone the same. But those who consider themselves more deserving of His love are furious at God's perceived injustice. This shows that they are really evil and full of resentment because they insist on "justice", draw comparisons and make value judgments. These people are the ones who end up excluded as they are the ones who burn with rage and jealousy against the Kingdom's ways: they insist on this world's order being followed. This is why Jesus insists on the fact that the rules of this world are the opposite of the ways of the Kingdom and why He takes so much time to point this out.

²²³ Matthew 20:1-16

Jesus again makes it clear that the Kingdom is not about “deserving”; it is about love, a love which is the same for all. The grumbling workers should have been glad that their colleagues got paid the same as they instead of demanding more for themselves. The Kingdom is about loving others, about being of service to them, about rejoicing with them, about putting them first. If you put yourself first, you end up last and in fact, out. If you put yourself last, you end up first in the Kingdom, as your joy in the happiness for others is so great.

The Parable of the Talents

Another parable on God’s perceived unfairness is a “strike” by a servant who considers as unfair his master’s demands. This is found in the parable of the servants each given some money to look after:

For the kingdom of heaven is as a man travelling into a far country, who called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one; to every man according to his several ability; and straightway took his journey. Then he that had received the five talents went and traded with the same, and made them other five talents. And likewise he that had received two, he also gained other two. But he that had received one went and digged in the earth, and hid his lord’s money. After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them. And so he that had received five talents came and brought other five talents, saying, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me five talents: behold, I have gained beside them five talents more. His lord said unto him, Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. He also that had received two talents came and said, Lord, thou deliveredst unto me two talents: behold, I have gained two other talents beside them. His lord said unto him, Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy lord. Then he which had received the one talent came and said, Lord, I knew thee that thou art an hard man, reaping where thou hast not sown, and gathering where thou hast not strawed: And I was afraid, and went and hid thy talent in the earth: lo, there thou hast that is thine. His lord answered and

said unto him, Thou wicked and slothful servant, thou knewest that I reap where I sowed not, and gather where I have not strawed: Thou oughtest therefore to have put my money to the exchangers, and then at my coming I should have received mine own with usury. Take therefore the talent from him, and give it unto him which hath ten talents. For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath. And cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.²²⁴

The main points of this parable are: (1) Someone leaves on a long journey, giving to each of his servants the mission to increase some of his money. The sum he gives to each is in accordance to his ability. (2) Two of them – those who were considered the most able by the way – double the amount given them by their business transactions. (3) The one considered less able, unwilling to risk the money entrusted to him by a master he considers a hard businessman, puts the money in a safe instead of really trying to fulfil his duty. (4) Then comes the time of reckoning: the first two come to their boss and give him back his money and what they earned from it. They are both told that they did their job well, that they are “good and faithful” servants; they are both promoted to more responsible jobs and a bonus: to “enter into the joy of thy lord”. (5) The one who put the money in the safe gives it back to his boss with this excuse: I was scared of you, a hard businessman, so I decided not to take any risk and did nothing. The master is indignant: you could at least have put it in the bank! (6) For his refusal to do his job, to try to increase the amount entrusted to him, he is called a “wicked and slothful servant” and is thrown out in the darkness where “there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth” and the money entrusted to this last employee is given to the one who was the most successful.

I think it is fair to say that the businessman is God; He entrusts each human with some work to do when He brings her into the world. It is then to her to do her best to make something of her talents and of the occasions that present themselves to her. Part of her life is thus the time of the businessman’s journey. The reckoning takes place at special moments in the life of each human. This is

²²⁴ Matthew 25:14-30

when the employees meet their employer after a long absence. This is when each gives an account of her life's performance so far.

The last employee is most indignant of his treatment. He considers his excuse perfectly legitimate; that his master had no right to demand such a job of him. He considers it unjust that his most successful colleague should get the money he "saved". He considers his employer to be a Big Bully, one who steals the fruit of the work of others. In fact, this is what he tells him to his face. You can feel the hate this man has for his master and his mission. He wants out. He cannot stand to be with him and his colleagues; he ends up in the darkness where he continues to rage and weep against all and sundry.

The other two did the job they were told to do. They took risks, and fulfilled the mandate they were given. For that they are promoted and rewarded. And they are happy. God gives them more to do, while He leaves the "unprofitable" servant to the Hell he made for himself. The ones who do well are given more to do, and for this they are joyful as they love to work for their master, while the one who is on strike and hates to work for him is given nothing to do.

In fact, his resentment and anger at God is such that he exiles himself, cuts himself from Him, and so makes his bed in Hell instead of accepting the Kingdom. No one is forced to love; hate is an available option. For those, *"l'enfer, c'est les autres"*.²²⁵

God and the unproductive fig tree

The last employee was derelict in his duties, on "strike". Even then not all should be lost for him. Jesus wants all to be saved. The following parable shows His readiness to try His hardest to make someone "come to fruition" while leaving him to choose to be what he is meant to be or not:

He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I

²²⁵ "Hell is others" from Sartre's play "Huis Clos" ("No Exit")

shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well:
and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down.²²⁶

The owner of a vineyard finds that one of his fig trees has not given fruit in season for three years in a row and so is losing patience with it: he wants it cut down. But the one in charge pleads to give the tree a last chance. More than that, he will work the soil around it and fertilise it. He will improve the soil to make sure the fig tree has all the nourishment it needs. But if after all that the tree does not produce the fruit it should, then there will be no point leaving it there: it will be cut down, removed from the vineyard.

God expects every fig tree to produce figs in season; this is what a fig tree is all about. If one does not, Jesus (God) is willing to go the extra mile to help it become the fruit bearing tree it was meant to be. If it still does not, there is no choice but to remove it, to give up on it. A fig tree that refuses to be such excludes itself from the others; its chopping down just makes evident what is already. Just like God has no choice but to accept that some consider His presence Hell instead of Heaven. He does not refuse us, we refuse Him.

²²⁶ Luke 13:6-9

THE PARABLES ABOUT HOW TO LIVE OUR LIVES

The Kingdom of God does not only refer to Heaven but also to the life of those who live according to God's plan on this earth. I will examine Jesus' parables on that topic.

The Faithful and the Faithless Stewards

Jesus tells in Luke's Gospel how, on his return, a lord treats his stewards depending on the way they performed the job he had assigned them. In a set of two parables on the subject, we first have a good steward:

And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath.²²⁷

Jesus takes the case of a "faithful and wise" steward who does his job well. He runs the household, making sure that all have to eat and so on. Jesus says that his lord will be so pleased with him when he comes back that He will give him the ultimate promotion: "ruler over all he has". And He adds that this will make this steward "blessed", happy.

So the lord went away after entrusting his steward with the responsibility of looking after his household. His trust was vindicated by his steward's behaviour. Because of this, she is entrusted with even more. As she was faithful in some things, she is entrusted with more.

The set continues with an abusive steward:

But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming; and shall begin to beat the menservants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers.²²⁸

²²⁷ Luke 12:42-44

²²⁸ Luke 12:45-46

The word “apistos” (απιστος) translated by “unbelieving” really means “faithless” or more precisely “non-faithful”. In other words, that steward is placed with the people who are not faithful, not trustworthy. While one steward is faithful, the other is not. And this is what is now clearly proclaimed by the latter being placed in the group of the untrustworthy people.

To come back to the text, the steward decides after a while to take advantage of his lord’s absence to lord over the servants, harassing and beating them, acting as if all was his to do what he pleased with. This man is not doing the job he was entrusted to do but is taking advantage of the situation by putting himself in his lord’s place. He makes himself number one. He is not acting according to his lord’s mandate but has set up his own where he comes first and all others must gravitate around him.

This steward is dismissed, fired by his lord on his return as he did wrong to his lord and his fellow servants. So will we be in the afterlife, if we have not looked after our lord’s interest and so after the humans under our care, while the good steward will be served by his lord. The first servant has acted according to God’s plan (the Kingdom); the second has decided on a different one where he replaces God; other humans are now for him to use and abuse. His outlook is that of this world’s order.

In both cases, we see Jesus comparing a human being to a steward in charge of her master’s house. All that she controls is not hers but her master’s. She can use these things to look after the people she has been put in charge of or she can use her fellow servants as if they were hers, using her master’s goods as if they were hers and acting as if she had no one to report to.

Is not this very much like our lives? We are born in a particular place and at a particular time, with particular people around us. We have been given a certain number of things to use for certain reasons. We have been given a certain number of people to look after considering these things we were provided with. Either we use them so as to use others as well, or we use them in the way God meant them to be used, as a service to others. We can either follow the ways of this world order or the ways of God’s Kingdom. But, whatever our choice, the Master will return and will restore His ways over His house. The faithful servant will be happy to receive her Master (Heaven) while the faithless servant will be angry at losing these things she considers rightly hers (Hell).

The Good Samaritan

This very idea is found also in the parable of the Good Samaritan. In Luke's Gospel, a lawyer asks Jesus what to do to inherit eternal life. Jesus replies by asking him what the Torah says. The lawyer answers by the "*Shema Israel*" followed by "and thy neighbour as thyself" (the Golden Rule). Jesus agrees that this is the right way to inherit eternal life.

The story does not stop there. The lawyer then asks Jesus to elucidate for him what to be a neighbour really means. Jesus answers by the well-known parable of the Good Samaritan:

And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side. But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him, And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee. Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves? And he said, He that shewed mercy on him. Then said Jesus unto him, Go, and do thou likewise.²²⁹

We have three people who see this man half dead on the road. Two avoid him like the plague though they are of his ethnic group. A third, a foreigner, sees the wounded man, has "compassion on him", bandages him and then takes him to a hotel he knows where he takes care of him during the rest of the day. The next day, as he finds his patient looking better, he gives the manager some money to take care of the wounded man, promising to repay on his next journey whatever extra the manager spends to make the wounded man well again.

²²⁹ Luke 10:30-37

Jesus then asks the lawyer who of the three men was a neighbour to the one who was attacked and left for dead. The lawyer replies: the one who showed mercy on him. To which Jesus says more than he answered rightly; He tells him that this is what we are to do ourselves.

This story has been read so many times that we do not see what it requires. Aren't we always running from meeting to meeting, with tight schedules? Are we not living in a world where "time is money"?

The first two men were busy: they just did not have the time. They also did not want to get involved; after all, the bandits might have been still around, looking for another prey. Why take any risk, especially as they had a family which depended on them? What did they know about first aid? What if they had made the man sicker? What if the police had turned up and booked them in for this attack? And what if the man had died while in their care? What could they possibly do that would not be time and money consuming? They had other responsibilities that had to come first.

Is not this the way we react to any event we come by? Do we normally get involved? Do we help someone who is injured? Are we ready to act promptly and drop everything else?

The Samaritan had "compassion". The Greek word "es-plagchnisthè" (εσπλαγχνισθη) translated thus means "to be moved in one's innards". He is moved in his guts: this human is completely taken by his fellow human's state. He knows in his heart of heart that he has to see to him: that is what he is on this earth for at this very moment. Everything else is secondary. He sees to his wounds the best he can and takes him to the hotel he normally frequents. He looks after him and, the next day, as his patient is out of danger, he leaves him under the care of someone he knows and trusts, telling him that if he did not leave him enough money, he will pay the extra on his next stop.

This human gives not only his time, he gives his money. He knows this is what he has to do. He is his brother's keeper. This wounded man is his responsibility: he is his neighbour, the person put next to him by God for him to look after as the need arises. The lawyer says that he showed "mercy", the translation of the Greek word "eleos" (ελεος) which can also be translated by "pity" or "compassion".

So Jesus makes it clear that we are to show compassion to the people who are around us. Which is a very dangerous thing to do as it means getting involved, helping, caring. All which requires from us time and money. But we are God's stewards and as such have a duty to perform such acts; and we are God's children and as such have to act according to our Father's ways.

Who acts in such a fashion will have no difficulty coming in her Father's presence: she will have learned to act in her Father's mindset.

The Parable of the Shrewd Steward

To come back to parables about stewards as such, let us examine a rather perplexing one about a dishonest steward who is being dismissed after being found out:

And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light.²³⁰

This steward is accused of dilapidating his master's goods. He just got his notice after being told to give an account of his stewardship. This fellow does not have his master's best interest at heart and never did. He is there for what he gets out of it. Now that he is going to lose his livelihood, he needs a scheme to save himself.

²³⁰ Luke 16:1-13

That he does by using his master's money: he has his master's various creditors come and he changes their bills to their advantage, expecting that, grateful for his good deed toward them, they will receive him in their homes. He does them a good turn with his master's money and hopes they will reciprocate. Just as he looks after their interests (with his master's money!), he hopes to have them look after him.

His master, told of this fraudulent scheme, says that this dishonest steward is wise. Why? Because he plans for his future, he looks after himself!

Jesus then bemoans the fact that "the children of light" do not show as much "wisdom" as "the children of this world"! Somehow, this seems a bit much! Jesus is giving us a crook as an example, someone who is looking after himself instead of others, someone who stands not for the Kingdom but for this world's order of "Me, myself and I!" How make sense of this? The previous parable about the untrustworthy steward (which is certainly what this one is!) seems to be saying just the opposite: the steward who made himself number one is sacked, and Jesus does not seem to find anything good about his actions.

Jesus' point here seems to be this: the children of God should know what to do to get to Heaven just as much as this fellow knows what to do to be welcomed by others. How is it that they are so slow at acting upon it? Knowing that getting to Heaven is in their interest, why are they so reluctant to do what it takes? After all, He told them what to do and they are not moving. Why can't they be as eager to get to Heaven as some capitalist is to make her first million before the age of twenty-five?

All we have in this life is not really ours: it all belongs to God, our Master. So Jesus is saying: "steal" from God (from the goods He has put you in charge) to your long term advantage, to make sure that you will have a happy "retirement" after this life by getting yourself "popular" with God's creditors by reducing the debt they really owe Him as the goods that you consider your own are really God's. (In the world's order's terminology, reduce others' debt load towards you.) Then they will invite you in their homes in the Kingdom.

So the dishonest manager has assured her success in the afterlife by forgiving some of the debt due to her master by not requiring payment for goods she had delivered them. She forgave

debts that, in this world's order, would be considered due to her but are really due to God.

Chastisement

Jesus produced quite a few parables about servants. In the following, He examines the need of chastising some who do not perform well:

And that servant, which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.²³¹

In Jesus' society, servants who misbehaved were physically beaten by their masters. Corporal punishment was considered perfectly legitimate in those days and masters had, until not that long ago, the right to act in such a way to "correct" servants who did not perform properly.

The first verse is straightforward: the servant who knows what she has to do and does not prepare herself accordingly nor does her job properly will be punished more than the one who does not do her job properly because she is not properly aware of her responsibilities. This makes a lot of sense.

The second is "to everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required from him; and to whom was entrusted much, more exceedingly they will ask of him." Now again, this seems to make much sense. The one who is given bigger responsibilities is expected to perform better than the one who is given few. The lord is supposed to give jobs according to people's abilities; only then can he expect them to do their jobs properly.

So what is this all about? Obvious statements are not very useful. What does it mean in the context of Jesus' teaching? Of course, we first have to understand the text itself, but then, we have to figure out why it is there, what message Jesus is trying to get across.

²³¹ Luke 12:47-48

It is fair to say that Jesus suggests that not all do well the job required of them by God. Some are not aware of what is required of them. These are less guilty than those who know what they are to do with their lives. So those will be more chastised, as they need to be more “corrected”. These beatings do not bring an end to the employment: the servant remains a servant. On the other hand, it has an incidence on what the master asks of her next time.

As a servant learns what she is to do and how to do it well, she is given more responsible jobs. If she continues to be trustworthy, she will be given even bigger projects to work on; if she slackens and becomes untrustworthy, she will be demoted.

That seems to be a *simile* of life on earth where God gives us more and more responsibilities if we prove ourselves as He reviews our performance. On the other hand, if we then decide to replace His interest by our own, we will “be beaten by many stripes”.

This can suggest a God who judges and the reader will remember that this is exactly the conclusion I do want. I seem to have hit a big snag: I have a text which does not seem to fit in my general interpretation of Who God Is, that is: a Lover and not a Judge.

Can I save my scheme without twisting the Gospel text beyond all recognition? The text seems to apply to our life on this earth and not to our meeting with our master after death. It basically says that God puts more responsibility on those who have shown that they can handle it: people like mother Theresa, whose influence increased as she proved to be able to cope with the added pressure. She could cope with anything; she had this inner strength that comes from being a truly faithful servant of God. Those who cannot cope with life are those who do not live according to the Kingdom. They find themselves ill-prepared to face life and end up facing major distresses, difficulties (stripes). You just have to check the paper to see how many of the rich and famous, glamorous and successful according to this world order end up with major problems. By not following the way of the Kingdom, they have not found the necessary stamina to face life’s difficulties and so are devastated by their difficulties.

In that interpretation, the very fact of not relying on God's way causes grief. And this grief can be salutary: it can teach people that they need to change their ways. And this, after all, was the reason why servants used to be corrected by corporal punishment: so they would reform and become good and faithful servants.

By the way, this interpretation is a tenet of Judaism found in many Psalms. Jesus would then bring here nothing new.

WHAT DOES BEING A CHILD OF GOD ENTAIL?

We have seen that for Jesus God is not One Who Condemns but a Father, His Father. But is He also our Father? As Jesus does not refer to God as His listeners' Father many times, it is perhaps worth examining this set of His sayings to see what meaning it has for us and my scheme. I have already examined some of them but I still hope this will be worthwhile. It also will bring us to look into other texts that develop the same themes.

To follow God's lead

What is a father in a patriarchal society? He is the one who takes the decisions for his family. He is the one to whom the children turn for everything: direction, food, clothing, work. He is the head of his clan. So when Jesus states, "And call no man *your father* upon the earth: for one is your Father, which is in heaven,"²³² He means that God as Father must be the centre of our lives, the One we refer to constantly. He is the One we take our orders from, not our natural father. No surprise that He states that this will cause human family frictions!

We have to follow our Father in Heaven's way of doing, His principles: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as *your Father* which is in heaven is perfect."²³³ This requires us to:

Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; That ye may be the children of *your Father* which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.²³⁴

This is the central principle of Jesus' teachings: be like your Father, love and serve everyone, whatever their actions towards you. The fact that someone wants to kill you does not give you licence to kill him: you are to serve him! This is the central point of Good Friday: Jesus carried His cross and so helped His tormentors liquidate Him. He did not in any way oppose the forces of this world order. He

²³² Matthew 23:9

²³³ Matthew 5:48

²³⁴ Matthew 5:44-45

behaved like His Father, loving His persecutors. And this is what we are also to do, as children of God our Father. Luke puts it in a different way: there Jesus says “Be ye therefore merciful, as *your Father* also is merciful”²³⁵ where “merciful” can also be translated by “compassionate”.

God does not want us to play this world order’s game: fighting back, defending ourselves. We are to refuse to play according to those rules. We are to play by God’s. We are to accept death, violence, brutality, not only against us but also against those we love, all this without expecting or demanding that God will make them pay in the end. Jesus forgave His tormentors, His killers. We are to do the same: pray for those who persecute us.

According to Jesus then, violence is never justified. We have no right of self-defence. There is no such thing as a just war. These concepts are totally alien to Jesus’ teaching. Anyone who claims to follow Christ has to remember this. Jesus made very clear that nothing less than total commitment to His way of life will do. You cannot serve two masters.

The reason why non-violence is a must is obvious: violence divides people; it requires enemies to brutalize, to hate. How can you live by God’s absolute love for the one you are fighting without raging against God for loving him?

Jesus tells us in this text found in Matthew how to pray to God our Father:

But when ye pray, use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking. Be not ye therefore like unto them: for *your Father* knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask him. After this manner therefore pray ye: *Our Father* which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever. Amen. ... But if ye for-

²³⁵ Luke 6:36

give not men their trespasses, neither will *your Father* forgive your trespasses.²³⁶

while in Mark the only reference to forgiving to be forgiven by God our Father is in the following:

And when ye stand praying, forgive, if ye have ought against any: that *your Father* also which is in heaven may forgive you your trespasses. But if ye do not forgive, neither will *your Father* which is in heaven forgive your trespasses.²³⁷

while in Luke there is a slightly shorter version of the Lord's prayer:

When ye pray, say, *Our Father* which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, as in heaven, so in earth. Give us day by day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation; but deliver us from evil.²³⁸

For Jesus, God as Father knows what we need; so the prayer is not there to remind *Him* but to remind *us* of our needs. We need to remember how essential it is to forgive others; that we are of His kingdom, not of this world order; that we have to live like Him, not like those who do not put their total trust in Him. We have to ask Him to feed us as we are aware of our total dependency on Him. Again, we have to trust Him completely if we seek to live according to His ways. After all, His ways of total service to all, friends and enemies, of total refusal of self-defence are such that they are impossible to follow without total trust in Him! We certainly do not stand a chance according to this world order!

Trust in our Father

This trusting reliance on God as our Father is again taken by Jesus in the following text found in Luke:

If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for

²³⁶ Matthew 6:7-13; 15

²³⁷ Mark 11:25-26

²³⁸ Luke 11:2-4

a fish give him a serpent? Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall *your heavenly Father* give the Holy Spirit to them that ask him?²³⁹

and, in a slightly different way, in Matthew:

Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: For every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened. Or what man is there of you, whom if his son ask bread, will he give him a stone? Or if he ask a fish, will he give him a serpent? If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall *your Father* which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him? Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets.²⁴⁰

We are to trust that God will look after us as a Father. If we trust in God our Father, He will give us His Holy Spirit. Or, in the way put in Matthew, God our Father will give “good things to those who ask Him”. And these are the “Golden Rule”: to do to others what you want them to do to you as this is the Law and the Prophets.

The Greek terms “*agios pneuma*” (ἅγιος πνεῦμα) are translated by “Holy Spirit”. The term translated as “holy” also means “sacred”, “august”. The term translated by “Spirit” means “breath”, “breath of wind”; from it come words like “pneumatic”; the related Greek word “*pneumôn*” (πνευμῶν) means “lung”.

The way we breathe is directly related to the way we are. Breathing in an august way is breathing in a serene way, deeply and slowly. This calm and deep breathing is the breathing of someone untroubled, at peace, unworried. This is the breathing of someone who is a child of God and as such relies entirely on Him and follows with absolute confidence His ways, the Golden Rule, the Rule He gave to His humans.

²³⁹ Luke 11:11-13

²⁴⁰ Matthew 7:7-12

Jesus again insists on the need for total trust (faith) in God as Father:

Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to day in the field, and to morrow is cast into the oven; how much more will he clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and *your Father* knoweth that ye have need of these things. But rather seek ye the kingdom of God; and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock; for it is *your Father's* good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.²⁴¹

which is taken very succinctly in Matthew: “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without *your Father*.”²⁴²

Jesus argues again and again that God does a very good job of sustaining His creation. How much more will He sustain His children! We do not have to worry: God takes care of everything. We do not need to gather possessions on this earth; on the other hand, what we gather in His kingdom is everlasting, incorruptible.

Another very important way to live is to have faith that Jesus (God) will heal us, will make us what we need to become. We have to accept to be clay in His hands. Without His help we will not be able to reform ourselves, to become a “child of God”, to embrace His values.

²⁴¹ Luke 12:24-34

²⁴² Matthew 10:29

I intend to contrast two texts; in the first we have a leper who is convinced that Jesus can cure him if He so wills it:

And there came a leper to him, beseeching him, and kneeling down to him, and saying unto him, If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean. And Jesus, moved with compassion, put forth his hand, and touched him, and saith unto him, I will; be thou clean. And as soon as he had spoken, immediately the leprosy departed from him, and he was cleansed.²⁴³

Jesus can cure someone only if the one who so asks Him firmly believes that He can deliver. The cure is impossible without this certainty from the supplicant that God can actually do it if He so wishes: "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean." As we know, this required trust is not sufficient: God has to want such a cure: "I will; be thou clean."

It is important to note that when God refuses to satisfy the supplicant, it is not necessarily because the latter lacks trust in Him. What the supplicant is asking for with trust in God's power to deliver it is not necessarily what God wants for him. The supplicant must trust that God is compassionate and so will do what is best for him.

This certainty in the supplicant's mind that God really takes care of her is essential. Let us look at a case where Jesus' followers lacked this faith in God when a storm struck while they were on a ship with Jesus:

And there arose a great storm of wind, and the waves beat into the ship, so that it was now full. And he was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow: and they awake him, and say unto him, Master, carest thou not that we perish? And he arose, and rebuked the wind, and said unto the sea, Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm. And he said unto them, Why are ye so fearful? how is it that ye have no faith? And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Mark 1:40-42 (also Matthew 8:2-4)

²⁴⁴ Mark 4:37-41 (also Luke 8:22-25)

It is obvious that the disciples have no confidence at all that all is turning out well for them! In fact, they are so fearful of drowning as their boat is taking on water faster than they can bail it out that they awake Jesus to get Him to start bailing out water as well. He, of course, does nothing of the sort. To their great surprise, He just calms the wind and the sea and then tells them off for their lack of faith!

I can easily put myself in the place of the disciples. I can easily understand their frustration at trying desperately to keep the boat afloat while Jesus is totally unaware of their efforts. Jesus is so oblivious to their predicament that they feel it is just as if He was not there at all!

We also face desperate situations in life; situations where we wonder if God is asleep! Jesus does not tell them off for trying to bail the water out; He tells them off for not trusting that God does His part: that is, save them from drowning or take them to Himself according to His will for them. Confidence in God means to trust that He somehow acts *for* us, as our Saviour. Faith in God means to believe that He Who can do anything is always there looking after us. The disciples did not believe that Jesus could stop the storm: it never entered their heads. But they should have believed that God was a Father to them.

So faith is confidence that things will work out in the end, whatever that “end” is. It is an outlook on life that provides one with serenity, inner peace. It is a decision to be afraid of nothing, to keep on loving our enemies and praying for those who persecute us come what may. It is being committed to God’s ways.

He does not require us to believe in Him. Jesus did not require His apostles to believe that He would rebuke the wind and save them. He just wanted them to “keep their cool”, do their best without complaining and moaning and so face life with serenity.

Blood, sweat and tears

Jesus promised His followers persecutions. Christians who think that prosperity is the ultimate proof of God’s love for them have definitely not understood Jesus’ message: they seem to have kept to reading the Septuagint. Jesus promises us blood, sweat and tears. He wants us to fight the good fight every day and everywhere; to preach His message of self-denial and not of self-promotion, a message that does not fit at all in the present world:

Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of *your Father* which speaketh in you.²⁴⁵

His followers are to be “sheep” among “wolves”. They are to be “wise as serpents” and “harmless as doves”. The Greek word “akeraioi” (ακεραιοι) translated by “harmless” means “pure”, like in “pure water”, “intact”, “whole”, “unstained”, “unadulterated” and the Greek word “phronimoi” (φρονιμοι) translated by “wise” means “sensible”, “wise”. We are to be sensible and unadulterated, children of God our Father.

Sheep cannot defend themselves against the teeth of wolves: they get eaten up. We can expect the same. We can expect to be scourged, taken to court. But He says that the “Breath of our Father” will speak through us, so we do not have to worry. Strength and words will be provided for by our Father.

In the following passage, Jesus states that discipleship, though demanding, is far preferable to the *dolce vita* suggested by this world’s order. I will divide this passage in its four verses and examine them one by one: “Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me.”²⁴⁶

He first states that the disciple must “reject his self” (the Greek word “aparnēsasthō” (απαρνησασθω) translated by “deny” means “refuse”, “reject”. Instead of building the self as suggested by today’s psychologists, one is to reject it; instead of wanting to be oneself, one is to refuse to be that self so as to follow Jesus’ ways. We are not to look after our advantage or convenience but follow Jesus. He comes up with this terrible image of carrying one’s cross

²⁴⁵ Matthew 10:16-20

²⁴⁶ Matthew 16:24

for a painful death to self. This is what is actually going to happen to Him; this is what will happen to His disciples, at least metaphorically.

Jesus goes on to say: “For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it.”²⁴⁷ What does it mean: to save or to lose one’s life? The same Greek word “psychè” (ψυχή) is translated by “life” (in this verse) and “soul” (in the next). It means “breath”, that which we need to be alive. This verse would be better translated by: “for who may desire to save his breath of life, will lose it; and whoever may lose his breath of life because of me, he will find it.” It states the following dilemma: dying because of one’s faithfulness to Jesus’ ways or surviving by abandoning them. The one who abandons Jesus’ ways will lose his life later (as, after all, every one dies at one point or another) while the one who died to keep them will win his life back later.

This is followed by: “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”²⁴⁸ Again, this verse would be better translated as “what good will it do to a man to gain the whole world and suffer damage as regard to his breath of life? or what will a man give in return for his breath of life?” What Jesus is saying here is nothing really new. The Ancients all agreed on the fact that living was better than being dead and that most people would give away their riches to stay alive. They also agreed on the fact that riches did not prevent death and were of no use in the “underworld”.

The last verse helps make sense of this cluster: “For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.”²⁴⁹

Humans all die. Either you die a disciple or not. Either you die rich or not. Your riches do not give you back your life (as He remarks in verse 26). The only thing that can give you back your life is your discipleship (as He promises in verse 25). This is the reward the “Son of Man” gives to His disciples.

²⁴⁷ Matthew 16:25

²⁴⁸ Matthew 16:26

²⁴⁹ Matthew 16:27

The same theme is taken in a somewhat different way in another passage in Matthew, which I will divide in three clusters, of two, four and two verses each. The first cluster is:

Whosoever therefore shall confess me before men, him
will I confess also before my Father which is in heaven.
But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I
also deny before my Father which is in heaven.²⁵⁰

The first verse would be better translated as: "Everyone then who shall declare himself for me in front of men, I will declare myself for him in front of my Father which is in Heaven." Basically, if you are ready to publicly declare that Jesus' way is right and face the consequences, Jesus will declare in front of God that you are one of His. If you repudiate Him in public, He will declare to God that you do not accept Him and His message. Jesus will very simply tell His Father what you have announced to your fellow humans.

He then makes a very strong statement:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I
came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come
to set a man at variance against his father, and the
daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law
against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be
they of his own household. He that loveth father or
mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he
that loveth son or daughter more than me is not wor-
thy of me.²⁵¹

As His demands are fundamentally different from that of this world's order, they will cause a rift among people and divide them between His followers and His detractors. Some in a family will be for Him while others will be against Him. Each one of His followers in that predicament will have to choose between their family ties or Jesus; between either staying a follower of Him or abandoning Him.

In this war against the world's order, friends and family members end up one against the other. This is why it is so costly to be His disciple. She has to be ready to forgo her possessions, to lose her friends and her family, all which is important in the culture of the time.

²⁵⁰ Matthew 10:32-33

²⁵¹ Matthew 10:34-37

He states points already examined in the final two verses of the passage: “And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it.”²⁵²

The image of the cross is a kind of *leitmotiv*, a point that is hammered on again and again. The life of discipleship, as hard as it is, alone gets you your life back after death.

These points are also found in Luke’s Gospel:

If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.²⁵³

For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.²⁵⁴

This set starts with two ideas which we have already examined: if a human is not ready to put family well after what Jesus asks of her, she is no disciple. If she is not ready to endure everything for His sake, she is no disciple. Those two sayings are two different ways of saying basically the same thing: Jesus demands a total commitment from His disciple.

This is followed by two very sensible sayings that do not seem to be related to what He has just said. The first one is: do not

²⁵² Matthew 10:38-39

²⁵³ Luke 14:26-27

²⁵⁴ Luke 14:28-33

start building what you are not sure to be able to finish; otherwise, you will look quite foolish when you have to abandon your project half way. The second saying is: if you decide on a campaign against an opponent, make sure that you have the means to overcome him; otherwise, settle with him as quickly as possible.

Then follows what is meant to be the punch line: if you do not say farewell and take leave of all of your possessions, do not try to be my disciple. Why? Because you will lose your campaign, you will not be able to finish your project.

What Jesus is saying here is quite simple: the only way you can succeed in discipleship is by leaving all your possessions behind. This is not something that I have done, nor is it something that I have seen done by most people who call themselves Christians. I have to conclude that most Christians seem to consider this excessive, as they do not live by it.

Jesus insists on the necessity for every human to actually live according to His ways. Nothing else will suffice. This He makes quite clear:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.²⁵⁵

For Jesus, discipleship does not mean to cure in His name, or call on His name, or prophesy in His name. God can use anyone, good or evil, dedicated follower of His ways or not, to cure people, or preach in His name; these do not have to be real followers of Jesus. To be part of the Kingdom of Heaven, you have to act according to its ways. Those who do not are not part of this realm; they are not “according to God”; they are not in God’s image.

Jesus makes it again perfectly clear in this passage:

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man,

²⁵⁵ Matthew 7:21-23

which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.²⁵⁶

The only way for the house to survive is to build it on His sayings. Otherwise it will collapse and be ruined. The only way for a life to survive after death is to base it on Jesus' teachings. The only way to go through the difficulties of life unscathed is to base it on His teachings.

Jesus claims that His teachings and His teachings alone can provide the stability required in life and death. This is difficult to accept in this day and age. But let us remember that His teachings have nothing to do with dogmas and Church structure; they have to do with surrendering the self to God by trusting totally in His providence (Fatherhood); they have to do with putting the other in first place rather than the self and so being of service to all, irrespective of their actions. Love of God is made manifest in love of neighbour, good or bad. This message is neither confined to a (religious) group nor exclusively lived by any.

Humility

If we choose God's way, we will most probably not rise to important positions because we will not be fighting for them; we will have no ambitions for ourselves; we will probably not be rich, because we will not be looking to make tons of money. So we will not be important in the eyes of this world's important people, the politicians and the business people. We will be the ones the rich and powerful feast on: the "masses", the unimportant, the cannon fodder, the dispensable. We will be "the little ones".

So if we trust in God our Father, in His ways, we will be defenceless in the face of this world order but we will be part of His kingdom: "Even so it is not the will of *your Father* which is in heaven,

²⁵⁶ Matthew 7:24-27

that one of these little ones should perish.”²⁵⁷ The Greek word “micros” (μικρος) translated by “little one” means when applied to people: “of mediocre quality”, “unimportant”, “weak”. They are those who “have not made it” in this world: the poor, the marginalized, the forgotten. For them God is a Father who saves, who definitely cares: “Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven.”²⁵⁸

The poor are the ones whose angels are face to face with God: they have direct access to God. They are powerless in this world but have contact to their Father. The present world’s order is the upside down version of the Kingdom of God! The ones who are important in God’s sight are not in the eyes of this world’s leaders. Your ways are not God’s if you despise whom He holds in high esteem.

Jesus also suggests very strongly that humans should not put themselves forward, that they should not be puffed up, full of their own self-importance. He suggests in fact that being full of oneself is a very good way of risking to lose face:

When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.²⁵⁹

Jesus suggests that we should never assume to be among the most important people anywhere; on the contrary, we should assume that most if not all of the people are more important than us. That point of view means that we do not consider the others inferiors but superiors. This has a direct effect on our behaviour: politeness, consideration, civility, understanding for all and sundry.

²⁵⁷ Matthew 18:14

²⁵⁸ Matthew 18:10

²⁵⁹ Luke 14:8-11

Jesus' story of the banquet ends up with a sentence of His that comes up over and over again: "For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

But why does Jesus repeat this *leitmotiv* over and over again? For Jesus the reason we are on this earth is to prepare ourselves for the next. I suggest that we are going to decide our fate by our reaction to God's absolute love towards all our fellow humans: if we rebel against it, we will live Hell; if we embrace it, we will live Heaven. So finding others more worthy than us surely will help.

Some time ago, black men in the US were called "boy" by whites. It was a term used to denigrate them, to put them in the place of a child, someone who has no recognized rights; not exactly a non-entity, but one who could not vote, hold office, take decisions. This is what is meant in the Gospels by the word "child", which is "pais" (παῖς) in Greek: someone who has no power, no rights, and who owns nothing (even though he might be able to once he reaches maturity).

Jesus' disciples were very slow to understand His way of seeing things. They wanted to be important, to be leaders in their movement. They often were fighting for position in it. So Jesus had to come back to this over and over. So He makes it crystal clear:

At the same time came the disciples unto Jesus, saying, Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven? And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, And said, Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven. Whosoever therefore shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoso shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.²⁶⁰

Jesus says that someone who does not take the status of a child shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. To reach that status, one has to "humble oneself". The Greek word used "tapeinōsei" (ταπεινώσει) means "humiliate oneself" which surely implies a lowering of status, of standing. The lower the standing according to this word's order, the greater it is in the Kingdom of Heaven. To accept to seek a lower status according to this world's order, one has to change direction, the meaning of the Greek word "straphête"

²⁶⁰ Matthew 18:1-5

(στραφητε) translated as “be converted”). Indeed, Jesus requires a complete change of direction, of way of thinking.

This comes out again in a different way in Mark’s account. In answer to Jesus’ saying that who receives “such children in my name, receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me, receiveth not me, but him that sent me,”²⁶¹ John, one of the people always trying to get to the top of the Jesus movement, comes up with this extraordinary out of place statement:

And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us. But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against us is on our part.²⁶²

Jesus’ answer shows clearly that for Him there are no Chief Executive Officers in the Kingdom and organizational charts; permissions are not required to do good works in Jesus’ name nor is there any copyright on His name! No, there are no rules for doing good works.

We saw what Jesus meant by the “little ones”. Not every “little one” believes in Jesus, in His message. Some have just not succeeded in this world order but swear by it. But about those who, by their words or actions, their silence or lacks of action, are causing the “little one’s” who believe in Jesus’ message to falter, to fall, He has these harsh words to say:

But whoso shall offend one of these little ones which believe in me, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and that he were drowned in the depth of the sea. Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!²⁶³

The Greek word “skandalidzei” (σκανδαλίζει) translated by “offend” means “trip”, “cause to fall” and the word “skandalōn”

²⁶¹ Mark 9:37

²⁶² Mark 9:38-40

²⁶³ Matthew 18:6

(σκανδαλων) translated by “offence” means “trap”, “pit placed on the way”; “obstacle meant to trip someone”. Jesus says clearly that those people would better be dead than to have caused such a disaster for the “little ones”. Now this is not a very accommodating message!

He follows this by:

Wherefore if thy hand or thy foot offend thee, cut them off, and cast them from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life halt or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet to be cast into everlasting fire. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast it from thee: it is better for thee to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire.²⁶⁴

This saying sounds very harsh in this day and age of moral relativism, where even what is “real” is debatable and relative to the way we see things. But Jesus makes it clear that if you cause something to stumble and fall from God’s way, you will end up “cast into everlasting fire” which does not sound like a very nice situation to be in. So for Him, it is essential that all obstacles to following God’s ways be removed whatever the costs.

Humility is a must. In Matthew, we are told to give alms in secret: “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of *your Father* which is in heaven.”²⁶⁵ There Jesus makes the point that good works can be done in the spirit of this word’s order rather than in the spirit of the Kingdom of our Father.

Indeed looking for good publicity is very much in accordance with this world’s order. A hugely rich capitalist, for instance, can “justify” his amassing of a huge fortune (made on the backs of others) by his benevolence. It shows the “human touch”, the “compassionate side” of capitalism. So it justifies not only his ways but the whole world order he lives by, based on greed, injustice, inequality.

So we are to go about our Christian lives without a thought given to what others will think of us. What matters is that we live according to the Kingdom, with its way of thinking, of feeling, of living.

²⁶⁴ Matthew 18:7-14

²⁶⁵ Matthew 6:1

Loving everyone and rejecting none. Not looking after our needs so much as looking after those of others.

In Matthew is also this sentence of Jesus: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify *your Father* which is in heaven."²⁶⁶ The Greek verb "doksasôsi" (δοξασωσι) translated by "glorify" means "have an opinion" "believe" "think", "judge". The Greek word translated by "good" is "kala" (καλα) can also be translated as "noble", "honest", "honourable". The idea here is that people will have an opinion, a judgement of God our Father based on what we do; if we do good works, they will have a good opinion and they may want to believe in His ways. We have a definite role as God's children to make His ways known, to talk in His Name though this will mean persecution, at least to some degree, as this world's order does not approve of God's. We live in Enemy territory. No wonder Jesus got killed, and lots of Christians as well.

The "Good News" is God's order, His kingdom, where all are loved equally and all love each other and look after each other. The "Good News" is that God will never let us down as He will take us to Himself. Death and torments are not the last word. Evil will not triumph over God's love.

Choosing between God or money

For Jesus, serving both God and Wealth (Mammon is the personification of Wealth) is impossible: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."²⁶⁷

Serving God means acting like His child, with His mindset, which is giving, being of service to others. While looking after oneself, one's needs, one's personal security entails gathering wealth as a shelter from the unpredictable, from poverty, from misery. It is trying to rely on ourselves to face the future by accumulating for our needs alone money, goods and influence.

We have a choice to make: to be children of God and so follow in His ways or to be children of the devil and follow in the ways of

²⁶⁶ Matthew 5:16

²⁶⁷ Matthew 6:24

this world's order, based on acquiring possessions and power, on inequality.

What are we to do with our money if we have some? Jesus has a suggestion: "And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."²⁶⁸

Jesus tells us to use our money to make friends of others so that they will welcome us in the afterlife. We need to use "our" money to help the people who are in need as they then will welcome us in Heaven, this place where it is for all to see that God identifies completely with them.

Jesus follows this by stating: "He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much"²⁶⁹ that someone who cannot be trusted with little cannot be trusted with much and someone who is dishonest about little is dishonest about much. Such a statement is just good sense.

He then goes to say: "If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"²⁷⁰

Here He argues that if you cannot be trusted with money (little because transitory, ephemeral), how can you be trusted with true riches (something worthwhile because everlasting)? If you cannot be trusted with something as unimportant as someone else's (God's) money, how can you be trusted with something that should be really yours? Or said differently, if you cannot be trusted with money, how can you be trusted with what God wants you to do with your life? How can you make a success of your life, and end up happy in the afterlife?

In Luke's Gospel, Jesus gives an example of what He means: He suggests this method of drawing a list of guests to our dinners:

²⁶⁸ Luke 16:9

²⁶⁹ Luke 16:10

²⁷⁰ Luke 16:11-12

Then said he also to him that bade him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.²⁷¹

Jesus is telling us to invite people who cannot invite us in return. The idea is that if they cannot repay you, their debt towards you will be maintained until you reach the afterlife. So you will be repaid at “the resurrection of the just”.

How does that fit in my scheme? One thing is for sure, this saying can be contrasted with the parable of the rich man who ignored Lazarus. Ignoring the poor makes it Hell, feeding the poor makes it Heaven. Why? Of course, one could talk about “justice” but this is exactly what I want to avoid without twisting Jesus’ sayings beyond recognition. It is all very well to try to show that a scheme can work, but you cannot fit square pegs in triangular slots.

I suggested that the reason why the rich man finds the after-life Hell is because he sees God’s love for the poor as well as knowing that he did nothing to alleviate his sufferings, in fact, it can be put even more strongly: God identifies with the poor so much that the rich man sees himself having avoided to feed God Himself. Surely God will have revenge on him for letting Him starve when he could have fed Him. The rich man feels both guilty and afraid. He cannot think of God as being able to forgive, so he stays in his Hell, incapable of leaving it for fear of even worse.

When the man who has fed the poor and the lame has the same insight, he does not have the same reaction. He can rejoice that he fed God! What an honour! What luck! He can rejoice and exult. He is in Heaven. The more God identifies with the poor and the forgotten, the more those who have helped those will exult because of what they did.

The difference between Hell and Heaven is in one’s reaction to confronting the same Reality: God. If you know that God is Love,

²⁷¹ Luke 14:12-14

you are not afraid of Him but you run to embrace Him in joy and thanksgiving.

In our world, money is considered essential. We cannot see how we could live without it. We “need” so many things: cars, homes, televisions, clothes, shoes, coats and so on. So to have Jesus making diatribes about money sounds excessive to us. The poor fellow just was not thinking of our world, our country, where we need to pay for electricity, oil, telephone, transport, food, and so on. Surely, He went a bit overboard.

In Luke, Jesus states His case quite soundly: There is no point desiring or possessing more than one really needs as a person’s life does not consist in what that person possesses: “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man’s life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth.”²⁷²

Possessions do not in any way help in the afterlife. The Greek word “pleoneksias” (πλεονεξίας) translated by “covetousness” has a wider meaning, which is “having more than others”, “advantage”, “having too much”, “abundance”, “desiring more than one should”, “cupidity”, “covetousness”, “insatiable appetite”.

This is exactly what Jesus then proceeds to explain with the parable that follows His statement:

And he spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully: And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns, and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee: then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided?²⁷³

It is very clear from this parable that all this man’s abundance of wealth is of no use at all in the afterlife. On the contrary, this man’s

²⁷² Luke 12:15

²⁷³ Luke 12:16-20

plan to amass property and goods for his earthly future means that he has not at all planned for his more important future, that of his afterlife.

The moral of the tale is clearly stated in the verse just following the parable: “So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God,”²⁷⁴ which can be paraphrased as “So ends up the one who, while amassing lots of goods to protect himself against the unknown of this physical world, forgot to amass what makes him rich in the eyes of God, that is, what he needs to be at his meeting with God.”

Let us look very carefully at what is said here: you have a man who has been accumulating possessions and wealth. He now has so much that he needs greater storage space: so he gets himself a bigger place. He has accumulated wealth, all the necessities of life. He has saved for his retirement. So he can now retire and live a life of ease.

Is not this the life everyone wants for himself? Is not this what everyone tells us must be our aim in life, to save for a happy retirement? How many ads do we find on the subject? How many people tell us we must save for a rainy day? But what does Jesus say? All these things will go to others when you die; there is no way in which they will help you after death, when you meet God. You will have nothing of that to show to Him then.

Most people would have rather said about the dead man: pity he did not retire earlier, while he could still have enjoyed his goods. Now he is dead and cannot. Most do not think of what is after this life; most people do not think about being prepared for that encounter, which can come at any time.

To add another twist, Matthew relates that the final answer Jesus gives to the man who wants to know what to do to inherit eternal life is: “Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.”²⁷⁵

Perfection is the same translation of the same Greek word we have seen when we talked about God’s as well as His humans’ perfec-

²⁷⁴ Luke 12:21

²⁷⁵ Matthew 19:21

tion. Jesus' statement could read: "if you want to be what you are meant to be, sell all and give it to the poor, then come and follow me."

This is hardly what I see Christians doing by the millions, or even thousands. I do not see all these people who say they have made a commitment to Christ do what He says here. Among those I do not see following this advice, I count myself as well as all the ministers of the various Churches. Indeed, have they not access to cars, televisions, and most of the amenities of modern life?

Not everyone necessarily aims for perfection. Some of us could be satisfied by something a little less. The problem is what Jesus says next; that it is very hard for a rich man to enter the Kingdom, not to say near impossible:

Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven. And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.²⁷⁶

And every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundredfold, and shall inherit everlasting life.²⁷⁷

Of course we could argue that we are not really rich; in fact just somewhere near comfortable with our cars, bungalows, closets full of clothes, dishwashers, fridges, stoves, washing machines, dryers, and so on. All these are *necessities* of life in this day and age. That most of the people of this earth do not have such amenities is unfortunate; we wish they get them soon.

For Jesus, the more you are rich, the less chance you have to make the Kingdom! Riches are not a sign of God's grace; just the opposite! This flies in the face of the thinking of most Christians who believe, as the Septuagint implies, that riches are a sign of God's love.

The disciples were astounded by Jesus' saying on the near impossibility of the rich to enter the Kingdom. In our case, we prefer to ignore it, which means classifying such a saying among Jesus'

²⁷⁶ Matthew 19:23-24

²⁷⁷ Matthew 19:29

“excesses”: He went slightly overboard, you know! He got carried away; He did not really mean it.

The widow's alms

Let us look at another incident that shows in a way what we are to do. It is the case of the widow giving money to the treasury at the Temple:

And Jesus sat over against the treasury, and beheld how the people cast money into the treasury: and many that were rich cast in much. And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing. And he called unto him his disciples, and saith unto them, Verily I say unto you, That this poor widow hath cast more in, than all they which have cast into the treasury: For all they did cast in of their abundance; but she of her want did cast in all that she had, even all her living.²⁷⁸

Rich people are seen to give substantial sums of money and a poor widow, a very small amount. Obviously, the Temple managers prefer the large amounts given by the rich than the minute amount given by the widow. But Jesus (again, God Incarnate) does not see it that way. The rich gave little of what they had, ensuring themselves a very comfortable life indeed, while the widow gave all she had, leaving nothing for herself and so putting herself in a very sorry state. That she gave all she had while they gave little is the way God sees it; but not the way the worldly Temple managers see it. For them, it is a question of what it costs to carry out such or such a repair; it is not the size of a contributor's loving self-sacrifice in making her contribution.

God does not need repairs to the Temple. What counts for Him is the love humans have for Him. This, because those who love Him very much will want very much to be with Him for all eternity, where they will be rejoicing in His love towards them and others. They will be ready to make whatever adjustment is required to become like Him. God loves humans totally; the widow showed by her gift that she loved God totally. She acted like Him.

²⁷⁸ Mark 12:41-44 (also Luke 20:1-4)

Defilement, goodness and evil

Jesus has this to say about trees and their fruits, and people and their words:

Either make the tree good, and his fruit good; or else make the tree corrupt, and his fruit corrupt: for the tree is known by his fruit. O generation of vipers, how can ye, being evil, speak good things? for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh. A good man out of the good treasure of the heart bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of the evil treasure bringeth forth evil things. But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned.²⁷⁹

Jesus' reasoning is straightforward: a tree that produces good fruit is said rightly to be a good tree; similarly a person who utters good words is said to be a good person. After all, good words come from a good heart just like evil words come from an evil heart. What you say shows who you are. If your words are good, you are pure, good; if they are evil, you are impure, evil.

This makes a lot of sense; of course Jesus could have added that you also are good if you perform good deeds and evil if you perform evil deeds. But not everyone is able to put in practice all the threats that she utters. Some destroy others by their words alone.

The logical link between the state of the fruit and that of what produces it is obvious. Jesus says that humans' fruits are their words. So if their talk is "evil", so are they; if their talk is "idle", so are they; if their talk is "good", so are they. The Greek word "ponèros" (πονηρός) translated by "evil" means "bad", "defective", "faulty", "wicked", "depraved", the Greek word "argon" (αργον) translated by "idle" means "going nowhere", "unfinished", "incomplete", "slovenly", "slipshod", "lazy", "idle".

So Jesus is requiring of humans that they actually get down to the job the Father has given them to do, which is to produce good fruits; nothing else will do.

²⁷⁹ Matthew 12:33-37 (also Matthew 7:15-20)

The people who reject my scheme will now pounce on the last two verses of the above text which talks about the “day of judgment”, when some will be “condemned” and others “justified”. Can I extricate myself honestly from what seems the proof that my scheme does not stand?

But who judges? Who separates? Who accepts to consider someone just? Who considers someone condemned? Jesus does not name the “judge”.

In my scheme, the day of separation is the day of our death. Then all is revealed, all our shortcomings, all those of others; all the rotten fruits, all the bad fruits, all the fruits that did not reach maturation as well as all the good fruits. Then we will judge and decide either to separate ourselves from the truth and God’s love, or we will accept the truth of our poor state of affairs and accept also that of others. We will choose between Heaven or Hell, faced with the truth and the love of God.

Jesus disagrees with the Torah about what constitutes impurity. He states that it has nothing to do with dirty hands, a woman’s menstruation or eating such a type of food:

And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand: There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.²⁸⁰

For Jesus, no human can be defiled by anything that comes into that human, whether it is food, or dirt, liquids or solids, including semen and blood, but only from what comes out of that human from within. For Jesus, a man or a woman who is raped is not defiled.

Jesus considers null and void the Torah’s laws on ritual purity, laws which touch every aspect of a Jew’s daily life and remind them constantly of their commitment to God’s commands:

And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him; Because it entereth not into his heart, but

²⁸⁰ Mark 7:14-15 (also Matthew 15:11)

into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging
all meats?²⁸¹

What Jesus considers cause for defilement is the evil that comes from within the “heart”. The Greek word “kardia” (καρδία) translated by “heart” is the source of courage, friendship and love on the one hand and passions and anger on the other; and the seat of intelligence:

And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.²⁸²

Jesus’ list of the evil that emanates from the heart includes adultery (copulating with someone who is married), fornication (copulating with a prostitute), murder and theft. It continues with covetousness (the Greek term “pleonexia” (πλεονεξία) means “have more than someone else”; “superiority”, “have too much”, and from there “want more than one should”, “cupidity”, “covetousness”, you can take your pick as for which one Jesus meant here, if not all of the above!). This is followed by “deceit”, the translation of “ponèria” (πονηρία) which means “nastiness”, “perversity” according to my dictionary), lasciviousness, the translation of “aselgeia” (ασελγεία) (which means “impudence”, “insolence”, “rudeness” and from there lasciviousness, as well as blasphemy, pride, foolishness.

Nothing in this list has to do with worship or even relationship with God but rather with how people relate to others, how they respect others, how they treat others as they want to be treated (the Golden Rule).

But what about blasphemy? The Greek word “blasphèmia” (βλασφημία) translated by “blasphemy” means according to my dictionary a “word of bad omen”; a “word which must not be pronounced in a religious ceremony”, and from there an “impious, ungodly and irreligious word”.

²⁸¹ Mark 7:18-19 (also Matthew 15:17)

²⁸² Mark 7:20-23 (also Matthew 15:18-20)

Nowhere in the Bible is God really hurt by something someone says. Words uttered by mere humans do not wound Him. The only time I recall Him talking about His good name being put into question is when He decides that He cannot continue to punish His people by letting them in the hands of the *goyim* because if He does so, the *goyim* will be able to say that He was incapable of protecting them. In the Septuagint we find Him again and again saving His people for His good name's sake.

The God described in the Septuagint does not need the sacrifices that are given to Him; His good health does not depend on such a religious thing being done according to the right prescription. The only effect of the utterance of something impious is to provoke His anger at the blasphemer and the people around him. The consequence of the blasphemy is thus something bad affecting not only the person responsible but also the community in which he lives. So again this affects others.

What to make of all this?

What did we learn from this chapter? Jesus' main point is that we have to love everyone the same, whether they are good or bad, whether they want to do us good or evil. The corollary of this is that we cannot defend ourselves or anybody else for that matter; neither can we protect anything that we have or that they have. This flies in the face of the basic law of any civilized society where the right of defence of self, family and possessions is primordial. No wonder that those who live according to Jesus are at variance with their family and society. They are to let their loved ones be tortured rather than help them! And they are to forgive and love those tormentors! They are to help those who steal from them! No wonder this requires a strong trust in this message of non-violence and love! We need an unshakable trust that God will provide us with His "August Breath" that will sustain us to live a life of love whatever happens to us, whether we are robbed, tortured or raped. We are to remain steadfast in His ways of loving everyone whatever happens. And think of them as better than us! Everything must be subservient to this Law of Love of all.

Why must we? Why does Jesus tell us that we have to live like that? Does not all this smack of sadism or masochism? Why are we not "saved" if we follow the laws that I mentioned earlier, laws that are normally considered basic and moral in any civilized society?

According to my scheme, God loves everyone the same, good or bad, sadists or not. This love of God will be for all to see. We will know that God loves our torturers, our rapists, our killers as much as us. We will know for a fact that Adolf Hitler and mother Theresa are loved equally by God. Will this fact revolt us or amaze us? Will it make us rebel or rejoice? Is it not a good idea to get used to His ways now rather than to be shocked later, and unable to accept them as infinitely right and so live Hell?

My conclusions are very different from what is heard in most churches. Why? Have they not read the texts I have just looked at? Of course they have. But it seems that the idea of "pick and choose" which Jesus applied to the Septuagint has also been applied to His words by those who claim to follow Him! So the sayings with which we are uncomfortable have been largely ignored.

There is more. Those who claim to follow Jesus consider the Septuagint as nearly as important as Jesus' words. For them, Jesus came to "save" them by dying on the Cross as required by the Septuagint: that was His main contribution. His sayings are secondary, *on par* with the Septuagint. And there is no doubt that what the Septuagint introduces is a religion which ordains every aspect of a citizen's life, in other words, a state religion.

As soon as we want to introduce obligations on others, we need a social compact. This the Torah creates while Jesus' message does not. Jesus tells the individual what her obligations are; not what others' obligations are toward her. Jesus does not talk about rights. For Him, we have no rights at all. We are at the disposal of others as we are to love them completely whatever happens.

Such a message is definitely unacceptable to the State as it cannot base law and order on it. On the other hand, the Torah is perfectly acceptable to the State. As my scheme does not permit me to mitigate Jesus' message by the Septuagint, I end up with a message that spells the end of the State if it was to be lived by its citizens.

Soon after Jesus' death some got concerned about creating a "Christian" society. As a society is based on laws, rights and obligations for those living in that social group, they had to go to the Septuagint and so necessarily "forget" some of Jesus' message as being impossible for those "living in the world", in contact with other citizens, either Christians or not. Jesus' message is subversive and does not lend itself to create and maintain a society. As my principle

of coherence does not permit me to jettison any part of Jesus' message, I am stuck with the whole of His uncomfortable, anarchic and antisocial message.

The day the Roman Emperors wanted to make Christianity a state religion was the day that sealed the fate of Jesus' subversion. His message was sanitized by the Septuagint, and the various kings and emperors were able to see themselves as heirs to David: they were now reigning by divine right! To make a mockery of Jesus' message, we make Him "King of Kings and Lord of Lords", Him Whom we crucified after scourging Him, spitting on His message, and hanging Him to die naked for all to see what a worm He was! He is no king; He is that hideous beggar who smells and stinks of liquor on the next street!

The Enemy, the Prince of this world order, made Jesus into his own image, used Him to justify his subjugation of all humans. Jesus' kingdom is not of this world order. He does not give orders, laws and obligations. He forgives all, loves all, embraces all. And He begs us to do the same so we can find happiness when we come face to face with Reality, as we will inevitably do the day we die.

It is impossible to justify any law, any state, any war, any justice system or any morality (in the real sense of this term) by Jesus' message if taken as a comprehensive whole as required by my principle of coherence. If this is indeed so, it follows that any "Christian" ethic is not consistent with Jesus' message.

In that case, whose ethic is it? Does "Christian" mean "of Jesus" or does it mean "figured out by people who kind of follow Him after 'mature' reflection"? Or is it that they do not really believe that the Gospels accurately reported all of Jesus' sayings?

JESUS' ODDITIES

I need to examine here some rather odd or disturbing events reported in the Gospels, events that do not seem to fit with the rest. As these texts could be used to attack the scheme I am trying to put forward, it is rather important to examine them carefully.

Did Jesus try to obscure His message? The use of parables

Here is a saying of Jesus that does not seem to make any sense. It is found in some form in all four Gospels, but it reaches its most complete and clear form in Matthew. It is this version that I will examine. I have cut the text in question in two parts, starting with:

And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath.²⁸³

What is a parable? The Greek term “parabolè” (παραβολή) means “comparison”, “bringing together”, “similarity”, “relation with” and from there “parable”, “allegorical discourse”. It is used to take an often hard and dry concept, remote from people’s experience, and put it in a vivid, familiar context so that it is easier to understand. It is thus an effective teaching method, a way to make understanding of things unknown easier by drawing comparisons with things that are familiar.

From what I have said you can guess that I find parables to be a way to increase understanding for all rather than a way to disguise meaning, so that only the initiated can understand. But this is what it seems that Jesus is saying in the above text! What follows can reinforce this interpretation:

Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people’s heart is waxed

²⁸³ Matthew 13:10-12

gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.²⁸⁴

This text can be understood as meaning that Jesus does not want some people to understand, perceive, turn their lives around and thus be healed by Him! And this is why He is talking in parables, a kind of code understood only by the initiated!

I cannot accept that Jesus seriously meant that. I think He is poking fun at His disciples, who think of themselves as the select few, the ones who really belong to Jesus' group! For them, they are the only real followers; all others are *amateurs* who do not really take Jesus' words seriously and thus are going nowhere.

That the disciples believed that there was such a distinction between themselves and others is made clear over and over. They did not want anyone else to make miracles in Jesus' name, nor to teach in Jesus' name and again and again make it clear that they are expecting some special and great reward for their participation in His group.

My first reason for thinking that Jesus is not serious about this – nor the writers of the Gospels, I must add – is the following argument: (1) There are countless parables in the Gospels while only two are “explained” by Jesus and none by the writers themselves; (2) the Gospel writers surely considered that their job was to provide their readers with the most complete understanding possible. (3) From this and the fact that nearly all Jesus' parables are not “explained” (4) it follows that no one among the writers and Jesus really thought it necessary to “explain” the others.

The second reason is found in the reading of part of Mark's account of the same incident – used to bring in the explanation of a different parable. After the “I talk in code so that they do not change their ways and get forgiven” routine already looked at, we have Jesus adding something rather significant:

That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand; lest at any time they should be converted, and their sins should be forgiven them. And he said unto them,

²⁸⁴ Matthew 13:13-15

Know ye not this parable? and how then will ye know
all parables?²⁸⁵

Jesus is teasing His select few, the ones who make up His “inner circle” by telling them: “Are you telling me that you do not understand a thing of what I have been teaching you? You, whom I Myself selected, are you also ‘out of it’? Do I have to do all the work, all the thinking, for you as well?”

This last point brings me to my third reason. What Jesus is trying to do is to teach people. A job I can assure you is not easy to do now and was not then either. The problem with teaching is the following: the teacher cannot do all the work; the one who is supposedly interested in learning has actually to put some effort into it. Just hearing (assuming that there is not too much extraneous noise happening while the teaching is going on) is not sufficient. As Isaiah himself says, hearing is not enough; it has to be followed by understanding.

And that requires work on the part of the listener. That work is in many parts: first she must make sure to remember all the elements of the message; second, she must put it in her own words to make sure nothing is missed, third she has to check for herself its validity by examining it in various circumstances and then relating it to her life. By then and only then has she understood it; no wonder so few are!

Understanding a message is like playing a piano: one does not learn a piece of music by looking at someone else playing it wonderfully (hearing someone’s well-thought message) but by actually sitting down to play it oneself; note by note, working on the technique required and looking at it as a whole to figure out how to play it “right”. So learning – understanding – requires work and stamina. And that is possible only if there is sustained interest and incentive. This is basically the analysis that Jesus makes in the parable of the Sower as we have already seen. So it is hardly surprising that Mark has placed his text on this subject between the parable just mentioned and Jesus’ interpretation.

The Isaiah passage already quoted definitely can be understood to support this interpretation. It can mean: “if people took the time to understand what I am saying instead of just listening inattentively, they could absorb the message, make it theirs, and so have to

²⁸⁵ Mark 4:12-13

change, a change that would bring them healing. But that is a lot of hard work, and they do not have the time or the interest to change.”

This is as valid an interpretation of the Isaiah quote as the previous one. But is it what Jesus said just before? No. But was it said in jest, as I suggest for the reasons I have previously given? This is what has to be answered.

We know that again and again Jesus said “For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost.”²⁸⁶ This statement is totally inconsistent with the other; so one of them has to be taken in jest.

As using a parable is obviously to make things easier to understand, the whole of Jesus’ statement is good humoured nonsense, just making fun of His apostles for being so hard of understanding. After all, they are saying to Him: “Why do you use parables? We don’t understand them.” It is like saying “Why do you give examples? We don’t get them.” The teaching aids even are too much for them! So He uses irony rather than scorn and contempt like some teachers would under the same circumstances. (Where are the dunce caps?)

Jesus’ treatment of the Canaan woman

The cases that will be examined now can all be construed as violence, verbal or physical. In the following Jesus seems to be guilty of nothing less than racism!

There are three instances where Jesus is faced with *goyim*. In each case, it is obvious that such contacts were not the done thing. In one case (though in Luke’s version only), we have some Jews begging Jesus to help a Roman Centurion because he has been their benefactor;²⁸⁷ in another case, a Samaritan woman is very surprised when Jesus talks to her.²⁸⁸ Then we have the only text which definitely can seem to be racist:

And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daugh-

²⁸⁶ Matthew 18:11

²⁸⁷ Luke 7:1-10

²⁸⁸ John 4:9

ter is grievously vexed with a devil. But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us. But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me. But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs. And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table. Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.²⁸⁹

Here we find a Canaanite woman begging for Jesus to cure her daughter and He refuses even to acknowledge her existence! After being bugged by His disciples, Jesus tells them that He will not take any notice of this woman's plea because she is a Canaanite! He states that He is not sent to anyone but "the lost sheep of the house of Israel". This sentence smacks of racism, pure and simple: Jews only may apply.

The woman is not the kind to give up; she knows He can cure her daughter and she intends to see that He does. She begs for help, kneeling in front of Him. He answers by another racist remark: He cannot give to dogs what belongs to the children of Israel! She still does not give up: she answers Him back that although this is true, dogs do get to "eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table". This repartee has the better of Jesus: after acknowledging how great is her faith, He grants her the cure of her daughter. He then remarks that foreigners have greater faith in Him than His own people, as He did in the case of the Roman centurion.²⁹⁰

The problem is we just do not know if any of this was said in jest; we have no record of Jesus' body language at the time of the event. But we do know that He did put another woman on the spot. A haemorrhaging woman believed that she would be cured if she could only touch His garment. She did so while He was being pressed from all sides in a crowd and was cured instantly just as she believed.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ Matthew 15:22-28

²⁹⁰ Matthew 8:5-10

²⁹¹ Mark 5:25-29

But Jesus turned around “and said, Who touched my clothes?”²⁹² thus putting the woman in a pickle. Perhaps He sounded somewhat angry for the reaction of the woman was “But the woman fearing and trembling, knowing what was done in her, came and fell down before him, and told him all the truth.”²⁹³ We know that He “said unto her, Daughter, thy faith hath made thee whole; go in peace, and be whole of thy plague.”²⁹⁴

Obviously the way this incident goes, it does seem that Jesus teased this poor woman by putting her on the spot. The good nature of His last words shows that He was not really angry and offended by what she did. If anything, He just enjoyed making public both her faith and its effect.

To go back to the case of the Canaanite woman, we know that Jesus did acknowledge the existence of a Samaritan woman by starting a conversation with her. He then spent a couple of days in the Samaritan town of Sychar.²⁹⁵ So He could not have been such a racist as He seems to be in the case of the Canaanite woman.

I believe that He could see from the beginning that this Canaanite woman was going to be a tough cookie, someone who was determined to get what she came for. After all, it was not done for members of these two ethnic groups to mingle or for women to start a conversation with strangers. She did so because she really believed that He could cure her daughter if He wanted to. And He was going to; she would make sure of that! So Jesus knew He could tease her and at the same time teach His apostles the lesson that salvation was also for the *goyim* even if they were just to get the “crumbs” of His time as He was there first and foremost for His people.

Jesus' violence against the Temple merchants and a fig tree

I have said that Jesus lived His life according to the principle of non-violence. Some could say that He used verbal violence in some of the cases we have already seen. But there are also two

²⁹² Mark 5:30

²⁹³ Mark 5:33

²⁹⁴ Mark 5:34

²⁹⁵ John 4:4-42

cases of physical violence, one reported by three of the Gospels, the other, by two.

In every account the two incidents took place shortly after Jesus' arrival to celebrate the Passover in Jerusalem. Matthew says it happened on the day of His arrival while Mark puts it on the next day. John does not specify on what day of His stay. In each case, it is clearly stated that Jesus used violence against people minding their own business in the Temple precinct in Jerusalem. Matthew's version of the event is the following:

And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves.²⁹⁶

while Mark's is:

And they come to Jerusalem: and Jesus went into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves; And would not suffer that any man should carry any vessel through the temple. And he taught, saying unto them, Is it not written, My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer? but ye have made it a den of thieves.²⁹⁷

and finally John's is:

And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem, And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables; And said unto them that sold doves, Take these things hence; make not my Father's house an house of merchandise. And

²⁹⁶ Matthew 21:12-13

²⁹⁷ Mark 11:15-17

his disciples remembered that it was written, The
zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.²⁹⁸

So we have Jesus taking the law into His own hand. According to John, He even used a whip that He made out of ropes to drive businessmen out of the Temple precinct! According to all three sources, He expelled all those that sold and bought in the Temple precinct. He overthrew the tables used by the moneychangers with their contents.

This is breaking the peace; if He did so today, He would be arrested and charged with a criminal offence. It is difficult to know if anyone was injured, but this is not reported. I would think not as the Temple police did not pursue the matter further: He was sent off with a reprimand.

Let this be very clear: the merchants there were basically providing the pilgrims with the various animals required as Temple sacrifice to God according to the Torah. The moneychangers were changing the pilgrims' foreign currency into local one so they could buy those animals required as sacrifice by the Torah. These services were there because they were needed to fulfil the Torah! Was not Jesus just in a foul mood that day? What was all the fuss about?

This event happened, if one goes according to John, on Jesus' first trip with His disciples to Jerusalem for the Passover. It does not seem to have been repeated. In fact, the Temple authorities could not have put up with this kind of behaviour day after day. So it seems that this was just a one-time event. Jesus wanted to make a point, and it only needed one outburst on His part to make it.

The point He wanted to make is in fact three-fold: "make not my Father's house a house of merchandise."

From that we can see that (1) He disapproves of the commercialization of the Temple (2) which for Him should just be a place reserved for prayer; (3) He has a say in all this because this Temple is His Father's.

Of course the Temple authorities challenged Him. And, from what we know, He did not push people around again.

²⁹⁸ John 2:13-17

So we could say in His defence that He just wanted to make a point in a way that people would notice; and causing a commotion definitely is such a way. We could also add that nobody was reported injured in the process; nobody really lost anything by it. Perhaps, but this is still breaking the peace. So this is very much at the limit of what is acceptable for someone who preaches non-violence.

The second event, found in Mark's and Matthew's, happens basically within 24 hours of the other. So it occurs in spring, just before Passover. In Mark's account, we have:

And on the morrow, when they were come from Bethany, he was hungry: And seeing a fig tree afar off having leaves, he came, if haply he might find any thing thereon: and when he came to it, he found nothing but leaves; for the time of figs was not yet. And Jesus answered and said unto it, No man eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever. And his disciples heard it... [19] And when even was come, he went out of the city. And in the morning, as they passed by, they saw the fig tree dried up from the roots. And Peter calling to remembrance saith unto him, Master, behold, the fig tree which thou cursedst is withered away.²⁹⁹

while in Matthew we have:

Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered. And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away. And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!³⁰⁰

Jesus is here responsible for the death of a fig tree. This is an act of violence against His creation. And this is an act of violence against a tree that was following the laws of nature, the laws that govern the growth of plants according to the seasons, laws that He, as creator, was responsible for! Mark makes it crystal clear: Jesus is looking for fruit in the spring from a tree that does not produce figs fit for picking until later! Jesus is being totally unreasonable. Although

²⁹⁹ Mark 11:11-14; 19-21

³⁰⁰ Matthew 21:18-20

the two Gospel accounts are slightly different as to when exactly the tree withered away, they both agree that it was (1) after Jesus told it that it would never again produce fruit and (2) that Jesus said that because He had found it without figs in the spring!

Some will explain Jesus' unreasonableness by the verses that follow, which are, in Matthew's account:

Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done. And all things, whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive.³⁰¹

The argument would go thus: Jesus gave to His disciples an example of the power of faith. Someone who has enough faith can even move a mountain and cast it into the sea! Now I find all this bizarre. Neither Jesus nor anyone else started redrawing the geography of Palestine! So this example seems a little odd. Furthermore, many have tossed themselves out of a window in the firm belief that they would fly only to fall to their death; so I am not very convinced by such a statement. Of course, someone could argue that if the would-be flier really had faith, he would have flown and so, the fact that he fell shows that he did not. The problem with this is that it makes the statement irrefutable, and so I cannot accept it as useful. A statement, to be of value, must be of the kind that one can check to see if it is true or false.

It seems to me that a better example of the power of faith would have been for Jesus to make the fig tree laden with ready to pick figs instead of cursing it! After all, He changed water into wine; He fed the multitude; He could have just as easily hastened the process by which the fig tree produces its fruit so that it would have been ready to harvest in the spring. And this feat would have been in favour of life and not death.

There is something else which is puzzling in this whole incident. This is the only recorded case of Jesus trying to get something for Himself (figs to appease His hunger) and when He does not suc-

³⁰¹ Matthew 21:12-22

ceed, He says: "If I can't get some now, no one else will, not even in season!" Is this not perplexing?

One of the temptations Jesus went through at the beginning of His ministry was to change stones into bread to feed Himself.³⁰² He had then refused to do so; He was to live of God's message, which consists in putting others before self. Jesus helps others, not Himself.

What point was Jesus really trying to convey to His disciples in doing what He did? What does His unreasonableness mean? In Matthew, this event takes place the day after the incident in the Temple; in Mark, the cursing takes place on the way to the Temple and thus just before it and the result is noticed only on the way back, just after it. Are both events meant to be understood together?

Is there something basically unreasonable in Jesus' demands? In one case, He is upset by and causes a commotion about the normal cultic way of life found in the Temple precincts (that is, outside the Temple proper where only priests can go); in the other, He is upset by and causes the death of a fruit tree because it does not produce fruits out of season. In both cases, He is demanding a revolution of the way life is.

In the set-up of the Temple with its animal sacrifices, what else could pilgrims do but to buy local animals to offer God? They could not bring a goat from Alexandria or Athens! How could they offer such a sacrifice – as they were called to do by the Law – if they could not change their money into local currency? In the case of the fig tree, what could it do but follow the laws of nature? Jesus seems to be saying that all this is not good enough; the Temple should be for prayer, not animal sacrifices; the effect of the prayers at the Temple should be such as to change its environment, make the surrounding creation constantly fruitful.

Perhaps what Jesus was trying to convey was that what God wants is actions out of character, out of this world order symbolized by the religious rituals of the Temple and the unfolding of the sea-

³⁰² "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil. And when he had fasted forty days and forty nights, he was afterward an hungred. And when the tempter came to him, he said, If thou be the Son of God, command that these stones be made bread. But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."
(Matthew 4:1-4)

sons. A new way of life has to come to be, one that would supersede the present world order, which would wither and die like that fig tree. Fruit trees in this new way of life would be always fruitful and so would humans, who would always be giving to others, always be children of God Father.³⁰³

Whether this is absolutely convincing or not, there are very few cases where Jesus can be said to be violent. Killing a tree is the worst case mentioned. The business people at the Temple did not really get hurt and His protest did not reoccur. It does seem to me that it is fair to say that Jesus lived and preached non-violence. I also think that my explanation of the Canaanite woman's case is acceptable. All this would mean that what I called Jesus' "oddities" would not contradict my assertions about Jesus' love for all and sundry.

³⁰³ I am indebted to Alain (Émile Chartier) for this interpretation, found in his essay "La Parole du Figueur" published in "Essais", the first book of his collection of essays found in the "Bibliothèque de la Pléiade", Gallimard, Paris

PROBLEMS

Of course one of the problems that still has to be examined head on is that Jesus did mention on many occasions the terms “judgment”, “reward” and “punishment”, terms that do not fit at all in my view of things. And there are others.

Jesus and salvation

One of the problems is that the Roman Catholic Church insists that salvation would not have occurred without the crucial and determinant events of Jesus’ death and resurrection. This statement is difficult to reconcile with the other fact that God is Love and has been from all eternity. God has been Saviour from all eternity, which of course means that He has been in love with all His humans and all His creation from the very beginning of time.

In my scheme, Jesus’ death and resurrection are not events that had to take place at one time for humankind to be “saved”; they are events that took place as the definite statement of Who God is and how He “wants” us to live, or, put differently, a statement on how we must be to enjoy His presence for ever. We are “saved” in the measure that we take Jesus’ life as an example to follow and His words as God’s own. We are “saved” in the measure that we let God change us in His image. And this has been the case for humanity for all of its existence. That is why Jesus did not have to appear until two thousand years ago while humanity has been around for so much longer.

God has always “conversed” with each and every human to teach her how to live. Many understood how powerless they were and decided to just trust in God’s providence. They knew that they could not defend their families and their friends against enemies or the elements. They accepted what they considered God’s will and so were not at war with any one, and were quite ready to accept God as He is, just like they accepted everything that happened to them: as a matter of fact. These people knew deep down how to live at peace with themselves. It is only when humans decided to organize in hordes and then in city states with lords, laws and so on that war and greed become options. It is only then that comparisons can be made and with that, the judgment by some of others.

It is interesting to note that what the book of Genesis considers as the basic, the original “error” (sin) is the urge for the knowl-

edge of good and evil, the knowledge required to judge others, to pass sentence on others. Humans lived happily before that, and found nothing wrong with their nakedness, just like all the animals do today with us as the only exception. They just were; they had needs, but no sense of shame as this requires judgment. They accepted their lives and difficulties, their needs and their satisfactions. That does not mean that humans at that time did not have some form of hierarchy like monkeys and dogs for example. Greed, the excess of possessions, does not exist in any kind of animals except human-kind. Neither does the need to possess others.

By the way, nakedness is a great equalizer. You cannot pretend to “own” others if you are stark naked: you have to wear something to announce your superiority. The females cannot be “owned” by any male as they all are, like the males, in full display to all: no specific male can disrobe one and claim her for himself at that time as she is uncovered only for him. In fact, nakedness of everyone is not an enticement to sex.³⁰⁴

Leaving this digression, the idea that humanity was not “saved” and the dead risen before Jesus’ death and resurrection is flatly contradicted by Jesus in the Gospels. He clearly states that:

And as touching the dead, that they rise: have ye not read in the book of Moses, how in the bush God spake unto him, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? He is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living: ye therefore do greatly err.³⁰⁵

As Jesus clearly states that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are alive as He speaks, it follows that they had risen from the dead before Jesus did as, after all, He was not yet dead! Furthermore Moses

³⁰⁴ These equalizing and asexual factors of total nakedness for all are most evident when you compare the sexual arousal found on a nudist beach with that due to the alluring swimwear worn as a way to attract the other sex on a “normal” beach.

³⁰⁵ Mark 12:26-27 also: “But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” (Matthew 22:31-32)

and Elijah conversed³⁰⁶ with Jesus on Mount Tabor, exactly like Jesus conversed with his disciples on the road to Emmaus.

God loves His humans too much to let them just die: He raises them as soon as they die: that is why they are in Heaven or Hell just “after” death. As humans are their body, they have to be a body to be alive, one very different from the one they were before of course, but a body nonetheless. The very fact that resurrection is considered a requirement by Jesus and by His apostles implies that a human cannot exist without the body that defines her. The idea, taken from mythology, of the existence of “shades”, though existing only while they are waiting for the final judgment to be risen from the “dead”, is not based on the Gospels.

What is supremely important in Jesus’ life, death and resurrection is that God proves His Love for us by becoming a man like us, showing us exactly how to live and proving that His Love for us is everlasting by making His disciples experience His resurrection and thus, His new body. Normally, a particular human’s cadaver vanishes after being eaten, decomposed or burned while that dead human’s resurrection is in no way experienced by those left behind. In Jesus’ case, His disciples saw the transformation of His cadaver into the new “risen” Jesus. His is the first *witnessed* resurrection. We will only be able to attest to the one of others when we live our own, at the end of our life, of our “time”.

If God is Love, we must rise, because Love is forever. The proof of His Love is His Son’s life, death and resurrection. Jesus rose because of His Father’s Love for Him. This is why Jesus is so important. But it is not the only reason: not only did Jesus rise from the dead, and not only did He tell us by words and example how to live, but He also gave us Himself to eat, to drink and to breathe: He gave us His Body and Blood as well as His Breath. He did all that for us so that we might more readily become like Him, children of God our Father Who loves us without any restrictions.

Judgment Day

There is an expression that comes up over and over again in Jesus’ discourse: day of judgment. In Matthew we find Jesus saying

³⁰⁶ “And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.” (Matthew 17:2-3); also Mark 9:4 and Luke 9:31-32

(1) “Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the *day of judgment*, than for that city”³⁰⁷ as well as (2) “But I say unto you, That every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the *day of judgment*. For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned”³⁰⁸ while in Mark (3) “And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you, when ye depart thence, shake off the dust under your feet for a testimony against them. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrha in the *day of judgment*, than for that city”³⁰⁹ and in Luke (4) “But it shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the *judgment*, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted to heaven, shalt be thrust down to hell.”³¹⁰

Just in case we did not get the message, we also find in Matthew:

(5) Woe unto thee, Chorazin! woe unto thee, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the *day of judgment*, than for you. And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to hell: for if the mighty works, which have been done in thee, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the *day of judgment*, than for thee.³¹¹

and in Luke we find:

(6) The queen of the south shall rise up in the *judgment* with the men of this generation, and condemn them: for she came from the utmost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here. The men of Nineve shall rise up

³⁰⁷ Matthew 10:15

³⁰⁸ Matthew 12:36-37

³⁰⁹ Mark 6:11

³¹⁰ Luke 10:14-15

³¹¹ Matthew 11:21-24

in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here.³¹²

This is not all. We can also find quite a few cases where of Jesus is sending some of His adversaries to Hell in what seems to be no uncertain terms like (7) "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye devour widows' houses, and for a pretence make long prayer: therefore ye shall receive the greater *damnation*"³¹³ as well as (8) "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the *damnation* of hell?"³¹⁴ and finally (9) "But he that shall blaspheme against the Holy Ghost hath never forgiveness, but is in danger of eternal *damnation*."³¹⁵

It should be quite clear to anyone that those nine excerpts seem to demolish my theory. So I must examine these carefully to see if I can save it from what seems to be certain death. The reader will remember that I consider that any interpretation *can* be valid *only* if it is consistent with *every excerpt from every one of the four Gospels*.

First, in *all* but the seventh of these excerpts, the operative Greek term is "krisis" (κρίσις) (even in the case of the eighth excerpt where it is translated by "damnation" instead of "judgment"); in the seventh it is "krima" (κρίμα). This last term means "object of a contestation or quarrel", "judgment", "judiciary decision", and from there "condemnation", "penalty", "sentence". The first term means "action or faculty of distinguishing", "choice", "election", "sorting", "selection", "action of separating", "decision", "judgment", "judiciary judgment", "condemnation".

These excerpts definitely mention a "judgment" and state that not all "sentences" will be equal: some "sentences" will be more tolerable than others.

But what does "judgment" entail? A judgment is something that comes at the end of a trial. A trial is chaired by a judge and requires an accuser and an accused. So you cannot have a trial with-

³¹² Luke 11:31-32

³¹³ Matthew 23:14

³¹⁴ Matthew 23:33

³¹⁵ Mark 3:29

out at least three people. The judge bases his decision on laws and on evidence. So we have Moses judging cases between Israelites by referring to the Law that He had received from God.

But the judge must not only be versed in the law, he must also make sure that he has all the evidence. Only then can he deliver a just “sentence”. So the first step in a trial is establishing the truth, by making everything relevant known.

But who accuses at the last judgment? Is it the “Son of man”? Is it the “King”? Is it God? In the famous parable of the “last judgment” there is, in fact, no trial: just the “separation” of people. Judgment as the last part of a trial does not seem to be what Jesus had in mind there – and in lots of parables. The Greek word translated by “judgment” would be better translated as “separation”, which is exactly what happens in most parables.

Indeed, while Jesus mentions repeatedly the word translated by “judgment”, He does not very often pinpoint who accuses. This is why the usual translation is bad. There are exceptions: we find that both the “queen of the south” and the “men of Nineve” “shall rise up in the *judgment* with the men of this generation, and condemn them”.³¹⁶ So when Jesus has really has a trial in mind, the accusations come from other humans!

An interesting excerpt on this topic is found in the Book of Revelation:

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels, And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven. And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him. And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night. And they overcame him by the

³¹⁶ Luke 11:31-32

blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony;
and they loved not their lives unto the death.³¹⁷

For the author of this text, the one who accuses humans before God “day and night” is the “Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world”. This text complements the previous quote in stating that when humans want others condemned, it is because they are deceived by Satan,³¹⁸ the Prince of lies. This deceit is overcome by the Blood of the Lamb Who was slain. How? This Blood is the proof that God Who is Love justifies rather than condemns. “Justify” means to “make just someone who was not”. It is the process by which an individual who was found guilty by some court is pardoned, and thus sees her condemnation annulled and all signs of the proceedings, deleted from her record. God could be said to “overturn” the condemnation humans suffer at the hands of their fellow humans.

So we can see that far from contradicting my thesis, those texts can agree with it. Some people, used to judge others, will insist in continuing doing so in the afterlife to their grief as God’s Love for all will be manifested to them.

The revelation in the afterlife of all the facts to all, without which any trial is a travesty, is tantamount to my thesis. God’s decision, given all the facts, the most important fact being Who He Is, a Reality that cannot be avoided but must be faced head on, is that His Love is for all. This decision (judgment) has for result that some will rejoice in His reality while others will rage, that is, those creatures who intend to decide for themselves what is good and evil rather than submitting themselves to God’s decision (judgment) are Satan’s children.

There is another saying from Jesus that can be construed against my thesis:

Wherefore I say unto you, All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. And whosoever speaketh a word against the Son of man, it shall be forgiven him: but whosoever speaketh against the Holy Ghost, it shall not be

³¹⁷ Revelation 12:7-11

³¹⁸ This is not a Christian idea: Satan is said to be the accuser of men before God in many texts found in the Septuagint.

forgiven him, neither in this world, neither in the world to come.³¹⁹

Here we have something that will never be forgiven: speaking against the “August Breath”, although speaking against Jesus will be forgiven. This text clearly states that you do not have to believe in Him as God; you can think that He is just a Prophet or just a Rabbi, or just a fraud; that error will be forgiven. But will not be forgiven talking against the “August Breath”.

So what does this refer to? August Breath, I have suggested, refers to the breathing of someone who is at peace because convinced that her Father does look after her; it is the Breath of someone who has submitted herself to her Father. If you do not submit your will to your Father, you do not accept His ways. If you rebel by usurping the right to decide what is right and wrong, then you will rage against His “decision” to love every one of His creatures equally. You will not forgive God for Who He Is. This act of rebellion and un-forgiveness against Reality has the same personal end result as not being forgiven by that Reality: burning in a personal Hell.

The Church’s role in forgiveness

While we are finding problems, there is another big one. The author of Matthew’s gospel reports Jesus as saying:

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.³²⁰

The problem is mostly found in the last verse; in it we have Jesus giving Peter the “power” to let go or not let go other humans’ debts. That Peter would have been given the power to let go debts is not a problem for me; but its opposite seems to contradict the fact

³¹⁹ Matthew 12:31-32

³²⁰ Matthew 16:17-19

that God as Love lets go all debts. How could it be that God would have given to Peter or his representatives a right which goes, according to my thesis, against His very nature?

The same kind of message is again repeated in Matthew but this time it is aimed at all and sundry:

[15] Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. [16] But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. [17] And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. [18] Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. [19] Again I say unto you, That if two of you shall agree on earth as touching any thing that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of my Father which is in heaven. [20] For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.³²¹

Let us examine this text very carefully. On the one hand, verse 15 seems to be contradicted by Jesus' repeated statement that we are to forgive all our brother's trespasses. On the other hand, this verse and the following two seem to be a procedural way to resolve problems between believers: (1) Instead of just turning the other cheek, we are told in verse 15 to first try privately to make the other understand our complaint and take the appropriate action. (2) Verse 16 applies in the case this private meeting at conciliation has been fruitless. It consists in involving other people (2.1) to witness the complaint and the other person's reaction to it as well as (2.2) to ascertain the facts surrounding the complaint. (3) Verse 17 applies in the case that this second meeting at conciliation has also been fruitless. It consists in involving the "church" in the litigation as (3.1) the "church" would then judge between the plaintiff and the defendant. (3.2) Refusal to obey the decision of the "church" would result in expulsion.

³²¹ Matthew 18:15-20

It is after that procedure, in verse 18, that Jesus repeats the saying that what is untied by “them” shall be so untied in “heaven” while what is not “untied” by “them” will remain tied “in heaven”.

Before we examine this verse 18, let us examine the meaning of the Greek word translated by “church”, the word “*ekklèsia*” (ἐκκλησία). The term means “convened assembly, which debates, discusses and deliberates”. So this term refers here to the assembly of the believers gathered to hear the case.

These three verses 15 to 17 refer to a practical way to try to defuse and resolve conflicts within the community without reference to anyone outside it.

This procedure, as we have just seen, is followed by that verse about the fact that the “them”, most probably the convened and assembled community, has the power to decide for heaven what is “untied” or not. This is followed in verse 19 by a statement concerning the effectiveness of anything asked for from the Father by a group of His followers and, in verse 20, that Jesus Himself is present with His followers if they are assembled “in His name”.

What follows immediately in verses 21 and 22 is Peter asking Jesus how many times he is to let go debts against him. Jesus’ answer is basically “all the time” as the number given is huge. This is then followed by the parable of the unforgiving servant already examined.

We must always keep in mind the requirement that an interpretation cannot be valid if it is contradicted by any verse of the Gospels. The very fact that these verses 15 to 20 are followed by the absolute need for forgiveness requires us to look for an interpretation that makes sense of the lot. Surely, the author of these lines must have thought that all these verses made sense together!

Jesus insists on the need to accommodate, to find a resolution to any conflict. This is why He goes so far as to involve the community to try to get the protagonists reconciled. His saying “if you do not forgive, it is not forgiven in Heaven” is a double edged sword. It can be understood in the following way: the servant who does not forgive on earth his fellow servant cannot forgive him in Heaven either and thus will rage when he sees God’s absolute love for him while the servant who does forgive on earth his fellow servant will also forgive him in Heaven and thus will be joyful when he sees God’s absolute love for him.

Interpreted this way, this “power” of the “Church” is not something which overrides God at all. This would not make any sense. Thinking that mere humans can decide for God is blasphemy. God’s Reality is not subject to any human interpretation, whether it mine, Peter’s or the whole assembly of Jesus’ followers. So giving to Peter the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven is giving him the power to act like God in Jesus’ name, by living the life Jesus wants him to live, a life based on love of the other and perpetual forgiveness. Just like the building of a life must be done on the rock that is Jesus’ teaching and life, the building of the assembly of Jesus’ followers must be done on the rock that Simon Peter must become by living like Jesus and by preaching Jesus’ message and no other. In other words, by living and preaching “in Jesus’ name”. And no one can live and preach in Jesus’ name without forgiving at all times. After all, someone who acts in someone else’s name must follow this person’s orders and outlook.

The “Church” must be in the image of Jesus, as she must be one with her husband, Jesus, our God, the Lamb Who was slain to show us His absolute Love for everyone. Jesus knew what Judas would do. He did not expel him from His companionship at table on His last meal as He still loved him absolutely: it is Judas who decided to leave Him. When Jesus saw him again a while later, He did not utter him any reproach; He did not expel him from His group: Jesus, our God, never pushes away anyone. He is and remains the Loving Servant of all.

Can God’s forgiveness be conditional?

We have seen many excerpts where Jesus clearly states that we will be forgiven only if we do. This definitely seems to indicate that God’s forgiveness is conditional, and so must be His love. I cannot accept such a conclusion. For me, God cannot do anything else then forgive as He is Love, something He cannot do anything about. He cannot change His Nature, His Reality.

My solution to this predicament is not very pretty but I feel it is needed to avoid a contradiction between who God is and How He acts. My solution is that God *seems* not to forgive those who do not forgive themselves because they are certain that He acts like them. They are certain that they know the difference between good and evil, with the same view of it that God has. Because they are certain of God’s un-forgiveness, they react to their false perception as if it was true. *Their certainty makes it so for them.* Instead of facing the

Truth, they face a Lie, the god of vengeance. If they saw the Truth, they would realize that God loves them all the same. As they cannot face this Truth, they live in a false world, a world of vengeance, of death, of suffering and rage.

Someone could then say the following: God created humans with this particular psychology which permits them to deceive themselves, which makes them believe that their world view is correct. So it is fundamentally God who is responsible for them living Hell. This is quite correct; He created humans free to choose a wrong world view, to make the wrong choices. So one could say that in the last analysis everything is His fault, that He is a tyrant responsible for all that goes wrong in this world and the next. But is not this the wrong world view just mentioned?

We noticed that Jesus insisted on a few points He considered absolutely essential; that are part and parcel of the following all-encompassing requirement which is to have total reliance on God as He is our Father and so the One we take our orders from. This requirement is fleshed out in these points: (1) to live every second of our life with the knowledge that we are on this earth to serve others and not ourselves; (2) to forgive others at all time and never to seek revenge or justice as we cannot harbour any animosity or resentment against anyone; (3) to never pass judgment on or condemn the actions of others; (4) to never use violence of any kind for any reason; (5) and to live in humility and frugality, not looking for earthly riches or successes.

Obviously, someone who follows these prescriptions will inherit the Kingdom as she will accept humbly that God is right in all His ways. It is the one who rebels against these requirements through pride that will rage against God's infinite Mercy for her enemies.

None of these prescriptions require the fulfillment of any specific ritual or the assent of any specific dogma. We do not even have to believe in God as such, as long as we follow His will without realizing that it is His will. On the other hand, the "Good News" brought forth by Jesus should make it easier to follow the Father's will as long as we do not use our knowledge of Jesus in such a way that we end up betraying Him by using our position to exclude others instead of embracing them like Jesus did. He came to heal those who needed His attention so that they would live according to His Father's will.

For this really “Good News” of God Father’s infinite love for us all, let us sing with the Psalmist in the words of the Septuagint:

O praise the LORD, all ye nations:
praise him, all ye people.
For his merciful kindness is great toward us:
and the truth of the LORD endureth for ever.
Praise ye the LORD.³²²

Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity, June 6th, 2004

³²² Psalm 117

SHORT ESSAYS

WITHHOLDING COMMUNION?

Some American bishops, with many good God-fearing Catholic Christians, incensed that some other Catholics do not intend to follow their *fatwah* to vote against any candidate who supports the right of a woman to have an abortion, want them and these candidates banned from the Eucharist.

Holy Mother the Church teaches that abortion is a sin. But is a sin (a subject which concerns the Church) the same as a crime (a subject that concerns the State)? Is it not a sin to avoid going to Mass on Sunday without valid reason? Must the State prosecute its citizens for not going to Mass on Sunday? Certainly not! Why then should the State prosecute a woman who has an abortion because the Church says it is a sin? Why should a Catholic layperson be forced to vote so as to impose the Magisterium's decisions on the whole citizenry? Are we to give such an example to other religions so they also try to impose on the whole citizenry their religious observances, like the Sabbath's restrictions and the application of the *sharia*? Let us not forget that the Crusades and the Inquisition are shining examples of the Magisterium's interventions in public affairs!

Could these same bishops tell us where it is said in the Catechism that it is a grave sin to vote not to impose our religious obligations on others?

These points are of very little importance compared to the following, which goes to the very core of what the Church is about. It is indeed essential to see if such a penalty for non-compliance is in line with Jesus' message as He should be our Model in all things.

Three of the Gospels clearly state that, on the evening before He died, Jesus took some bread, gave thanks, gave it to all present telling them all to eat what was now His body, and likewise passed a cup filled with wine and told them all to drink from it as its wine was now His blood. Jesus fed Himself to all present, including Judas, knowing full well that the latter had already betrayed Him and was in the process of sending Him to a terrible death!

The fact that all present are to eat His flesh and drink His blood is clearly stated in the words of consecration at Holy Mass where the priest as *alter Christus* repeats Jesus' words to those assembled: "Take this, *all of you...*"

So he tells *all present* to eat Jesus' flesh and drink His blood, just as Jesus did Himself. And Holy Mother the Church in her wisdom clearly states that no one is worthy to eat Jesus as *all* the congregation is to say: "Lord, I am not worthy..." after being invited to the Feast of the Lamb.

Jesus, God-made-man, Love-made-man, came to heal sinners. He never excluded anyone from His presence, whatever their state of sinfulness, to the great scandal of the righteous. He never judged or imposed anything on anyone, unlike the scribes and the Pharisees.

The Church's *duty* is to follow the example of her Lord and God, rather than that of the Enemy who "accused them before our God day and night". Judging others' worthiness is not the *rôle* of the Christian but that of the Devil. Forgiving others is what Jesus' message is all about. This is what He did on the Cross when He shed His blood to show us the depth of His love.

Solemnity of Corpus Christi, June 10th, 2004

“UBI CARITAS ET AMOR”: WHAT DOES THIS HYMN MEAN?

VIII

The following antiphon and its verses are never omitted. It is begun towards the end of the Washing of the feet; some of the preceding antiphons may be omitted.

Ant. 6
U -bi cá-ri-tas et ámor, Dé-us ibi est. V. Congregá-
vit nos in únun Chrísti ámor. V. Exsultémus, et in ípso
jucundémur. V. Time-ámus, et amémus Dé-um vívum.
V. Et ex córde di-ligámus nos sin-cé- ro.

This latin text³²³ used to be always sung at the “Washing of the feet” part of the Solemn Evening Mass of Maunday Thursday. Here is my translation:

Antiphon Where are found love and charity, there God is.

Versé Christ’s love assembles us as one.

Versé Let us exult, and rejoice in him.

Versé Let us fear and love the living God.

Versé And from a sincere heart let us love each other.

I do not know when this Hymn was first sung, but its message is very close to the Gospel’s. This Hymn says that God is love

³²³ **Antiphon** Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est.

Versum Congregavit nos in unum Christi amor.

Versum Exsultemus, et in ipsi jucundemur.

Versum Timeamus, et amemus Deum vivum.

Versum Et ex corde diligamus nos sincero.

The Liber Usualis, page 675. Desclée Company, Tournai (Belgium) – New York N.Y., 1961

and that we find Him everywhere we find love, charity and the service of the other. By washing His disciples' feet, Jesus showed He was their Servant. He also told them to do likewise.

This message also comes out in John's first Epistle: "Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."³²⁴

Let us assume for one moment that this last text's author is right. What does it imply? What does this text really say? It not only says that the child of God is a loving, caring, self-giving individual but also that any loving, caring, self-giving individual is a child of God, whether she recognizes herself as such or whether others recognize her as such. Another way to say the same thing is that the way we can tell if someone is of God is if she is a loving, caring, self-giving servant to all. This is how everyone knows that Mother Theresa is of God, is a saint.

If this love exists between partners, God is in their union, because "love is of God". It does not matter if the partners are legally or religiously married or not, of different sexes or not, as long as this love, this self-giving, this service to the other, is well and truly present. We know that is a fact because as John so aptly puts it, love is from God.

Hate on the other hand, hate of those who are seen as different for any reason, is not of God. Considering loving couples as evil because their members are gays or lesbians, divorced or unwed, this is not of God; as John so aptly put it: "He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love."

So as Catholic Christians, children of God, we do not have a choice in our conduct: we are to love the others, even when they are different; we have to rejoice in the fact that their union is just as holy as the ones between spouses of the opposite sex in a "regular Catholic marriage" as long as it is one of true love and service.

Solemnity of the Sacred Heart, June 18th, 2004

³²⁴ 1 John 4:7-8

MARRIAGE OR MARRIAGES? AND WHAT FOR?

My wife and I were married twice on June 30th, 1973: legally by the Oxford County Registrar so as to change our legal status from that of two single individuals to that of a married couple according to the laws of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and sacramentally within a Mass by exchanging our vows according to the rites of the Roman Catholic Church in front of the Catholic Chaplain of the University of Oxford.

I

While the marriage laws of the Catholic Church are universal, the Civil ones vary from country to country and from province to province within Canada. This obviously complicates comparisons between these two types of marriages. I will consider here the laws pertaining to marriage existing in the Province of Québec, laws found in its *Code Civil*.

As the officiating minister of religion is (normally) an officer of the State³²⁵ Christians who marry in a religious ceremony tend to forget that they were also married according to the Law of the land by a dutifully recognized “civil servant”.

Matrimonial laws existed during the early Roman republic.³²⁶ These changed to reflect the new mores first in the case of the Ro-

³²⁵ For example: “In addition, every minister of religion authorized to solemnize marriage by the religious society to which he belongs is competent to do so, provided that he is resident in Québec, that he carries on the whole or part of his ministry in Québec, that the existence, rites and ceremonies of his confession are of a permanent nature and that he is authorized by the minister responsible for civil status.” *Code Civil*, Art. 366 Paragraph 2 (The emphasis is mine)

³²⁶ “Under the old Roman Law, at a time when the matrimonial union was still defined as a “consortium omnis vitae” (Modestin, I Dig. de rit. nupt. 23-2), the wife could neither retain nor acquire during the marriage any property of her own. In fact, she was so entirely under the power of the husband that she became a member of the latter’s family and the sister of her children. There was only one patrimony and it belonged solely and exclusively to the husband.” Address of Mr. L. E. Beaulieu, K.C., LL.D. President of the Canadian Bar Association, from the Minutes of proceedings of the 24th annual meeting of the Canadian Bar Association held at Quebec, August 1939, Ottawa 1940, pp. 59-69

man Republic³²⁷ and then in the case of the Kingdom of France³²⁸ which had inherited the later Roman Republic's laws. These were again changed within Québec's *Code Civil*.

In our day and age, the rules of Civil and Catholic marriages diverge considerably. This is recognized by the *Code Civil* which states that no minister of religion can be forced to marry people against his religion.³²⁹ Among the divergences, divorce is permitted by the State³³⁰ in the case of its Civil marriage but not by the Church in the case of any marriage it recognizes; a Civil marriage between divorcees is permitted by the State but a Catholic marriage between them is not permitted by the Church; a Civil marriage between a non-Catholic and a Catholic is permitted by the State while a Catholic marriage between them can only take place if certain conditions are met.

The Catholic Church only recognizes a marriage solemnized according to its rites if at least one of the spouses is Catholic while it recognizes any type of marriage between non-Catholics. This, while the State only recognizes Civil marriages, that is, marriages that have been solemnized by someone so authorized by the Minister responsible for civil status.

³²⁷ "But during the last period of the Roman Republic, divorce became so frequent that marriage was no longer considered a life association; so much that, as was said by a moralist, women in those days no longer computed the years, as it was customary in the good old time, by the names of the consuls, but by the names of their successive husbands. Under these conditions the old system whereby the husband became the sole master of the wife's property, as well as that of his own, could no longer subsist. It was replaced by a régime of complete separation of property, so complete indeed that, so far as their mutual interests were concerned, the consorts were really aliens." L. E. Beaulieu, *opus citatus*

³²⁸ "This legislation was considered as conflicting with the Christian ideas respecting the mutual confidence and co-operation which should govern the matrimonial relations, and gradually a new system – the community of property – was organized in various parts of the Kingdom of France, and more particularly in and around the heart of the country, that is to say, the City and Viscounty of Paris." *Opus citatus*

³²⁹ "No minister of religion may be compelled to solemnize a marriage to which there is any impediment according to his religion and to the discipline of the society to which he belongs." *Code Civil*, Art 367

³³⁰ "Marriage is dissolved by the death of either spouse or by divorce." *Code Civil*, Art. 516

There are some common grounds between the Civil and the Catholic marriages in the Province of Québec as they both: (1) use the term “marriage”; (2) limit how close genetically the two spouses can be;³³¹ (3) until now defined it as the union between a man and a woman;³³² (4) insist that marriage is between two unwed persons³³³ in front of witnesses³³⁴ after issue of a public notice some time ahead of their intention to wed.³³⁵

II

Québec society is now thinking of defining Civil marriage, the only type of marriage under the jurisdiction of the government, as the union between two people, thus permitting two individuals of the same sex to marry. This change is required to satisfy the fundamental principle of equality of all under the Law. No other change is contemplated.³³⁶

The Magisterium of the Catholic Church, Evangelicals, Muslims and Jews are up in arms against such a change in the definition of Civil marriage. They affirm that the State has no right to change the meaning of the term “marriage” which they claim has always been reserved to the *union of one man and one woman*.

These religious leaders’ rebuke is odd as the Qu’ran clearly permits a man to have three wives and as Moses, Gedeon, David, Salomon and so many others had wives *galore* and numerous concubines to boot! So their claim about point (3) contradicts their Holy Books!

³³¹ “The officiant may not solemnize the marriage unless... (4) neither spouse is, in relation to the other, an ascendant, a descendant, a brother or a sister.” *Code Civil*, Art. 373 Paragraph 2

³³² “Marriage may be contracted only between *a man and a woman* expressing openly their free and enlightened consent.” *Code Civil*, Art. 365 Paragraph 2 (The emphasis is mine)

³³³ “The officiant may not solemnize the marriage unless... (3) the intended spouses are free from any previous marriage bound.” *Code Civil*, Art. 373 Paragraph 2

³³⁴ “In the presence of witnesses, the officiant...” *Code Civil*, Art. 374

³³⁵ “Before the solemnization of a marriage, publication shall be effected...” *Code Civil*, Art. 368 ss

³³⁶ which means that the degrees of kinship, for instance, will not change, contrary to what some religious leaders have wrongly implied.

We must remember that Israel's laws, civil, criminal and religious, are all said in the Torah to have originated from God himself. The Torah, like the Qu'ran, does not establish a democracy as is the Canadian Confederation but a true theocracy, a *régime* where God is the Power on the throne, just like in Iran.

Jesus on the other hand does not believe that the civil and criminal laws found in the Torah are of God as He clearly states that some were from Moses³³⁷ rather than God, disobeys others³³⁸ or makes one impossible to carry through by His opinion in the case.³³⁹

In response to Moses' divorce law as found in the Torah, Jesus' statement that marriage is the *union between a man and a woman*, which after all was the only type of legal union that existed in His society, was made to point out that it should not be dissolved at the whim of the husband. He was challenging the legal right of husbands to dispose of their wives as any other part of their property. He insisted, with the help of the Torah itself, on the egalitarian character of marriage and the primacy of that alliance over all others, points which are definitely respected in the present legal definition of Civil marriage³⁴⁰ and even in its proposed form. Of course one can also conclude that for Jesus marriage was a lifelong commitment on both parts, something that is not respected in the present legal definition of a Civil marriage and is maintained in the proposed form.

III

We must not forget that in Jesus' time, and for most of the history of humankind, the reason why a man took a wife was to have children by her; the reason why a woman took a husband was to be protected by him and the children he would "give" her. The couple needed children so that they could help provide for them as long as

³³⁷ "He saith unto them, Moses because of the hardness of your hearts suffered you to put away your wives: but from the beginning it was not so." (Matthew 19:8)

³³⁸ Jesus does not fast like His religious Jewish contemporaries (Mark 2:18-20) and plucks ears of corn on the sabbath and calls Himself "Lord... of the sabbath." (Mark 2:23-28)

³³⁹ as in the case of the woman caught in the very act of adultery (John 8:3-11)

³⁴⁰ "The spouses have the same rights and obligations in marriage. They owe each other respect, fidelity, succour and assistance. They are bound to live together." *Code Civil*, Art. 392 (Articles 393 to 400 go into more details on this.)

they were part of their family and later in their old age as their married children. Of course, sex also gave them some relief and in many cases a sought after and needed pleasure, but that pleasure in itself did not provide them with any security or any help in facing the hostile world in which they lived.

Couples were thus expecting help from their children as they grew older: these were to work for them as long as they were single and also help them after. This help from their married children could be forthcoming only if the couple had taught them to do so by the way they had treated their own older parents. Those who gave their own children the bad example in that they avoided helping their own old parents after leaving home would not get the help they needed and so could not expect to live to a ripe old age.³⁴¹

As couples of the same sex would be childless, they could not count on any help later on. So marriage between them was out of the question.

Today's society is completely different from the one just described. To live to be old does not require bearing children. So children are not seen in the same light as in Jesus' time. This is why married couples do not have as many children as before. Children are now financial liabilities as well as a source of joy. They cannot be expected to work for the family from an early age but are at their parents' expense until they leave home.

Children are not necessary to a couple's survival through old age: money put aside, pension funds, social policies guarantee that. On the contrary, children are an impediment to the future welfare of their parents as they eat up monies that could have been put away for their future. Of course, children are needed to provide for the elderly, but in our society the ones who can pay more are better looked after than the poorer ones, the ones who gave society the manpower required to maintain these services.

All this is to say that the need to have children does not exist for couples. Children are nearly a luxury to those with an income (though still a source of revenue to those on welfare). Those with a

³⁴¹ This is why we read: "*Honour thy father and thy mother*, as the LORD thy God hath commanded thee; *that thy days may be prolonged*, and that it may go well with thee, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." Deut 5:16

job cannot afford too many even when they are ready to sacrifice a lot for them as their education and upbringing are expensive.

So people today do not get married to have lots of children but they get married mostly for companionship, love, support. Sex is not basically for procreation. Sex is a way to show love and to give much needed relief from the tension of modern life, a life where both have to work to make “ends meet”, that is, live with roughly the standard of living of the majority.

In this different social environment, marriage between people who cannot procreate through their union is not to their detriment: they simply either do not bring up children, like quite a few of today’s heterosexual couples, Catholic or not, or they bring up children born outside their union.

IV

The Roman Catholic Magisterium has yet to come to terms with this social change. It would love to reverse it, to go back to Jesus’ society. It is very much like trying to go back to a pre-industrial society, something impossible barring a gigantic catastrophe which would eliminate most of the world’s economic and social infrastructures (as well as most of its population). Longing for the past does not bring it back.

The Magisterium’s insistence that children must be brought forth as before regardless of their cost refuses to take into account the cruel fact that children are now liabilities rather than assets; it also forgets that young children used to die in large numbers, as their parents either could not afford to feed them all or had no need for some of them which would suffer “benign neglect”. On top of that, disease would normally kill roughly one child of every three born before it reached the age of one. The Church also forgets that children had no rights until quite recently, so their survival really depended on their parents. This too has changed.

Children rights, the obligation to send them to school, the laws preventing young children from working for their families are all working against the *raison d’être* of large families. And, by the way, was the Magisterium for these laws and rights when they were enacted? Was the Magisterium for the abolishment of slavery and slave labour? Was the Magisterium on the side of democracy when it was implemented? Or has it always been the champion of past *régimes*?

That the Roman Catholic Church's Magisterium insists on sticking to the past is a major disaster for the whole Church, as this makes the hierarchy out of touch with the world in which the rank and file are living, at least in the West. When the hierarchy tries to stop the State from adjusting its laws to conform them to its citizens' vision of what a marriage is and what it is for, what fairness is and how it must be applied, it shows itself to all as a bully trying to interfere in a field outside its jurisdiction. The Province of Québec as well as Canada has taken great care to respect Catholic marriages; the hierarchy owes them the same respect towards its Civil marriage.

The State answers to its citizens, whose opinions are shaped by the world in which they live rather than by the *diktats* of Pope, *rabbi* or *mullah*. Canada is not a theocracy: the Magisterium can always try to force its will on Catholic voters, but I can confidently predict that it will be to no avail.

*Solemnity of Saint John the Baptist and Fête Nationale du Québec,
June 24th, 2004*

LEVITICUS, CANADIAN LAW AND HOMOSEXUALITY

The Qu'ran and the Torah consider utterly immoral for a man to have sex with another man; in fact, Leviticus, one of the five books of the Torah, a holy book common to both Jews and Christians, prescribes the death penalty for such an offence.³⁴²

Of course, this is not the only case where consensual sex is considered a criminal offence punishable by death according to Leviticus. There is also the case when sex is between a man and a woman within certain degrees of kinship,³⁴³ a man or a woman and a beast³⁴⁴ and between a man and a menstruating woman.³⁴⁵ To which, of course, we must add the case of adultery.

This being said, to whom falls the duty to carry out the sentence found in Leviticus? We do know from the Gospels that in some cases anyway, the individuals who judged the crime were also the ones who saw to the sentence being carried through, like in the case where a woman found guilty of adultery was brought to Jesus Who suggested that the first to stone her should be without sin.³⁴⁶

³⁴² "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." (Lev 20:13)

³⁴³ "[11] And the man that lieth with his father's wife hath uncovered his father's nakedness: both of them shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them. And if a man lie with his daughter in law, both of them shall surely be put to death: they have wrought confusion; their blood shall be upon them... [14] And if a man take a wife and her mother, it is wickedness: they shall be burnt with fire, both he and they; that there be no wickedness among you... [17] And if a man shall take his sister, his father's daughter, or his mother's daughter, and see her nakedness, and she see his nakedness; it is a wicked thing; and they shall be cut off in the sight of their people: he hath uncovered his sister's nakedness; he shall bear his iniquity. And thou shalt not uncover the nakedness of thy mother's sister, nor of thy father's sister: for he uncovereth his near kin: they shall bear their iniquity." (Lev 20:11-12;14;17-19)

³⁴⁴ "And if a man lie with a beast, he shall surely be put to death: and ye shall slay the beast. And if a woman approach unto any beast, and lie down thereto, thou shalt kill the woman, and the beast: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." (Lev 20:15-16)

³⁴⁵ "And if a man shall lie with a woman having her sickness, and shall uncover her nakedness; he hath discovered her fountain, and she hath uncovered the fountain of her blood: and both of them shall be cut off from among their people." (Lev 20:11-21)

³⁴⁶ "He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her." (John 8:9)

Of course, it could be said that Leviticus assumes that the acts of judging, sentencing and execution is to be carried by people who have been chosen for that purpose, behaving as part of society's justice system. This is certainly one way this text has been interpreted before. Before I examine this option, certainly more in line with our way of thinking, let me examine the more extreme one where it is up to the individual to apply without delay the penalty appropriate to the crime.

The death penalty has been abolished in Canada. There are no laws in the Canadian Criminal Code against sex between humans and beasts, a man and a menstruating woman, or partners of the same sex, nor for that matter against adultery, as long as the humans concerned in those acts are all consenting adults.³⁴⁷

Canadian law does not permit individual citizens to judge and sentence people: the police alone can arrest people, the Crown Attorneys alone can put forward charges and the Courts alone can judge and sentence people (usually with the help of a jury as far as the verdict) and the prison system sees that the sentence is carried through. The Parliament of Canada oversees and amends the Canadian Criminal Laws that are applied by the Courts. The Supreme Court of Canada makes sure that every law is compatible with the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. (Some laws can include a "Notwithstanding Clause" which shields them from the supremacy of the Charter; but they must be voted anew every five years.)

Furthermore, there is a "Hate Crime Law" in the Canadian Criminal Code to protect groups from attacks on the basis of creed, colour, ethnicity or sexual orientation. Those guilty of fomenting hate against people of a religious or ethnic group are incarcerated and their writings, banned.

This being said, it should be clear that killing an adult because he had consensual sex with his adult gay partner is (1) murder and (2) a hate crime according to Canadian Criminal Law. This implies that anyone who decides to live up to what that person considers God's command as found in Leviticus 20:13 "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have commit-

³⁴⁷ "Trudeau [as] Minister of Justice... oversaw amendments to the Canadian Criminal Code on abortion and homosexuality, and divorce reform. His words "the state has no place in the bedrooms of the nation" are still quoted frequently in Canada.

ted an abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them” will be found guilty of murder.

There is thus a clear problem for those who consider this verse as God’s word. If it is, they must apply it or else! If it is not, it follows that not every verse in Holy Scripture is the actual word of God. There is no other choice.

As a Christian and a Roman Catholic, I have no hesitation in choosing the latter proposition over the former. We have here a case where Canadian law is more in line with Jesus’ message than the Torah, a case which is in fact quite frequent.

Again, either you believe in this verse or you do not. Do not claim to believe in this verse if you are not ready to apply it! Either it is the word of God and you have to kill those who practise such “abomination” (as well as all the others mentioned in the Bible as guilty of death) or it is not.

You cannot believe the first half of the sentence “If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination” without believing the second: “they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them.” After all, we are talking about two parts of one sentence found in one verse. You cannot start picking and choosing like that! (And it would still be the case that half of the verse would not be of God!)

Again, applying this verse is a criminal offence according to the Canadian Criminal Code and preaching that this verse should be taken seriously is also a criminal offence as it is a hate crime according to the law of the land. Those who read this text have a real choice to make: for civilization (Canada) or barbarity (Leviticus 20:13 and many other verses of the Torah).

But what if we interpret Leviticus’ laws as laws that any State should want to promulgate in its statutes? What if we consider that it is God’s will that Canada should execute people who commit the crimes mentioned in Leviticus, and that Canada will certainly lose God’s favour if it does not heed to the Law of God?

I cannot say that I have found many among Christians who go so far as suggesting that (1) the various acts prohibited by Leviticus should be criminalized and (2) the death penalty should be reintroduced as punishment for them. But this is as we have seen the

necessary consequence of this text. If we believe that it is the *rôle* of the State to apply the laws of Leviticus, then we must see to it that they are fully applied, and that includes its penalties. By the way, the state of Israel, a Jewish state where the Torah is considered very important, does not act upon these texts any more than Canada; most Jews feel that these verses are best forgotten.

Solemnity of John the Baptist, June 24th, 2004

FAITHFUL OR NOT?

I

On many points of morals, the Roman Catholic hierarchy seems to be very much at odds with most Canadian Catholics as the latter agree with the use of condoms and oral contraceptives as well as the “morning after” pill (even though it probably causes a very early abortion) and consider it is a woman’s right to choose if she wants a medical abortion, in the very least during early pregnancy, and certainly if the woman has been raped or if her health is seriously at risk if she continues with her pregnancy.

Furthermore, again contrary to the position of the Church’s hierarchy, most Catholics in Canada accept that gay couples wed in a Civil marriage, that consenting adult partners engage in any sexual act they so wish, that couples live together and have children out of wedlock and that couples divorce and remarry.

Basically, most of them not only agree with the former Canadian Justice Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s *dictum* “The State has no place in the bedrooms of the Nation” but would add that the Church’s hierarchy has no place there either. They did and still do support the Roman Catholic Pierre Elliott Trudeau’s refusal to have the Church’s Magisterium dictate State policy on all matters of sexual behaviour. They also approved the fact that his stance was maintained and expanded by Prime Minister Jean Chrétien, another Roman Catholic.

Most Catholics are tolerant of the sexual behaviours of others as well as of their decisions concerning abortion. They see it as a matter of justice that gays and lesbians have licence to marry civilly just like them. They consider that behaviours that do no harm to other citizens³⁴⁸ should be private business while other behaviours should be legislated in a way that respects the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, a Charter that was included in the Canadian Constitution by the Roman Catholic Pierre Elliott Trudeau during his tenure as Prime Minister of Canada.

Why is the Magisterium so far from the faithful on these subjects? Why does the hierarchy insist in interfering in people’s prac-

³⁴⁸ Let me note here that an unborn human is not a citizen according to the Canadian Law.

tices whether they are Catholics or not? Why does it insist in telling people in minute details what behaviour is permissible and what is not when it comes to morals as well as Catholic ritual?

II

What is the proper *rôle* of the Magisterium? Why was it established? The *rôle* of the Magisterium is, as the word implies, to *teach*. But what should it teach? Is it not there to teach Jesus' message? Catholics know that their Church was founded by Jesus Himself and not by Peter or Paul. What the Church's Magisterium must proclaim in and out of season is what Jesus said and did: nothing more, but nothing less. This is why the Church has always put so much emphasis on the Gospels. This is why these texts are now proclaimed in the vernacular, so that they be more accessible to all.

What did Jesus say about living with a partner out of wedlock? Nothing. He told the Samaritan woman that this was her status, but neither did He ban her from His presence nor did He tell her off. Should not the hierarchy and the Magisterium do the same? Are they not to follow the example of our Lord and God?

What did Jesus say about homosexuality, fornication, masturbation? Nothing. The only "sexual" subjects He mentioned were divorce and adultery. Why? Because divorce was the way a husband could dispose of his wife as she was his chattel and adultery,³⁴⁹ because it is cheating on your spouse, coming back on your troth. For Him, in marriage, the two become one couple and no one of the two can change that unilaterally. Now I am not suggesting that Jesus condones fornication. It is just not a great impediment to the Kingdom.

Did Jesus ever refuse to be in the company of sinners? No. Did He ever refuse to eat with them? No. Did He refuse to give Himself to Judas at the last supper? No. Did He tell us to follow His example? Yes.

Why is the Magisterium's ways always at odds with Jesus? Why does it not understand that He came to show love and forgiveness, not to point fingers at people, make them feel like dirt, sinners who do not "belong" with God's people as long as they do not follow the Law's prescriptions? Jesus was hardly pleased with those of His

³⁴⁹ Though He never condemned the adulterous woman caught *in flagrante delicto*: He only told her not to do it again! This is found in John 8:3-11.

contemporaries who were trying to force such regulations down others' throats!

III

The Magisterium and the hierarchy should remember that the Pope is the "successor of Peter", not of Jesus. Jesus as God is always right, but what about Peter? We have examples galore of his mistakes: he was even told off by Paul, an itinerant preacher and no bishop, like in the following case, told by the latter:

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?³⁵⁰

God's Church is an assembly of very fallible people and this is fine. God throughout history has worked quite effectively with "normal" people. After all, He does not need us to get the work done: He can do it all by Himself!

We must not forget the example of the very first Council, which took place in Jerusalem with Peter and Paul in attendance and which is related in quite some detail in the Acts of the Apostles:

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question... And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they de-

³⁵⁰ Gal 2:11-14

clared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they. Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them. And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me: Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name. And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things. Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of

the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia: Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment: It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, Men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things; That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.³⁵¹

According to Luke, its decision, which started with the sentence “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us”³⁵² necessary for a Conciliar proclamation, was (1) not to impose circumcision on the *goyim* who became Christians and (2) enforce on them the abstinence from food offered to idols, blood (and so eat *kosher*) and from sex with a prostitute (translated as “fornication” although this term’s meaning has for some time been extended to sex between two unwed partners).³⁵³

Paul gives a rather different account of this Council in his letter to the Galatians:

Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by

³⁵¹ Acts 15:1-29

³⁵² Acts 15:28

³⁵³ The Greek term “porneia” (πορνεία) (“porn”) means “copulating with a prostitute” while the term “fornication” means copulation between unwed partners. Copulation with a prostitute is not the same as copulation between two unwed partners as it implies that one partner pays for sex and the other lives from it. A lot of unwed fornicate without being paid or paying. A slight variation of this term “porneia” is used by Paul in 1 Cor 6:9-20 where again it is translated by “fornicator” and not “prostitute user” as it should.

any means I should run, or had run, in vain. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.³⁵⁴

It is obvious that he “replaces” point (2) by alms to the poor! How come the accounts are so different? How is it that Luke and Paul only agree on the uselessness of circumcision?

Paul was right to “forget” the question of blood: this Conciliar decision was utter nonsense: Jesus told His disciples to drink His blood and so had abolished the *kosher* laws! So why in God's name would these Council members, including Peter the first Pope and all the important Church leaders (bishops), make such a *gaffe*? God must have had a good laugh, and decided this would be a good example to remind us how fallible and sometimes downright stupid the hierarchy and Magisterium can be! It was also a good example to show us that this mistake did not matter: sanity prevailed in the end.

But there is more: Paul's use of the terms “But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person)” and “James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars” are not at all flattering towards

³⁵⁴ Gal 2:1-10

his Church's Magisterium and hierarchy! He, no bishop but an itinerant preacher, believed that he should not have had to report to them in the first place, that he knew what was to be done at least as well as they did! I suppose humility was not his greatest quality, but he might have had a point there anyway: God can make Himself clear to everyone, whatever her status in the Church. By the way, that fact was recognized by quite a few popes...

IV

History has played and still plays a big *rôle* in the Church, especially with the hierarchy and Magisterium. These see themselves as the "spiritual" equivalent of and equals to the "temporal" governments. Very often there has been a symbiotic relation between the "leaders" of both groups. At the time of the "divine rights of Kings" it was hardly surprising that there would be the "divine rights of Popes and bishops."

The divine rights of Kings have bitten the dust as democracies finally toppled aristocracies, thanks in no part at all to the Church's hierarchy. The divine rights of the Pope and bishops have also largely bitten the dust where democracies thrive. The "Faithful" have simply transferred their allegiance from the hierarchy to Jesus Himself. So they try to follow their conscience in the light of the Gospel rather than the rules put forward by the hierarchy.

While the hierarchy preaches that all humans have a conscience and that God is able to talk to every human through her conscience, it still insists that she should follow its rules and regulations rather than her own conscience, God's voice in her.

They act as if they do not believe that God is able to do His work without their indispensable intervention! Is that pride or what?

Humility is something that each human needs to learn every day of her life. Faith in God stems from that humility: it requires letting go of the ship's controls so that God can take charge and bring us where He wants us to go. Faith means trusting God's infinite love for us and our fellow humans. It means following Him, crucifying our ambitions, our need of control, to our Father in Heaven, who will work as He pleases through us if we just let Him. Glory to Him forever!

Solemnity of Peter and Paul, Apostles, June 29th, 2004

MY BODY, MY SELF

I

On Ash Wednesday, the first day of Lent, the Roman Catholic priest officiating takes some ashes that he has just blessed and puts some on the forehead of each of the participants with the words “Turn away from sin and be faithful to the gospel” or with the more traditional words “Remember that you are dust and to dust you will return.”³⁵⁵ It is on these latter words that I want to concentrate here.

These words certainly remind us that we will die. For some of us, this is a rather bleak reminder as we do not want to die. But this text says much more. It tells us that we definitely are dust and that we certainly will return to dust.

Certainly it is fair to say that our body is made of elements found in the earth, found in its dust; certainly it is fair to say that our body will decompose in the earth and will return to it the dust that made it. But the text goes further. It states that we are our body and nothing else. *Our very Self is to be found in and only in this material organism that is our body.* From this we can immediately infer that our Self vanishes with our last breath. That we become, as the saying says, no more.

I think it is fair to say that this last statement is certainly not put forward by the Magisterium these days. So I better look further to see if I can justify it by more than this excerpt from a ceremony.

II

The text referred to in the Ceremony of the Ashes is the following, from the Book of Genesis: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”³⁵⁶

It should be fairly clear by this text that man *is* a living body, a body that has breath, a body that breathes, a “living soul”.

³⁵⁵ from the Proper of Ash Wednesday’s Mass as translated in the Sunday Missal approved for use in Canada (Novalis)

³⁵⁶ Genesis 2:7

When we die, we breathe our last breath. A body which does not breathe is a corpse. A baby just delivered is a still-born if she does not start breathing. And we calculate the age of a person from the moment she started breathing (her birth) to the moment she stopped breathing (her death). In fact, legally, the person is considered such only from her birth to her death because it is only within this time-frame that she breathes and thus that she is alive.

In the Septuagint and in the New Testament, the Greek term “psychè” is translated sometimes by “soul”, sometimes by “spirit” but its first and foremost meaning is “breath”.

That my thesis is correct is made clear again in the Book of Ezechiel where we find written:

The hand of the LORD was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the LORD, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD. So I prophesied as I was commanded: and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord GOD; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁷ Ezechiel 37:1-10

In this classic text, we have what could be called a two-step revival; the first step is a “FAST REWIND”: the dead bodies, just dry bones by now, go quickly back in time to when they were freshly dead, when they still had sinews, flesh and skin on their bones. These bodies might be looking very much like live bodies, but they are still perfectly dead.

The second step has these bodies recapturing their breath, receiving back the breath of life. Then they rise to their feet, being truly living bodies once again. And it is made abundantly clear in the text that this “breath” is just moving air, that it is just wind. There is nothing immaterial in this term. It does certainly not refer to some immaterial “soul” but to something that we can feel although we cannot see.

In this vision, we have what can be called a case of resurrection, of the dead rising again, just like Lazarus who, in his case, having died four days before and been buried, was raised, got his body intact again and his breath of life back again.³⁵⁸

Since the Jews believed that a living human was just her living body, an afterlife was impossible without the re-living human becoming a re-living body. And if this afterlife was to be eternal rather than transient like in the cases just mentioned, this new body had to be made in such a fashion that it would not be itself transient. That this was also the opinion of Paul is clear, as I will now show.

III

Paul puts his main thesis about what the resurrection of the dead entails in the following way in this succinct passage:

The dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.³⁵⁹

It is quite clear from this text that an individual's corruptible body, whether it has been corrupted (as a dead body) or not (as Paul

³⁵⁸ John 11:1-44

³⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 15:52b-54

takes into account the possibility that not everyone will die before such an event), will be transformed, recreated into an incorruptible body so that what was initially a mortal body becomes an immortal one, that what was initially a mortal individual, becomes an immortal one. This is also what is referred to in the Apostle's Creed: "I believe in... the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."³⁶⁰

So it would seem obvious from that text from Paul that we are our body and that we die when our living body dies, disappear with death to be recreated by God as an immortal body when we are raised from the dead.

IV

As I said earlier, this is not what I understand the Magisterium to teach these days. What at least I understand it to teach is found nowhere in the New Testament, indeed nowhere in the Bible. What I understand it to teach is that an immortal soul lives with or within a mortal human body, a soul that survives the body's death to be later united to a different kind of body after the resurrection from the dead.

Assuming that my interpretation of the Magisterium's position is correct, the question arises of why such an idea was proposed in the first place and what it was supposed to explain that Paul's idea did not.

I am not a specialist in theology, its history, philosophy or its history, so my answer will certainly be incomplete. It seems to me that the concept of "soul" started to be enlarged in theology through the use of Greek Philosophy by the Fathers and others. From just what kept a body alive (without breathing, we die, as the process of suffocation clearly shows), it became what permits the human body to think, talk, make tools, grow and move about. Slowly but surely it became where the "Self" was to be found as it could not be placed in any particular organ or bone or muscle of the body.

With the advent of René Descartes, of unhappy memory, the body became a kind of robot that the "soul" controlled while it was alive and which the "soul" jettisoned at death. The last breath was the soul saying good-bye to the body. And as that "soul" was definitely immaterial by opposition to the body which was definitely material, there was no reason for it not to be immortal. The body died, that was a

³⁶⁰ from the Apostles' Creed as translated in the Sunday Missal approved for use in Canada (Novalis)

fact. But did the “soul” die? How could we tell? Of course the breath dies with the body, but the breath is material contrary to this “soul”.

Now why should there be any opposition to this idea? Although it might not be biblical, it at least seems to make sense. How? Well, how else can we explain all the knowledge we have acquired through the years, our memories, our ways of doing things? How can we explain the virtuosity and “soul” of the violinist if not because she has developed an artistry of such quality and such a talent that these cannot be stored in her body? Our knowledge is contained in libraries. How can we retain it within the confines of our bodies? Is it not much too small for such a task?

For Descartes the answer was obvious. For scientists today, it is much less. We are now producing very small information stocking devices; our computers are getting smaller and more sophisticated through the production of programs that are more and more flexible and complex. It is becoming possible to believe that our brains can stock all the information we have accumulated, and the study of our brains in action is starting to show how this is done.

Descartes’ philosophy was based on the idea that man was an immaterial “soul” somehow linked to a material body. This is called dualism, as reality is posited to be at the same time material and immaterial. Now this philosophy has taken a beating in the last half century, and it seems to be definitely on the way out. So the idea of the immortal “soul” linked to a mortal body, based on Descartes’ dualism, could be considered soon to be as obsolete as the philosophy that underpins it.

We know for a fact that it is impossible for the Church to control knowledge. If she hangs on to concepts which have been shown to be false, she will lose even more credibility that she has lost already, just like when she refused to acknowledge that the Creation depicted in the Book of Genesis was not factual.³⁶¹ It is certainly not good to see the Church always being dragged kicking and screaming into an already old “Present”. It would be much better if lively debates were encouraged to ascertain if a proposed change is more faithful than the present understanding both to the truth that we have received and to the facts that have just been discovered.

³⁶¹ a view she has since repudiated, but only after many were excommunicated for holding what she now accepts

There is another reason why this theory should be discarded, one that is much more fundamental to Catholicism. And that is that it seems to make the resurrection of the body an optional extra.

Indeed, if we already are an immortal “soul” connected to a mortal body, why would we need a new body at all? Why should God raise it? Of course our body has taken part in our good deeds and bad ones, but it is not us after all: we are our “soul”. Furthermore, this new body that the “soul” will be attached to is not even made of the same stuff as the old one, so why bother at all?

To me, it seems that the very idea of an immortal “soul” linked to a mortal body goes against the need to have a resurrection at all. It seems to me that it basically puts in question an important tenet of our faith, the resurrection of the dead. To me it assumes that we are someone else that the Bible says we are. And that I find dangerous.

So I will go back to Paul and his ideas on the body and its resurrection. I hope to show that indeed he held that we are our bodies and so that they have to rise from the dead for us to be alive again.

V

Paul speaks in detail about what is meant by the resurrection from the dead in a passage that comes just before the one already quoted:

[35] But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?... [42] So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual. The first man is of the earth, earthy: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and

blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.³⁶²

It is quite clear that he sees a very qualitative difference between the human body before and the human body after the resurrection. He states that our present bodies, our present Selves, are like Adam's, while our new ones will be like Our Risen Lord's.

Paul sees our human body undergoing a process that goes from corruption to incorruption; from dishonour to glory; from weakness to power; from "natural body" to "spiritual body", the first being like Adam's, the second being like our Risen Lord's, whom, as he points out, is "from heaven" rather than from the earth.

We see that he goes back to the Genesis text I already mentioned. Adam's body is such that when he died, his self simply vanished. He was no more. When raised, he is a very different body, like Jesus' risen body, while being still the same. Just like when Jesus died, He also was no more a man; it is when He rose that He became a man again, Himself as man again.

One of the points Paul makes is that the risen body is indeed made of absolutely different stuff than the old one. And this to him is essential as bodies like ours cannot inherit the kingdom of God, cannot enter Heaven: they just are not made of the right stuff to do so.

This implies that we do not have to think in terms of atoms, molecules, as are found in this Universe. These in a way do not constitute our individuality, our Self. What constitutes our Self is more something like their pattern. And patterns can be transposed, recreated, just like "memories" can be transposed, recreated.

Let us look at an example from this earth. On the 29th of July, 1951, at the reopening of the Bayreuth Festspielhaus, Wilhelm Furtwängler conducted the choir and orchestra of the Festspielhaus in an absolutely stunning rendition of Beethoven's Symphony no. 9 in D minor, a rendition that has been considered by many (me included) as the best ever. For those present, this performance was forever in their memory. For me, it became available as a set of two Long Playing records. In the grooves of these two records were engraved patterns that permitted the stylus, linked to an amplifier and to loud speakers, to recreate at least a rather good version of that fabulous

³⁶² 1 Corinthians 15:35; 42-50

performance. And through that “memory” I was able to listen to that performance over and over again.

That performance had not been “memorized” that way originally as the original recording was made on tape. So we have three ways the “memory” of this event was recorded by 1955: in the brains of those who listened to the actual performance as well as in the brains of those who have listened to it on Long Playing records as they remind themselves of it; on a tape when it is played by an adequate tape player; on LPs as long as they are played on an adequate LP player.

Nowadays this same performance is available as a series of zeros and ones found either on a Compact Disc or in the memory of a computer, in so far as one has the proper equipment to transform that information into the music. So there is again a new format by which that memory can be kept.

Just as there are many formats by which our memories can be kept, there are many formats by which our ways of doing, our ways of thinking can be kept, and so many types of bodies by which we can be ourselves.

But one could one object, how can the information be kept if the dead are perfectly dead and if their resurrection takes place only eons later? This can be answered by a simple analogy. Google constantly memorizes what is found on all the world’s websites. So the website can die, disappear, but the information it contained is still found on Google’s computers. God is like Google: He records all we do, think, memorize, etc. We can die, but He keeps our records forever, and thus has all He needs to recreate us when He so wishes.

VI

All this said one thing is for sure: nowhere in Paul’s text do we find a mention of a “soul” surviving a body. His whole thesis is that for us to be alive after death, we have to undergo the resurrection he describes, just like the man Jesus could not be alive after death without rising from the dead on Easter Day.

Annunciation, March 25th, 2009

THE MAGISTERIUM'S DILEMMA: A TEST CASE

Introduction

We lay people have been told that Evangelization is not the exclusive *rôle* of the clergy, but also ours; that we must, by our words and actions, bring people back to God and to His Church.

This is indeed a good idea. But first the Magisterium must make it possible for us to do so. Indeed, we cannot defend what we ourselves consider indefensible, that is, many Church policies which are for us and many others squarely against the message of our Lord and God Jesus Christ.

The Magisterium's way of doing things has to change. It has to forget its *diktats* and stop acting as if it has the only acceptable solutions to every problem facing the life of the faithful. It has to stop wanting to macro-manage our lives. It has to lead gently the flock in its care rather than try to bully it into submission.

I have tried in many of my articles so far to indicate respectfully to the Magisterium that the bullying approach is incompatible with Jesus' message. But why should it listen to me? The answer is simple: because more and more among Catholics are not listening to it anymore as they have, like me, figured out that the Magisterium is in the wrong; that it is contradicting itself without even realizing it.

The Magisterium is in a Dilemma which it has to resolve. That this is indeed the case I intend to show by examining its position in a very sorry case which came up recently and gave the Church a black eye, that is, the case of a young girl's abortion.

To do so, I will copy two texts that state the facts and provide the opinion of many members of the Magisterium. These texts were found on the Diocese of Montreal web-site or hyperlinked from it and so should be considered reliable.

The first text is a Declaration from my own Bishop; the second, an Article written by a Vatican based reporter on Comments made by the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life. This article also gives the opinions of other members of the Church's Hierarchy.

I have refrained to add to these two texts any of the many declarations coming from the grass-roots. But to show the indigna-

tion and the determined refusal by some committed Roman Catholics at the Parish level to consider Church's Law as having any validity in these matters, I have added in appendix the declaration of a group in my neighbourhood, group that I have no link to except that its members are, like me, members of the One, Holy, Roman, Catholic and Apostolic Church, and are such just as much as His Holiness Pope Benedict, My Bishop Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte, and the members of the Roman Curia.

Declarations from the Magisterium on a young girl's abortion

Declaration by His Eminence Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte, archbishop of Montréal: the following English text, a Declaration by His Eminence Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte, my Bishop, was found on the Diocese of Montréal's website. It is reproduced here *in extenso* as it stood on that website on March 25th, 2009:

Last week, I refrained from commenting publicly on the unfortunate story of the young nine-year-old Brazilian girl who had been raped by her stepfather since the age of six. The media covered it extensively.

My silence must not be construed as indifference, quite to the contrary. But how does one understand what's going on without having full information?

I was surprised by the position taken by the Bishop of Recife. How could he arrive at such a decision? I would have chosen differently. The human drama experienced by that child and her family was already horrible enough without having to think of excommunicating the persons involved. The situation called for compassion in word and deed.

I was happy to learn that the Brazilian bishops, better placed than we to appreciate the local context, have disassociated themselves from the decision of their colleague in Recife. I also appreciated the commentary, published last week in the *Osservatore Romano*, by Archbishop Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life. I share his view that direct abortion is always a morally unacceptable action.

However, in this case, it seems evident that the situation called for understanding and compassion rather than condemnation and excommunication.

That being said, my conviction stands: life must be respected from conception till death.

† Jean-Claude Cardinal Turcotte, Archbishop of Montréal

D’Emilio’s 16th March, 2009 article about the Most Rev. Rino Fisichella’s Comments: the following article, written at Vatican City on 16th March, 2009 by Frances D’Emilio of the Associated Press, was found on the San Francisco Chronicle’s website and is reproduced here *in extenso* as it stood on that website on March 25th, 2009. This article was hyperlinked from the Diocese of Montréal’s website with the following description: Commentary from the Most Rev. Rino Fisichella, President of the Pontifical Academy for Life:

An influential prelate said Brazilian doctors didn’t deserve excommunication for aborting the twin fetuses of a nine-year-old child who was allegedly raped by her stepfather because the doctors were saving her life.

The statement by Archbishop Rino Fisichella in the Vatican newspaper the Holy See on Sunday was highly unusual, because church law mandates automatic excommunication for abortion. Fisichella, who heads the Vatican’s Pontifical Academy for Life, upheld the church’s ban on abortion and any implications of his criticism of excommunicating the doctors and the girl’s mother weren’t clear.

Fisichella argued for a sense of mercy in such cases and respect for the Catholic doctors’ wrenching decision, and strongly criticized fellow churchmen who singled out the doctors and mother for public condemnation.

“Before thinking about excommunication, it was necessary and urgent to save her innocent life and bring her back to a level of humanity of which we men of the church should be expert and masters in proclaiming,” Fisichella wrote.

The doctors, Fisichella noted, had said the child’s life was in danger if the pregnancy continued.

Earlier this month, the archbishop of Recife, where the child and her family live, made a public announcement about the excommunication, which is the church's most severe penalty. Cardinal Giovanni Battista Re, a top Vatican official, has supported the archbishop.

But Fisichella criticized the archbishop's public denunciation, writing that the girl "should have been above all defended, embraced, treated with sweetness to make her feel that we were all on her side, all of us, without distinction."

Fisichella stressed that abortion is always bad. But he said the quick proclamation of excommunication "unfortunately hurts the credibility of our teaching, which appears in the eyes of many as insensitive, incomprehensible and lacking mercy."

The Vatican teaches that anyone performing or helping someone to have an abortion is automatically excommunicated from the church, and the Vatican prelate underlined that abortion is "always condemned by moral law as an intrinsically evil act."

Abortion is generally illegal in Brazil. But the procedure is allowed when the mother's life is in danger, when the fetus has no chance of survival or in rape cases where the woman has not passed her 20th week of pregnancy.

Doctors said the girl was 15 weeks pregnant when the abortion was performed. Health officials said the life of the 80-pound girl was in danger.

The pregnancy was discovered when the girl fell ill and her mother took her to a clinic. The child then told officials she had been abused by her stepfather, who is in police custody.

An analysis of the previous texts

I will now analyze the positions which have been expressed by the various representatives of the Magisterium named so far.

First, I will mention the facts as stated by the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life: (1) a nine-year-old girl from the Archbish-

opric of Recife, Brazil, is made pregnant with twins by her step-father. (2) Her Catholic doctors state that her pregnancy endangers her life.

To this we can add the following facts: (3) The Law in Brazil states that abortion is legal up to the 20th week of pregnancy if the mother's life is in danger, or if the foetus has no chance of survival, or in rape cases; (4) The nine-year-old girl was aborted when in her 15th week of pregnancy; (5) The penalty for procuring an abortion or getting someone aborted is automatic excommunication according to Church Law (in this case the girl was too young to be excommunicated as she was not officially demanding one: her mother did); (6) The archbishop of Recife, the girl's diocese, was just making public what had already happened, i.e. the *ipso facto* excommunication of the mother and the doctors who performed the abortion.

These are the hard facts. According to Brazilian Law, the girl qualified for an abortion as she had been raped, as her life was in danger and as her pregnancy had not reached twenty weeks. According to Church Law, any abortion, irrespective of the circumstances that caused the pregnancy and irrespective of the consequences on the health of the mother, is illegal and the punishment is automatic excommunication for all concerned in the termination of the pregnancy.

The step-father was not excommunicated as he did not push for the abortion. He was just remanded in custody awaiting trial for rape of a minor in his care by the Brazilian authorities.

The twins, had they been born and had their mother somehow survived, would have been her half-brothers or half-sisters as well as her children. They also would have been their step-mother's brothers-in-law or sisters-in-law as well as her grandchildren.

I must say that I find such family relationships so abhorrent that they should not be allowed to happen. This gut feeling is not mentioned by any Church official. Obviously, if the archbishop of Recife felt it, it did not deter him at all. But after all he was not necessarily stating his own opinion by rendering the excommunications public: he was simply stating a fact, that is, the *ipso facto* excommunication of all involved in any abortion as clearly stated by Church Law.

But this point of view, which is nothing else but the Church's Law, is not shared by my Bishop and by many others clerics, including the President of the Pontifical Academy for Life, as we have seen.

Their position flatly put this Law in question. Let me examine exactly in what ways.

First, they call for a revamping of that Law in some cases. The President of the Pontifical Academy seems to call for an exemption from excommunication, automatic or not, if the life of the mother is in danger.

But someone can object on the following ground: abortion means the certain death of the foetus while the death of the mother, although likely according to the doctors, is not a certain fact. The only two things that are certain are that the foetus will surely die if an abortion is performed and that the doctors' considered opinion is that the mother's life is endangered by her pregnancy. So the right thing is to risk the life of the mother to save the foetus from certain death. After all, the biological *rôle* of a woman is to give birth. And terminating her pregnancy goes against that.

My Bishop calls for an exemption from excommunication in this particular case on compassionate grounds: "However, in this case, it seems evident that the situation called for understanding and compassion rather than condemnation and excommunication." His position requires examining the reasons for each abortion before deciding if it passes whatever test the Church would demand to avoid excommunication. This goes against the very principle of automatic excommunication for abortion, replacing it by a kind of Church Court that would decide if such and such an abortion is, although an evil act, not a case for excommunication.

Archbishop Fisichella calls for exemption from excommunication in cases where it would cause scandal among Catholics and non-Catholics. He said that the excommunication by the Archbishop of Recife "unfortunately hurts the credibility of our teaching, which appears in the eyes of many as insensitive, incomprehensible and lacking mercy." So excommunication should definitely not be automatic but should be based on a test not defined as such by the Magisterium but by the people, as it is the people who are or not scandalized by the Magisterium's lack of compassion.

It should thus be apparent that at least some members of the Magisterium are very unhappy with the present Law of the Church on abortion; that they want it revamped, reviewed, to arrive at a more compassionate solution. Unfortunately, once you open the door to one, you open the door to all others.

The average abortion case is not as extreme as the case of this little girl, but rarely are abortions asked for on a pure whim; there are reasons why someone is ready to go through with this. And to the person involved, these reasons are such that the procedure is justified. This might not be someone else's opinion, but it is the one of the person who undergoes the abortion.

On what grounds can I dismiss her reasons outright? Does she not have a say in the matter? On what grounds am I better placed to judge her predicament than her? On what grounds is the Magisterium better placed to judge her predicament than her? How can it say that Jesus would not understand her and would reject her because of it? Is not this last statement exactly what they state by their Law? Or is their Law having nothing to do with Jesus' message?

The Conundrum

The fundamental problem here is: which part of the Church's teaching does the Magisterium want to give precedence to? Her teaching that God is Love, that we must follow in the footsteps of His Beloved Son Jesus? Or her teaching that all those who do not follow the instructions she has carefully formulated over the years will definitely end up in Hell?

For those who would bristle at this last sentence, let me remind them that missing Mass on Sundays and Holy Days of obligation without an adequate reason is a grave sin and thus punishable by Hell. That there are in Church Law many causes for excommunication and a great number of anathemas. The Church does teach that if you die in a state of grave sin you go to Hell, and excommunication is due to a grave sin. To have this state of affairs revoked, you need to reconcile yourself to the Church, as the saying goes, repent from what the Magisterium considers a sin. And this cannot happen until you really agree with its position on the matter. Nothing else will do.

This Church in which we live right now demands obedience from all and sundry. The Magisterium's *rôle* is to formulate the laws we have to follow under pain of Hell. This is the *raison d'être* of the Church Law. And there is no input from the people as they do not know what is right and what is wrong.

Indeed, we are told that our conscience is dulled if we think differently from Church Law but right if we abide by it. We are not to

make our own decisions; we are to follow the decisions made for us under the pain of Hell.

Mind you, the Magisterium produced these laws for a very worthwhile reason. The Magisterium considers that it has the excessively important duty to clearly state what is good and what is evil so as to make sure that their flock ends up in Heaven. After all, these Laws were produced after careful study of Scripture and the Fathers and so must be God's Laws.

In fact, the Magisterium clearly believes that those who do not follow Church Law will be punished by God – not them – with Hell; that God does indeed send people to Hell. To me, this implies that their God is a Heavenly Sadist who recreates (resurrects) dead people so as to then be able to punish them by having them tortured forever.

The Magisterium seems to have made God into a kind of partly benevolent ruler, who provides rules that guarantee Heaven to His obedient subjects and Hell to His unruly ones just like temporal rulers provided laws to guarantee the security of their obedient subjects and harsh penalties to their unruly ones.

When most of the world's peoples lived under political *régimes* where the Law was imposed on them by their King or Emperor, the people could make sense of a God that demanded of them as much obedience as their King or Emperor. This Magisterium's view of God could easily be accepted. Furthermore most were unable to check for themselves what the gospels actually said as they could not read. The people had no choice but to believe what they were told.

With the advent of democracy the people started to have a say in what was or not a proper law. These laws were to be for their good and not just the good of the King or Establishment. The questioning of their suitability became the proper thing to do. Add to this the education of the masses and the people, now literate, could read the gospels themselves and find out what Jesus actually said.

These changes were reinforced when the Magisterium introduced the vernacular in the liturgy and saw to the production of the New Catechism, in which the various statements are actually backed by the earliest texts on the subject so as to answer legitimate questions about their relationship with the original message. Both these changes show a Magisterium with a different approach, a Magisterium who wants to convince people rather than demand blind obedience.

The authority of the Magisterium, especially its good judgment, was definitely put into question by its reaction to the sexual scandals perpetrated by some priests on children. Indeed, in many cases the Hierarchy threatened with excommunication the parents who complained (after all, the revelation of such abominations would cause scandal!) while letting the priests at fault free to continue their evil acts.

The Magisterium's concept of God as a Heavenly Sadist now comes face-to-face against its new teaching – if I can call going back to the Gospels a new teaching – that God is Love. Perhaps the Magisterium does not even now see the contradiction that is created; but the common folk can clearly see that the Heavenly Sadist is no God-Father; that He is not the God of our Lord Jesus Christ but some kind of scarecrow.

Ordinary people have also come to realize that they know more about love and compassion than the Magisterium does.

They see the Magisterium preaching about love and compassion while not showing any; preaching that God speaks to us personally while insisting that they must tell people exactly how to live their lives under the pain of Hell. No wonder the Magisterium's credibility is at an all-time low!

The Magisterium is faced with an alternative: either proclaiming the Gospel that Jesus Our Lord and Saviour proclaimed although this message caused His horrible death and will mean for it accepting a much more humble *rôle* or continuing as it has these last centuries.

The basic problem lies in the kind of authority the Magisterium wants for itself; one based on mutual respect, on acceptance of differences of opinions, of cultures, and so on, or one based on force. The last fifty years show a definite movement towards the former at the expense of the latter. But the very unhappy coexistence of two rather mutually exclusive viewpoints cannot remain for ever.

Many bishops have come to a conclusion close to this. And I believe that more and more among the Magisterium know that they have to convince rather than coerce, that the Church's fundamental message, the one that Our Lord and God Jesus brought us, is one that the people can readily assent to.

For those Bishops God is really Love; Christ died for all, the just and the unjust, the good and the bad; He excluded no one from

His Presence, He gave Himself totally to all. He certainly did not tell us to excommunicate; He certainly did not tell us that we will go to Hell if we do not do as we are told. He came for sinners, people like me. He told people that some things were wrong, but He did not reject them for that. He continued to the bitter end to pray for His persecutors, for each and every sinner past, present and future, making excuses for each and every one of them. He was and is Love-Made-Man.

I believe that this view of God will win in the end. After all, the Church must follow her Beloved Spouse, our Lord and God Jesus Christ, of Whose side she was born through Water and Blood, as He laid in death on His Cross on Good Friday. May His name be blessed forever!

Good Friday, April 10th, 2009

Appendix: A grass-root reaction

This text, from the Pastoral Councils of Anjou / Saint Justin and Mercier-Est as reported by Sylvia Cerasi was published in French in the newspaper *Le Flambeau* for Mercier-Anjou of March 31st, 2009, page 4. I hasten to add that I am in no way associated with these people, although the translation is mine.

Compassion first and before everything

The members of the Pastoral Councils of Anjou / Saint-Justin and Mercier-Est were meeting on the 12th March last with the Episcopal Vicar and his assistant. The subject of the hour has had our attention for quite some time, viz. the excommunication in Brazil of the mother of a nine-year-old little girl who had been raped by her step-father and was made pregnant with twins, as well as that of the medical team who considered the abortion necessary for the health of the young mother.

Confronted by such a scandalously hard position, our reactions were punctuated by a feeling of desolation, a profound disapproval of the religious authorities concerned and indignation in the face of such a flagrant lack of compassion.

We want to express to the population of Anjou / Saint-Justin and Mercier-Est that we are available to welcome and accompany all those who live difficult

situations, that we affirm our solidarity with those who are most wounded in life as well as our refusal to judge anyone: "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." (John 8:7) What comes first for us is to act with compassion whatever the situation. Our mission is essentially a pastoral one. We refuse to exclude anyone. We are inspired in this by Jesus-Christ, our shepherd, "who came not to judge the world but to save it." (John 12:47)

We express that way our commitment to take care of life, to serve all the people of our area, the members of our Christian Communities and especially the families and groups of our area.

The members of the Pastoral Councils of Anjou / Saint-Justin and Mercier-Est, André Tiphane, Episcopal Vicar, Est region, and Johanne Egglefield, associate to the Episcopal Vicar.

**JESUS' WORDS
AFTER THE LAST SUPPER**

WHY THIS ESSAY?

There is nothing more important to a Christian, whether Roman Catholic or Evangelical, than to become more and more like Jesus: He is the Example that God has given us. He teaches us how to live our lives and with what outlook.

To this effect, it is imperative to study carefully the Gospels as they are our only prime sources about His teaching and His life on earth.

The Gospel texts are common to all Christians. And all English speaking Christians not only accept the authority of the Greek New Testament but also consider the King James Bible as one of its faithful English translations. So they can work together from this translation to learn how to become more and more like Jesus our Lord, and so to become more and more a Christian.

This is what I am trying to do from my Roman Catholic background, my own theological studies, my own experiences with Pentecostalism and my life as a husband, a father and a teacher.

I have already examined quite a few excerpts of the Gospels in my essay Life, Love and Law as well as in Christians and Scripture but had to leave many important Gospel texts for another time.

What I want to do here is to examine a crucial excerpt found only in John's Gospel, and more precisely in his Chapters 13 to 17, a passage which refers to events that took place on the eve of Jesus' death between His last meal with His disciples and His arrival in the garden where He was arrested.

JESUS' LAST EVENING

Five chapters of John's Gospel examine a very short time interval at the end of Jesus' life, the time between His last supper with His disciples and His arrest. This long account is not found at all in the other Gospels.

Some assumptions

The writer of John's Gospel says clearly that he was with Jesus at His last supper, with Him on the way to where He was betrayed and also that he witnessed Jesus' crucifixion and death.

I believe that what Jesus did and said that evening was of the greatest importance to our author, especially within the context of Jesus' death and resurrection. He would thus have taken great pain to be as honest and truthful as possible. I thus believe that his text is sufficiently accurate to lend itself to be studied in detail. The problem here is: either a detailed textual analysis is worthwhile, or it is not. If the text is not faithful to what Jesus said and did, such an analysis is definitely not and so, a complete waste of time.

That this text could be unfaithful to what took place is to me utter nonsense. The writer of this Gospel states in his prologue that Jesus is God-made-man. You do not start fooling around with God's pronouncements if you are at all pious: God's word is much too precious for that! Not that I claim that we have a *verbatim* report, just that the text is an accurate expression of Jesus' words and actions.

The Johannine account of Jesus' last evening

As I have already mentioned, John's description of events which lasted only a few hours on the eve of Jesus' death takes up five of his Gospel's 21: Chapters 13-17. This comes to about 3,800 words, or 19% of his Gospel's roughly 20,000 words in the King James' Version.

His account is in two very unequal parts. The first one, which is mostly about Jesus' washing His disciples' feet, is only about 700 words long while the second part is about 3,100 words or 15.5% of those of the whole Gospel. The length of this second part, an account of Jesus' talks and prayer following the Last Supper and lasting at most a couple of hours, can be compared with that of Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion and death, found in his Chapters 18 and 19.

This last account makes up about 2,000 words or 10% of his Gospel's words while describing events lasting roughly a day. The account of the Risen Jesus, found in his Chapters 20 and 21, makes up about 1,500 words or 7.5% of his Gospel's words.

The very length given to reporting Jesus' talks and prayer shows their supreme importance to the author of John's Gospel, an importance he must have felt at the latest soon after Jesus' resurrection. He would, at least by then, have felt a strong need to see them written down. And so, when he decided to compile his Gospel, he only had to include in it his already written report.

The time sequence of Jesus' last words

Jesus' last talks and His prayer to God Father are addressed to and heard by a close group of His followers.

Jesus' first talk to His disciples, the second half of Chapter 13 and the whole of Chapter 14 is rather short at under 1,000 words. It starts after the meal and Judas' departure. Jesus is then all alone with His faithful disciples.

In it Jesus is interrupted by four questions, each asked by a different disciple (Peter, Thomas, Philip and Judas) and ends with Jesus telling His disciples that it is time to leave: "Arise, let us go hence".³⁶³ For this reason, I have called this first talk "Jesus' Last Talk at Table". The dialogue between Jesus and the disciples plays a major *rôle* in its structure. Each question forces Jesus to go back on a point He has already made, and from which He then goes forward. The psychology of these exchanges is very credible. It definitely shows how Jesus managed to alleviate His disciples' fears and insecurities.

Jesus' second talk and His prayer are much longer at 2,100 words. The second talk itself constitutes Chapters 15 and 16 and the prayer, Chapter 17. Each is very different in style.

In the second talk, Jesus is talking to His disciples and is interrupted twice, first by the disciples murmuring between themselves and then later by their affirmation of understanding. The first interruption forces Jesus to come back on a point He had already made while the second permits Him to move forward to the next phase of His predictions. This talk is essentially based on two analo-

³⁶³ John 14:31

gies, one about a vine, its fruit and its farmer, the second, about a woman giving birth. It thus uses the allegorical method of teaching so dear to Jesus. As this talk is said to have taken place after Jesus' departure from the hall where He and His disciples ate, I assume that it was said on the road. I have entitled it "Jesus' Talk on the Walk".

Third, in Chapter 17, Jesus is talking (praying) to His Father rather than to His disciples. They do not interrupt Him. It is a prayer meant to be heard by the disciples, as it concerns their new mission. It makes psychological sense as the disciple's at the end of the previous talk made a deliberate and unequivocal act of faith in Jesus.

This prayer is immediately followed by: "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples."³⁶⁴ It could imply that Jesus and His disciples were by now close to this brook, and had only a few steps to go over it and get in the garden. I will thus entitle this prayer as "Jesus' Prayer by the Cedron". Of course, these titles do not matter in the least and so I feel no need to try to justify them further. They are just a convenient way to note the definite division of that part of the Gospel in three separate sections.

So I will examine separately Jesus' two Maundy Thursday talks to His disciples as well as His prayer for them to His Father, but first a few words on the beginning of John's Chapter 13, as these talks are part and parcel of that fateful evening.

Washing of the disciples' feet

The talks I will analyze in the following chapters take as their starting point something Jesus did and said after the meal He had that night with His disciples: His washing of His disciples' feet. And the author introduces this event by a few rather important remarks, remarks that surely give us a good idea of how he saw what was coming. And so it seems to me important to start by looking into these.

The author of John's Gospel starts his account of Jesus' last evening on earth with this verse: "Now before the feast of the passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in

³⁶⁴ John 18:1

the world, he loved them unto the end.”³⁶⁵ We find here two very important themes: first, death is nothing but leaving this world for the actual presence of God Father; second, Jesus will show His love for His disciples to the very end of His life on earth. Now the time Jesus will be physically with His disciples is only from now to when He is taken away after His arrest.

This is followed by: “And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon’s son, to betray him”³⁶⁶ which tells us first that Jesus and His disciples had finished their supper and that Judas had already made up his mind to betray Jesus.

The next verse takes up the first point of the first verse and adds to it: “Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God.”³⁶⁷ Here, not only is death seen as a passage from this life to God, but is, in Jesus’ case, a *returning* to God, which implies that He pre-existed His earthly life, which is not the case for the rest of us.

There is more, as the author adds that all the events that will follow that night and the next day will happen while “the Father had given all things into his hands” and so, while He has absolute power. The author here feels the need to point out unequivocally that the events that will follow, both that evening and the next day, are done by or to a man whose power is boundless and thus, who could have altered their course. It follows that all what happened in that time frame was freely accepted by Jesus.

So what does this Jesus do? “He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself. After that he poureth water into a bason, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded.”³⁶⁸ So there is the Master of the Universe washing His disciples’ dirty feet!

³⁶⁵ John 13:1

³⁶⁶ John 13:2

³⁶⁷ John 13:3

³⁶⁸ John 13:4-5

Simon Peter objects to Jesus washing his feet. They both argue about it, but in the end Peter submits himself to Jesus' will.³⁶⁹

This is followed by: "So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?"³⁷⁰ Jesus is now going to explain what this was all about. He could have done so as soon as Peter objected, but He wanted his obedience before his understanding. We must be ready to trust Jesus' good judgment before ours; we must also admit that He knows better than us.

So what is His rationale for His action? He says: "Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you."³⁷¹ Jesus insists that He wants His disciples to do to each other just like He did to them, that they are to follow His example if He is indeed their "Lord and Master". We have here an instance of what the author referred to in his first verse: "He loved them unto the end." For Jesus, love is something concrete, something down to earth, something practical like washing someone's dirty feet so she feels better.

Jesus then defines a chain of command: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him."³⁷² This chain shows clearly that He takes His orders from God Father just like they do from Him. The next verse is the climax of this section: "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."³⁷³ Those who actually put this com-

³⁶⁹ "Then cometh he to Simon Peter: and Peter saith unto him, Lord, dost thou wash my feet? Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter. Peter saith unto him, Thou shalt never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, If I wash thee not, thou hast no part with me. Simon Peter saith unto him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. Jesus saith to him, He that is washed needeth not save to wash his feet, but is clean every whit: and ye are clean, but not all. For he knew who should betray him; therefore said he, Ye are not all clean." John 13:6-11

³⁷⁰ John 13:12

³⁷¹ John 13:13-15

³⁷² John 13:16

³⁷³ John 13:17

mandment of caring in practical terms for others are blessed. This basic theme is one of those that will come back in Jesus' talks.

The reason why I mention these verses is that not only are they at the root of what Jesus will say later but that *He considered this issue of service to others so important that He actually took the time to show in practice what He meant.* He did not just use a parable, He preached by example.

The washing on the feet is followed by Jesus telling two of His disciples who would betray Him that night.³⁷⁴ This text as such does not seem to me to be very much related to Jesus' talks and prayer, which are the texts that really interest me, so I will omit its analysis, just like I omitted Peter's objections to having his feet washed.

This being said, there is one point which is crucial, and that is that Jesus did not only wash His faithful disciples' feet but also His betrayer's feet, this while knowing full well what was to come. *In washing Judas' feet, Jesus asserted that our love and caring is not to be limited to those we agree with, to those who do us no harm, but also to those who persecute us, betray us.*

³⁷⁴ "I speak not of you all: I know whom I have chosen: but that the scripture may be fulfilled, He that eateth bread with me hath lifted up his heel against me. Now I tell you before it come, that, when it is come to pass, ye may believe that I am he. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that receiveth whomsoever I send receiveth me; and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me. When Jesus had thus said, he was troubled in spirit, and testified, and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me. Then the disciples looked one on another, doubting of whom he spake. Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of his disciples, whom Jesus loved. Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake. He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it? Jesus answered, He it is, to whom I shall give a sop, when I have dipped it. And when he had dipped the sop, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the sop Satan entered into him. Then said Jesus unto him, That thou doest, do quickly. Now no man at the table knew for what intent he spake this unto him. For some of them thought, because Judas had the bag, that Jesus had said unto him, Buy those things that we have need of against the feast; or, that he should give something to the poor. He then having received the sop went immediately out: and it was night." John 13:18-30

JESUS' LAST TALK AT TABLE

I will start my study of each and every talk by breaking them into short sections, often just a verse long, while always respecting the order of their appearance in the text. I will go back to the original Greek when I feel the need to do so. I will comment and try to make sense of every sentence within the context in which it is found, as I believe that no excerpt can be understood properly if taken out of context. I will try to paraphrase every sentence whenever I feel the need to do so. In fact I will, at the end of each discourse, provide a complete paraphrase of it, trying that way to provide a personal version faithful to the original.

I will be as honest as I possibly can be. I will admit my difficulties when baffled by a text. And I will try to find a way to make sense of it. I will not take for granted anything but the original text, working on it until I come up with what I consider to be an acceptable translation, acceptable in the sense that the meaning I have come up with fits properly within the text as a whole and within the Gospel taken as a whole.

The Introduction: “Glorification”

Right from the start, I must admit that I cannot make sense of Jesus' introduction to His first talk as it is translated in the King James Version:

Therefore, when he [Judas] was gone out, Jesus said, Now is the Son of man glorified, and God is glorified in him. If God be glorified in him, God shall also glorify him in himself, and shall straightway glorify him.³⁷⁵

I take for granted that Jesus is referring to Himself as the “Son of Man”, something He has done consistently in this Gospel. In fact, it cannot possibly refer to anyone else in the context of this Gospel.

This statement about “glorification” has the following logical structure: (1) The “Son of Man”, Jesus, is “glorified” now. (2) His “glorification” causes God to be “glorified”. (3) Because of this “glorification” of God through Jesus', (4) God Himself will “glorify” Jesus, and this, right now.

³⁷⁵ John 13:31b-32

The Oxford Dictionary states that “glorify” means “make glorious”, “exalt to the glory of heaven” where “glory” means “exalted renown”, “honourable fame”, “special distinction”, “subject for boasting” and so on. A paraphrase based on this definition would be something like: “I am now going to become a subject of boasting; my exalted fame will give God a special distinction in the eyes of humans. Because of this exalted renown I will give God, He will immediately make me a subject of boasting.” I must say that I do not find this at all clear! So perhaps it would be useful to go back to the original Greek text and see if there is another possible translation for the term “glorify”.

The Greek verb translated by “is glorified” in the first verse of this segment is “edoksasthè” (εδοξασθη), the passive (aorist) form of the verb “doksazō” (δοξαζω). In its active form, its first meaning is “have an opinion”, “believe”, “think” or “judge”. In its passive form, it would thus mean: “to be known as”, “to be thought of as”, “to be judged as” or “to be believed to be”. The problem then becomes “to be known as” what? This is not expressed in the sentences where these words appear. Part of the idea behind the normal understanding of “glory” is “fame”: a public understanding of someone or something.

Jesus saying about “glorification” would have the following translation: (1) The coming events will permit people to make a judgment on Him. (2) This judgment on Him will affect people’s judgment on God. (3) This will cause God to Himself make a judgment on Jesus (4) which will follow there and then.

I think we could all agree on the fact that any judgment, opinion, belief of God on Jesus must be a correct and truthful one. So, surely, there must be in the use of this term here the idea that the judgment that will be made is a correct and truthful one. If this is the case, the most reasonable translation would be “to be known correctly”, “to be judged correctly”. This sort of fame has to do with accuracy, correct knowledge.

So our segment could be translated quite differently as: “It is now that I am really going to be known for Who I am, and Me being really known will mean that God will also be really known for Who He Is; furthermore, as God will be really known in Me, He will make sure that His knowledge of Me is proclaimed right away.”

From this, I understand Jesus to be saying that the coming events, His handling of the ordeal to come, His passion and death,

which His disciples will be witnesses to, are going to clearly define Who He Is and thus Who God Is. God will vouch for this affirmation of Who He Is through Jesus' actions by His own corroboration that He Is indeed like Jesus says. This corroboration of God will be Him raising Jesus from the dead, Him bringing Jesus back to life, another event which the disciples will witness.

This interpretation seems to make sense since Jesus earlier in this Gospel made it clear that His "glorification" was related to His death, as He mentions it immediately after.³⁷⁶

This last interpretation of the text makes it a fitting introduction to Jesus' first talk as it contains its major theme in a nutshell.

Jesus' farewell

Jesus then gives to His disciples His farewell message: "Little children, yet a little while I am with you. Ye shall seek me: and as I said unto the Jews, Whither I go, ye cannot come; so now I say to you."³⁷⁷ After what can be described as a term of endearment applied to His disciples, Jesus tells them that He is leaving them for somewhere they cannot go, as He had told them and others many times before. They will look for Him and will be unable to find Him. He neither tells them *where* He is going or *why* they cannot go with Him (probably as He assumes that they had already worked it out by what He had said on previous occasions).

He then goes on to say: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."³⁷⁸ This is His last will and testament, His "new commandment": love one another *like* He loves them.

The Greek word translated by "commandment", "entolèn" (ἐντολήν), could be translated by "order", "instruction": Jesus is really giving His disciples their marching orders! This order is "new" as it is His last, final one. The Greek verb translated by "love", "agapate"

³⁷⁶ "And Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit."
John 12:23-24

³⁷⁷ John 12:33

³⁷⁸ John 13:34

(ἀγαπάτε), could also be translated as “show friendship”, “treat with affection”. It implies looking at the other as an equal, as a fellow human; not as a thing, a tool, an instrument to be used and abused. It refers to a concrete way of looking at the other, not just an emotion. They are to look after each other just like Jesus looked after them.

He then adds that this must be their “trademark”, the way for others to identify them as His disciples: “By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another.”³⁷⁹ So this “of Jesus” friendship is an absolute “must” for His disciples: without it, they just are not “of Jesus”.

Jesus is then (not at all surprisingly!) interrupted by Peter, who is still mulling Jesus telling him He is going away and leaving him behind.³⁸⁰ “Simon Peter said unto him, Lord, whither goest thou? Jesus answered him, Whither I go, thou canst not follow me now; but thou shalt follow me afterwards.”³⁸¹ Jesus reiterates that Peter cannot follow Him just now, but adds this time that he will definitely do so later.

This still does not sit well with Peter, always impetuous:³⁸² “Peter said unto him, Lord, why cannot I follow thee now? I will lay down my life for thy sake.”³⁸³ Peter claims he is ready to die for Jesus! This Jesus rebuts by foretelling his three denials of Him that same night: “Jesus answered him, Wilt thou lay down thy life for my sake? Verily, verily, I say unto thee, The cock shall not crow, till thou hast denied me thrice.”^{384, 385}

³⁷⁹ John 13:35

³⁸⁰ It is interesting to note the delay between the question and the point at issue as it took some time for it to “sink in”. Jesus had moved on in what He wanted to say. Peter’s question thus brings Him back to a point He had made previously. This often happens in the real world.

³⁸¹ John 13:36

³⁸² Notice that there is no delay here as Peter did not need any time to react on this occasion.

³⁸³ John 13:37

³⁸⁴ John 13:38

³⁸⁵ Jesus’ answer must have hurt Peter: it shut him up for the rest of the evening!

Jesus' reassurance about His disciples joining Him later

There is no doubt that all the disciples were saddened by Jesus' farewell: they did not want Him to leave them! They could not understand why He would, after all this time. They counted on His presence: He was the centre of their lives; they could not think of life without Him.

He thus has to reassure them. He starts: "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me."³⁸⁶ He asks them to trust Him just like they trust God. This trust is needed for them to accept what Jesus is going to say to them next.

He follows by: "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."³⁸⁷ So Jesus is not just going away; He is going ahead of them, to prepare things for when they will join Him. Jesus points out that where He is going and where they will follow Him later is where His Father lives: His House. He is just going to prepare their rooms for their future stay with Him and His Father.

He then adds: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."³⁸⁸ Not only is Jesus going now to prepare their rooms, He will come back to take them to His Father's "place" so that they can all live together again.

He assumes that His message is understood; so He adds in conclusion: "And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know."³⁸⁹ After all, He just told them He was going to prepare them a place in His Father's house! Where does He live, His Father? Why has He called Him "Father in Heaven" all these years? And He just told them He would come and pick them up as well. So why should they not already know that Jesus will lead them by the hand along the way there?

The reason the disciples cannot follow Him now is because they will not die now as dying is the only way to the Father. He has to

³⁸⁶ John 14:1

³⁸⁷ John 14:2

³⁸⁸ John 14:3

³⁸⁹ John 14:4

go to prepare Heaven for them, which perhaps could mean among other things showing them how to live to reach Heaven.

To me, there is a break in Jesus' talk at this point. He lets things sink in before moving ahead, He takes a time out to make sure that what happened with Peter's question does not happen again.

Jesus spells out His *rôle* and that of His disciples

This is just as well as His disciples are still in the dark. So "Thomas saith unto him, Lord, we know not whither thou goest; and how can we know the way?"³⁹⁰ Thomas does not understand where Jesus can possibly be going, nor the way He will get there. Jesus tries again: "Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me."³⁹¹

There is a lot packed in this short sentence! Our poor Thomas got more than he can cope with! The first part, "I am the way", could refer to Jesus' coming to pick them up, but what about the truth and the life? How make sense of this and what He adds?

Jesus started His talk by pointing out that the way He was going to live the next day is crucial to understand Who He Is and so Who God His Father Is. He now clearly states that the only way to get to the Father is by following His example as He is the One Who tells the Truth about Who God Is, He is the One Who lives life the way His Father meant it to be lived. This statement is of the greatest importance: those who do not live their lives like He does cannot come to the Father. This is why He insists on the fact that they have to love each other, be of service to each other, put others first. Only then will they be able to be in God.

Jesus follows this first statement in response to Thomas' question by another which basically makes the equivalence between the Father and Himself, His Revelation: "If ye had known me, ye should have known my Father also: and from henceforth ye know him, and have seen him."³⁹² Jesus states that knowledge of Him is the same as knowledge of His Father, as He is His Father's Manifes-

³⁹⁰ John 14:5

³⁹¹ John 14:6

³⁹² John 14:7

tation on earth. Then He adds that it is from now on that His disciples will know Him, will understand what makes Him click, Who He is, because *it is in His passion and death that He reveals both Himself and His Father*.

But of course, His apostles are still lost (which is quite useful to us, as it means the same point is somewhat clarified each time it is reiterated in a different fashion): “Philip saith unto him, Lord, shew us the Father, and it sufficeth us.”³⁹³ Philip still thinks that the Father can be “materialized” just like Jesus and he are! This is where his difficulty lies; for him, the Father, to be real, has to be visible. He cannot think of Jesus as the *visage* of His Father.

So Jesus has to make just this point:

Jesus saith unto him, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father; and how sayest thou then, Shew us the Father? Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works. Believe me that I am in the Father, and the Father in me: or else believe me for the very works' sake.³⁹⁴

Jesus has to reaffirm that He is the Father's Incarnation, that He is His Father's Instrument and Mouthpiece. And He argues that this statement of His is *proven* by the miraculous works He has done, works that no human can do by herself. He could not have performed these miracles without God working through Him as He, by Himself, cannot. It is only because Jesus is perfectly representing

³⁹³ John 14:8

³⁹⁴ John 14:9-11

His Father and His Father perfectly “controls” Him that these miracles can be.³⁹⁵

Jesus has thus answered Philip. But as He has brought up the fact that He has done great acts of service to others because of His identification with His Father, He goes on to tell His disciples that they too will do the same if they act like Him, in accordance to His ways, living like Him: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto my Father.”³⁹⁶ He tells them that these works of service that He has been doing, they will also do if they trust Him; in fact, they will do even greater works of service than He did. And why will they? They will because He is going to His Father.

Why will Jesus going to His Father have such an effect? Why will it mean that His disciples will be able to do more than Jesus was able to achieve in His earthly lifetime? But first, is this true? Did they actually achieve more than He did?

The answer is yes. While He opened the way to them, they built on the foundation that are His life and words and managed to convert many to His way of life, to His vision of why we exist. Up until that night Jesus had only managed to put together a small group of clueless individuals. Within a few weeks, these will have created a solid core of many new enthusiastic followers, ready to put their life on the line for Jesus’ vision.

Why should Jesus’ going to His Father have such a profound effect? First, because of the way He is going to His Father: His passion and terrible death, where He shows a complete trust in His Father’s ways as well as patience, humility, a complete lack of violence, a total readiness to forgive, to excuse. Second, because God Father shows that death is not the end of it all: life continues. In fact, it not

³⁹⁵ We see here that for Jesus “theology” is an experimental science: it is based on facts, events; in this case, on the fact that He did miracles for all to see. Jesus also clearly states that “miracles” are events which cannot happen according to the Laws of Nature: God has to overrule those Laws for miracles to happen. The Laws of Nature do not apply some of the time or most of the time but all of the time. All the events which do not conform to them must be due to a direct action of God where He acts outside these Laws. Water left alone in a container never becomes wine: this is absolutely impossible according to the Laws of Nature. It can happen only if God violate these Laws.

³⁹⁶ John 14:12

only continues, it is brought to a new, higher level in the extraordinary bodily transformation that is the resurrection from the dead as the risen are more real, more alive than they were before death.

Jesus' resurrection proves beyond a shadow of a doubt the truthfulness of His message, of His life, of His love. It proves that He is the Embodiment of His Father; that God is perfectly with Him and in Him. And this experimental proof that Jesus is now more fully alive as a body than ever before, a proof that Thomas will double-check by putting his hand in Jesus' wounds, gives them the courage to go ahead and do greater things.

Jesus was an obscure preacher in an insignificant backwater of the Roman Realm. One generation later, His message will be preached all over that Empire, bringing about thousands of people ready to follow Him to the Father to become more alive than they ever were, and who will know for themselves the fact that Jesus is indeed Who He said He Is, and that God is indeed Who Jesus said He Is.

Asking in Jesus' name

After telling His disciples that they will do even greater works than Him because He is going to His Father, Jesus makes a promise: "And whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask any thing in my name, I will do it."³⁹⁷

Jesus repeats Himself to stress His commitment to His promise. Twice He promises that He will grant His disciples anything that they ask in His name. And once He adds that this is to "glorify" His Father in Him.

Now, what does it mean to ask "in Jesus' name"? This is a formula often used by Christians when begging God for something or other. But is it used correctly?

The following formula is used in my country, the Kingdom of Canada: "In the name of our Sovereign Lady, Queen Elisabeth". She who utters these words does so by the orders of the Queen of Canada, according to her laws and regulations and within the powers vested in her by Her Canadian Majesty.

³⁹⁷ John 14:13-14

There are at least three persons involved in this example: the Sovereign who delegated to a chosen representative some powers to act in a specific way, the representative to whom these powers have been delegated under a specific policy and the individual harangued by the Sovereign's representative.

This last individual can herself be a Sovereign: the Queen of the Netherlands, for instance, receiving the credentials of the ambassador of the Queen of Canada. So the disciple would be acting here as Jesus' ambassador, asking things in accordance with her Sovereign's (Jesus') policies and orders.

This means that the disciple cannot ask just anything she feels like in Jesus' name; no, only things which are *in accordance* with Jesus' plan, His program for her.

Furthermore, Jesus is adamant that He is the One to whom the request is made, He is the One Who actually *has the power to grant it*. He did not say that everything that the disciple asks in His name will be granted by God His Father but by Him, God the Son. To come back to our example, He is not only the One Who gave His disciple Her orders but the One Who will see that what she asks according to His policies will be granted. And He says that He will so act to "glorify" His Father, to make Him known for Who He really is.

Jesus follows the text we have just looked at by: "If ye love me, keep my commandments"³⁹⁸ which can be read to say: "If you love me, you will do what I ask of you," which – in Jesus' case – is to be like Me. Jesus goes back on His first point about His commandment of Love, about the sign of discipleship. Jesus will grant His disciple's prayers if she asks Him to make her more able to fulfill His command.

Jesus will provide anything that the disciple asks of Him as long as it is to bring to perfection the mission He has given her. And the reason He will is that this mission, clearly given by Jesus, proclaims Who God Father is as it is manifested by the love the disciple share, a love that copies Jesus' love.

The rôle of the "Breath Advocate"

It must be quite clear that there is nothing that Jesus wants more from His disciples than that they live like Him. But this requires

³⁹⁸ John 14:15

a lot of strength and stamina. So Jesus adds: “And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.”³⁹⁹

Jesus was the One granting prayers a minute ago; now He is the One who prays. The Greek word translated by “I will pray” is “erôtèsô” (ερωτησω). This verb means either “ask a question” or “ask for something”, which of course can then be translated as “petition”.

What Jesus asks from God Father is another “Comforter” for His disciples. The Greek word so translated is “paracleton” (παρακλητον), which means “whom one calls for help”, “advocate for the defense”, “intercessor”.

So it is obvious that Jesus sees Himself as a “helper”, an “advocate for the defense” as He will ask His Father to send His disciples a Helper as His replacement. This Replacement will be sent by God Father just as Jesus was sent by God Father. Why? Because it is God as Father, as the One Who cares for His children, as the One Who looks after His children, Who sends them a new Helper to replace Jesus. And this Helper will always be with them.

Jesus describes this Helper: “Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.”⁴⁰⁰

There is an awful lot of information packed in this one verse! But what are we to make of it? How can we make real sense of this rich sentence?

The Greek word translated by “Spirit” is “pneuma” (πνευμα) which means “blow”, “puff”, “wind”, “breath”, “breath of life”. So this “Helper” is a “breath”! And a “breath of truth”! What does this mean?

But there is more: this “breath of truth” is not available to the “world” as it can neither see nor know it! What is the “world”? This word is the translation of the Greek word “cosmos” (κοσμος) which means “order”, “good order”, “in good order”, “order of the universe”, “world”, “universe”. This word then, refers to the social, economic, political and physical order of the world we live in. A much better

³⁹⁹ John 14:16

⁴⁰⁰ John 14:17

translation would be “world order” as the concept of good and proper organization is paramount to the term. This world order, described in social, political, economic and physical terms, is subject to internal “laws” which provide it with order against chaos.

The Greek verb translated by “see” is “*theôrei*” (θεωρεῖ) which means “observe”, “examine”, “contemplate”, “inspect”, “make sense of”. The Greek verb translated by “know” is “*ginôskei*” (γινώσκει) which means “learn to know”, “understand”. So Jesus is saying that this world order cannot make sense of this “breath”; that this world order cannot grasp it as it is totally foreign to it, so foreign that this “breath” is, to all intent, invisible to it!

This “breath”, incompatible with the world order, has to do with the truth. So Jesus claims that Truth and this world order are incompatible. On the one hand, this “breath of life” which speaks the Truth cannot be understood by this world order; on the other hand, it is understood by Jesus’ disciples, for it is *in* them: they actually *breathe* it if they live according to Jesus, loving instead of judging, refusing to fight, refusing to hate, refusing to demand retribution, punishment, justice but breathing love towards all, friends and foes alike.

This “breath” is *internal* to those who live according to Jesus; it is a strength that they have inside them; it is what keeps them going, it is what drives them. It is something real, experienced as coming from God by those who actually live by it.⁴⁰¹ While Jesus is Someone Who

⁴⁰¹ Again, God is experienced by the disciple as real and distinct from her. Theology is thus even today an experimental science, as God is experienced today by those who seek Him. Theology is more than an experimental historical science, as after all, Jesus’ life and death happened within history and are not as such experienced now. Jesus is not actually reliving His earthly life now: He is well and truly dead! He lived in history and was experienced then only by a small number of people. But the dead Jesus can be experienced today as He, dead, lives for ever in His Father.

Of course, God cannot be “experienced” by those who refuse on principle to recognize His possible existence just like the positive electron (positron) could not be “discovered” until its possible existence could be contemplated by the researcher. In that case, the thorough analysis by Anderson of a single trace left by that particle on a photographic emulsion could only be made sense of by the assumption of its existence. But as soon as this analysis was published, those who now accepted its existence were able to make sense of hundreds of other traces of that particle that had been already collected over the last years, traces that were until then simply treated as either unimportant or baffling. Which shows that what is considered impossible cannot be experimentally found, but only what is considered to be possible. Furthermore, it can be found only by those who are ready to invest time and effort in investigating it.

To come back to God, those who do not care about His existence or Jesus’ message for example, will not be ready to spend any time or effort to find out if He is, and if so, if He is as Jesus said He is.

is experienced as outside the self, the “Breath of life” is Someone Who is experienced inside our body, ourselves, just like our breath comes from inside our body, ourselves.

Jesus’ promise to return soon

Jesus then moves on to a different stage of His talk. He goes on with: “I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.”⁴⁰² This translation seems wrong to me as the Greek word translated by “leave”, “aphèsō” (ἀφήσω), actually means “let go”, “hurl”, “throw” and the one translated by “comfortless”, “orphanous” (ὀρφανούς), means “without father or mother”, “orphan”. So what Jesus is saying to His disciples is: “I will not send you on your way as orphans.” Why? because He will come to them.

This is bizarre! What does this sentence mean that Jesus would be sending His disciples orphans, without a father? Before we try to make sense of this, let us examine the next two verses, which might shed some light on this problem.

We first have: “Yet a little while, and the world seeth me no more; but ye see me: because I live, ye shall live also.”⁴⁰³ Jesus first says that this world order will never see Him again. This can easily be understood as He will then be dead and buried. He adds that His disciples will see Him again soon while others will not. This implies that He will show Himself alive though dead only to them. This of course is what happened after His resurrection: He showed Himself to be really and truly alive to His disciples but not to others.

He then goes on to say that His disciples will live because He will live. This again is true because His disciples’ lives will be changed completely by the fact that He will be well and truly alive again. This will become the determinant factor in their lives.

He follows that with: “At that day ye shall know that I am in my Father, and ye in me, and I in you.”⁴⁰⁴ He says that the disciples’ knowledge that Jesus is well and truly alive while being dead will

⁴⁰² John 14:18

⁴⁰³ John 14:19

⁴⁰⁴ John 14:20

prove to them that He did tell the truth about His Father; that He and His Father are indeed one, and so they are with Him.

Now can we make sense of Jesus' statement about not sending His disciples as orphans? We do know that He told them that God is their Father just like God is His Father. So His statement could be read as Jesus not sending them without them knowing for a fact that God is their Father.

Jesus' message is based on God being Father, One Who cares, One Who loves and One Who is of service to His humans. Because He is so, there is no point worrying about anything: what others do to us does not matter in the end as God Father will take us to Himself. This earthly life is not the end, just a beginning. What comes next is a life more real, more complete, a life in the presence of God Father.

A way to show that God is indeed Father is by Jesus being raised from the dead. His reappearance after His death as a real, complete human being is the proof that the disciples are not without a God Who is their Father, and so that they are not orphans.

And it is with this proof as the basis of their lives that He is sending them on their mission of proclaiming His message about God Father and His love and service for all and sundry, message that He is sending them to live by their love for each other. Indeed, their proclamation is first and foremost one of living this love rather than just talking about it.

Loving Jesus means living like He said we should

Jesus now clearly states that He demands deeds, not words. He tells His disciples to live according to His orders: "He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him."⁴⁰⁵ For Jesus, love is something active, concrete. To love Him is to act like Him, to follow His directives. And the one who so acts, being Jesus-like, will be loved both by God Father and by Jesus. Indeed, Jesus will even manifest Himself, show Himself to her. Because of her love for Jesus, she is immediately

⁴⁰⁵ John 14:21

loved both by God Father and by Jesus, Who will then be present to her in a very concrete way.⁴⁰⁶

This is followed by the fourth and last question, this one by Judas: “Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world?”⁴⁰⁷ Jesus’ answer to this question is very informative: “Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him.”⁴⁰⁸ For God and Jesus to be “seen”, “sensed”, “experienced”, the disciple must first love Jesus, live according to His words. Then both Jesus and His Father will love her and live in her. We could say that as Jesus’ way of life becomes internalized in the disciple, she becomes a “temple” in which God as Father and as Jesus lives. And she who has become such a “temple” will know for a fact that God Father is within her, and so God the Word.⁴⁰⁹

Jesus now comes back to what He considers the most important: loving Him means loving God and living as He wants us to: “He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings: and the word which ye hear is not mine, but the Father’s which sent me.”⁴¹⁰ Not keeping His precepts is tantamount to not loving Him or God His Father, as He only said what His Father wanted Him to say. Again, nothing is more important than to live according to His words. In fact, nothing else is important.

He then goes on to say: “These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you.”⁴¹¹ He states that He became a human to show them how to live correctly, truthfully, both in words and deeds. I would go as far as saying that this is the only reason He became a human as I believe that “to be saved” actually means living our life as He lived His. And this He showed to its fullest on Good Friday.

⁴⁰⁶ Again, Jesus makes it clear that theology is an experimental science.

⁴⁰⁷ John 14:22

⁴⁰⁸ John 14:23

⁴⁰⁹ This is yet another clear statement by Jesus that theology is an experimental science.

⁴¹⁰ John 14:24

⁴¹¹ John 14:25

Another *rôle* of the “Breath”: Peace-giver

Jesus is now going to His death and so He will not be there anymore to give support and guidance to His disciples. They will need to take over, to be in charge. As He knows that His disciples will need a Helper to fulfil their new *rôle*, He adds: “But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.”⁴¹²

Jesus gives a new name to His disciples’ new Helper Whom He had called “Spirit of truth” previously: “Holy Ghost”. The Greek word translated here by “Ghost” is “pneuma” (πνευμα), the same one we saw would be better translated by “breath” and the one translated by “holy” is “agion” (αγιον). Its translations are “holy”, “sacred” or “august”. When it comes to “breath”, the term “august” seems to me to make the most sense: it is the quality of a breath that is deep and slow, measured, controlled; the breath of someone who is serene, confident and unafraid. It is the breath of someone who is not bilious, angry, raging, nor full of trepidations or anxieties or imprecations.

Without breath, a human dies; so breath is absolutely necessary to life. But breath is more than that as the type of breath indicates the kind of person the human is. An august breath implies someone serene, someone who is in control, who can figure out with assurance what to do.

This “August Breath”, Who was referred to earlier as the “Breath of Truth”, gives the disciples the assurance that God loves them, looks after them, sees to their needs, gives them what they need to do the mission Jesus is sending them on. This peaceful “Breath” reminds them all what Jesus said as they begin living His message. A message is, after all, only understood when it is interiorized, and this is what this “Breath” does: it makes Jesus message alive *inside* His disciples.

Jesus goes on to elaborate: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.”⁴¹³ Jesus’ peace is not like the world’s peace, He says. Why is that? His peace is based

⁴¹² John 14:26

⁴¹³ John 14:27

on Love while the world's peace is based on Force, Violence.⁴¹⁴ Jesus' peace permits His disciples' hearts to be untroubled, as they are unafraid, as this peace is this "August Breath", this confidence in God Father.

Jesus' closing comments

Jesus proceeds to a kind of recapitulation. He starts with: "Ye have heard how I said unto you, I go away, and come again unto you. If ye loved me, ye would rejoice, because I said, I go unto the Father: for my Father is greater than I."⁴¹⁵ This starts as a straightforward recapitulation of something already said: He is going (to death) and will come back (alive from death). He always uses the expression "going to the Father" to mean "going to death" as this is the only way to go to Him. Then He slips in a new message: the disciples should rejoice for Jesus that He goes back to His Father as His Father is greater than Him!

I can understand that the disciples should be happy for Jesus that He goes to meet God Father, just like people should be happy when we die to meet God Father. What could be construed as odd is that "my Father is greater than I". Jesus Who said that He and His Father are one, now says that the Father is greater than Him! Perhaps, but He also said that He gets His marching orders from God Father, that He is God Father's Mouthpiece, acting by Him. So God Father is greater than Jesus. Being one does not mean being the same, equal.

Jesus then adds: "And now I have told you before it come to pass, that, when it is come to pass, ye might believe."⁴¹⁶ He tells them that things will happen just as He said they would. This prescience will be a further proof to His disciples that He is of God.

He then adds something which I find odd: "Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in me."⁴¹⁷ The first part of the sentence is clear: He has very

⁴¹⁴ "Si vis pacem, para bellum". (If you want peace, prepare war.) Roman author unknown.

⁴¹⁵ John 14:28

⁴¹⁶ John 14:29

⁴¹⁷ John 14:30

little time left in this life, and will not spend most of it with them, but being interrogated, tortured, hanged to die on a cross. But He then mentions why: the coming of the “prince of this world” who “has nothing over me”.

The Greek word translated as “prince” is “archôn” (αρχων): it means “leader”, “king”. The related verb “archô” (αρχω) means “be first”, “lead”, “guide”, “start”. So it refers to the one who leads the world, who gives it its orders. This leader has nothing on Jesus and so is totally different from Him. What is going to follow is a clash of “civilizations”, of world views, of living.

On the one hand, this world order, on the other, Jesus; on the one hand, a world of violence, on the other, a world of love. And this clash is exactly what will happen: Jesus will be tortured and killed by Roman soldiers on the order of the Roman Proconsul of Judea, as representative of the sole superpower of the time, the Roman Republic. Jesus will not fight back, complain, rage against this injustice, nor utter a word in His defence. He will only forgive and show His love to all who want it, like the murderer crucified next to Him who begs Him to be with Him in Paradise.

Then He follows up with His last statement of this talk: “But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave me commandment, even so I do. Arise, let us go hence.”⁴¹⁸ He finishes by stating that the actions He is going to do over the next day will be in accordance with His Father’s instructions as loving His Father means following His will. So Jesus’ actions will prove to this world order that He truly loves His Father.

How is that? Jesus has preached day in, day out, that His Father is a God of Love and Service and not a God of Violence. He will now practice what He has been preaching: forgiving rather than fighting back, loving rather than hating, giving rather than grasping, letting go of life rather than defending Himself. He preached belief in God’s love in all circumstances: He will now live this to the full. So the representatives of this world order, Pilate the Proconsul, the Chief Priests, the Centurion at Calvary, all will be able to see for themselves that He is true to His words, that He really lives His Father’s message.

⁴¹⁸ John 14:31

We can see in this first talk a progression of ideas with a back movement due to the disciples' questions. We can also see in it a thematic unity. Everything fits well in its place.

The Beaulieu revised version!

I will now try to put this first talk in my own words. Of course, this is somewhat presumptuous. But there is nothing like trying to paraphrase a text to see if one really understands it. So here is my "version". I sincerely hope that it does fully convey the message found in the actual Greek text. The one liberty I will take consists in omitting the disciples' questions from Jesus' talk.

What will going to happen to Me in the next few hours will tell you exactly and truthfully Who I am and Who God Father Is. My reaction to what is to come will tell you exactly how you must live your life as it is the only way you can come to God Father.

You should already know that I am representing God Father because of the various works and miracles God Father has done through Me: I could not have done them on My own.

I am going to die soon as this is the way to God Father. On the other hand, you must live. Only later will you die, when I come to fetch you to bring you to God Father. In the meantime, you have to represent God Father, and act like Me, doing great works and miracles. You have to strive to be like Me, to follow My instructions, so that God Father is known for Who He Is. I want you to love each other just like I love you. This is to be the criterion to identify you as My disciples.

You will need help. I will see that God Father sends you a new Helper, a Truthful Breath that will act within you, that you will experience while He is invisible to this world order.

I will also clearly show you that though dead, I am alive. You will then clearly see that God Father is in Me just like I am in Him and that I tell you the truth about God Father.

I want to make one point perfectly clear: loving Me means following My instructions, which really are God Father's. The Truthful Breath that God Father

will give you will remind you of all I said, and, as August Breath, will give you the kind of peace that only God as Father can give you.

The kind of peace this world order gives is no peace at all, as it requires you to be constantly on your guard, ready to threaten violence. My peace, based on trust in God Father, casts away all anxiety as you are not to protect yourselves but only trust in God Father.

I am telling you all this in advance so that you can check later that I was telling you the truth and that I indeed knew what was to come. In this clash between this world order and Me, between two world views that have absolutely nothing in common, you must clearly show by your love that you are on My side, the side of God Father.

JESUS' TALK ON THE WALK

According to the Gospel's author, Jesus gave His first talk *before* leaving the room where He had just eaten with His disciples. This implies that He gave His second "talk" after leaving that room, while on His way with them. This would explain that talk's different format. One can even assume that Jesus would have stopped a few times on the way to talk again to His disciples, before getting to the brook Cedron.

This second talk seems to have been an offshoot of a new parable by Jesus. As this parable is about a vine, it could have come to Jesus' mind as He was walking with His disciples on their way to the garden where they were all to meet Judas. As it was the full moon, or close enough to it, the moonlight permitted them to see quite well in the night. So one can picture Jesus talking while walking, stopping to make a point, walking some more. This fits rather well with the loose structure of this text.

After all, we have no reason to believe that they all walked silently to meet Judas. On the contrary, Jesus' realization that He had very little time left with His disciples would have prompted Him to speak.

This talk is definitely not a mere repetition of the previous one. The disciples' *rôle* is put in more active terms while Jesus' is put in more passive ones. Furthermore, the style is totally different, with the introductory parable giving it a completely new colour.

The Parable of the Vine

Jesus' second Maundy Thursday talk starts with a beautiful parable, where He compares Himself to a vine and God Father to the farmer: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."⁴¹⁹ I would rather translate this as: "I am truly a vine and my Father is its farmer."

In this we see God Father in an active *rôle* while Jesus is in a somewhat passive one. Not that a vine is totally inactive, but its farmer lords over it as he can decide to cut it down, or prune it in any way he so chooses. He goes on: "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he pur-

⁴¹⁹ John 15:1

geth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”⁴²⁰ We see the farmer working to maximize his vine’s grape output. So Jesus says He Himself is like a vine. His Father cuts off the branches that have no grapes and those that do, He prunes to make them produce even more. Jesus, just like everyone else, has to produce as much fruit as possible.

Jesus then goes on to say something that I find rather strange and out of place just here: “Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.”⁴²¹ Here, Jesus brings His disciples into the picture. But what is this all about? The Greek word translated by “clean”, “katharoi” (καθαροί), means “without blemish”, “spotless”, “unadulterated”, “clean” or “pure”. But what has being “without blemish” got to do with the vine? How can Jesus’ words make His disciples “spotless”? What does this mean? Why is it just there?

I do not know much about vines, being born and bred in a city. But I have heard that vines can suffer from rot which attacks their branches and makes them incapable of producing fruit. This rot, which changes the nature of the branch from what it should be, shows itself as a blemish on the branch’s surface. So it is likely that this is what Jesus has in mind here. If this is the case, the branches of the vine that must be without blemish are His disciples. After all, they are the ones that must be so.

This interpretation seems to be correct as Jesus then proceeds with: “Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me.”⁴²² The Greek word translated as “abide” is “mainate” (μαίνατε). It means “stay”, “stay put”, “stay with”, “stay the same”. We could thus translate the first sentence as: “Stay with Me and I will stay in you.”

Jesus then proceeds to explain that His disciples are His branches and that, as vine branches, their job is to produce grapes, something they cannot at all do if they are not part of the vine. So His disciples cannot bear fruit without Him (nor, for that matter, can He without them).

⁴²⁰ John 15:2

⁴²¹ John 15:3

⁴²² John 15:4

He then reinforces this message, which shows how important it is to Him that His disciples understand it clearly: "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing."⁴²³ Again, He makes clear the symbiotic relation between Him and His disciples. Together they form one body, one organism: a vine.

Perhaps it is worth pointing out that the branches are not the vine but only parts of the vine. It is by its roots and its leaves that the vine as a whole nourishes the grapes that grow on its branches. The vine is one, but has many parts and many branches. Only the vine's branches that are alive and well bear its fruit.

This is why He adds: "If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned."⁴²⁴ The only way a branch can stay alive is by staying part of the vine; otherwise it falls off the vine where it withers and dies and ends up burnt. Let me remark here that Jesus is clearly stating that any human who is not part of Him withers and dies as only He can keep them alive. Only by living His message, by being like Him, can she really stay alive.

Now this is quite a statement! It means that anyone who is not a good Christian dies. This is true... but what does it mean to be a good Christian? It means to live like Jesus did, to follow His precept of love for all; it means to bless and not to curse; it means to forgive and not to hit back; it means to love and not to hate; to be of help, of service rather than to lord over. This, after all, is Jesus' message in a nutshell.

Jesus now moves on to say: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you."⁴²⁵ We have a rather strange promise which requires two conditions, one of which having to do with His words staying in His disciples. What is this all about?

Jesus spoke earlier about His words making His disciples "spotless", "unadulterated". Could it be that His words are the sap

⁴²³ John 15:5

⁴²⁴ John 15:6

⁴²⁵ John 15:7

that gives life to the branches and makes them pure, genuine vine branches? That certainly could explain why the branches that are not being fed by His words would be cut off from Him as the Vine. It would also explain how it is that staying in Jesus requires being “fed” by His words.

If the disciple is fed by Jesus’ words, if she lives as His branch bearing His fruit, she can ask anything she wants: it necessarily will be what Jesus wants and so will come to pass. Again we have the same idea as in the previous talk: asking anything that is in accord with Jesus’ plan is going to happen. But let us be more precise: anything that is asked about herself as it is going to “be done to you”. The disciple is to ask to be bearing more fruit, to be more and more what she is meant to be.

This Jesus makes clear by this parable’s ultimate sentence: “Herein is my Father glorified, that ye bear much fruit; so shall ye be my disciples.”⁴²⁶ Here the translation is slightly wrong as the Greek text does not say “so” but “and”. A better translation would be: “Bearing more fruit and being My disciples show My Father to be Who He really is.” In fact, one could say that “bearing much fruit” is “being My disciple”: Jesus wants results. Being His disciple requires a behaviour truly different from that of a disciple of this “world order”.

Your fruit is your love

Jesus seems to leave His parable as He starts on the subject of love. He first states: “As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love.”⁴²⁷ It is interesting to note that Jesus loves His disciples just like God Father loves Him. In a way, one could say that it is God Father Who taught Jesus how to love (a statement not totally ludicrous, as He is God Father’s Son and children learn from their parents).

But what is this about remaining in Jesus’ love? The Greek word translated by “continue” is in fact the one He was using just previously about the vine’s branches. So we can see that this section is really based on the parable just examined. Remaining in Jesus’ love is like remaining His branch, and so continuing to be fed by His instructions.

⁴²⁶ John 15:8

⁴²⁷ John 15:9

He explains more fully: "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love."⁴²⁸ To continue, remain in Jesus' love, the disciple must keep Jesus' orders, just like Jesus had to keep God Father's orders to continue, remain in His love. Now there is something rather strange about this statement.

Indeed, either God Father's love is unconditional, or it is not. Either He loves each and every human whatever, or He does not. Jesus elsewhere stated that God Father makes His sun shine on good and evil humans equally. This statement seems to contradict the former.

Perhaps we need the previous parable to understand how to reconcile both texts. God Father makes His sun shine on His vine. He also prunes His vine to make it give more fruit. He helps it, He is of service to it; He loves it, He tends to it with care. He provides this help to every branch of His vine; but He cannot in practice look after the branches that have fallen off His vine as they are dead. He did not wish them to die; on the contrary, He wanted to look after them just like His sun is still shining on them, but to no avail. His love is thwarted by the branches which have cut themselves off from His vine.

For a branch to cut itself from the vine, it has to refuse to receive its sap. Without this sap it cannot remain a vine branch: it becomes a dead branch. This sap is what permits the branch to be what God Father wants it to be: a fully grown vine branch. This same sap flows from the vine (Jesus) to its branches (His disciples) and so becomes what God Father wants each one of Jesus' branches to be.

So it seems that we have a way to reconcile both statements. God Father wants *all of us* to be fully ourselves, but we cannot do that without living according to Jesus' teaching and example. We *can* decide not to follow His ways, to cut ourselves from Him and from God Father: He does not cease to love us, but His love is now totally futile, as we are now basically dead: we are of this world order, an order of violence and death.

Jesus follows with: "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."⁴²⁹ What

⁴²⁸ John 15:10

⁴²⁹ John 15:11

has joy to do with what He has just said? Jesus wants His joy to remain in His disciples and He wants His disciples' joy to be complete. He says that what He has just said to them should have that effect. And what He has just said had to do with His Father's love for Him, His love for them, and their love for each other and for Him. Love brings about joy. Complete love brings complete joy.

Jesus now reiterates a sentence that He basically said in His first talk: "This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you."⁴³⁰ Again, the disciples must copy Jesus' love in their love for each other. They have to act like Him. He immediately adds: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."⁴³¹ This statement certainly was meant by Jesus to refer (among other cases) to what He Himself would live in the next few hours. But does it make sense? How is it that Jesus is going to die for His friends?

What is going to happen is that Jesus is going to be arrested, found guilty of sedition by the Roman Proconsul, found guilty of blasphemy by the Chief priests, tortured and put to death by crucifixion. He is also liquidated as someone who was deemed dangerous to the survival of the Jewish people by the powers that be. These are facts, but they have absolutely nothing to do with what Jesus just said. In what way is Jesus laying down His life for His friends?

Jesus will show by His passion and death *how* to cope with adversity, with this world order. He will stand tall, answer questions only when He thinks it valuable for the hearer and stay silent otherwise. He will remain unafraid, peaceful, patiently facing the blows, the insults and the terrible ordeal of crucifixion. *He is thus giving His friends an example of how to live selflessly, refusing completely to adopt any of this world order's methods. He is giving to His friends the supreme example of the Christian life.*

Jesus then goes to say: "Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you."⁴³² To be a friend of Jesus, we have to follow His orders; nothing else will do. Again, to be a friend of Jesus, one

⁴³⁰ John 15:12

⁴³¹ John 15:13

⁴³² John 15:14

has to love Him, and loving Him means following His orders, which means, following His example.

The disciples are sent as friends and not as servants

It is possible to imagine that something happened at this point of the walk and thus of Jesus' talk; I can imagine that they passed a house where a servant was taking orders from his master. This would explain why Jesus now brings up a point He has not dwelt on before: "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."⁴³³ Jesus' distinction between "servants" and "friends" is one based on knowledge: while the orders given to a servant do not normally contain any explanation or justification, the orders given to friends come with arguments as to why they are crucial, imperative and necessary. And this explanation comes from God as Father, as the One Who knows His plan for each of us.

Jesus goes on to say: "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you."⁴³⁴ This sentence is quite complicated and contains many points, some which we have already seen, sometimes in a different form, and some which we have not.

What He is saying is that He is the One Who gives orders. He chose His disciples. They are His agents, and it is their job to work effectively (bring forth much fruit, a return to the introductory parable) for the Kingdom. As long as they are His agents, His officials, His vine branches, God as Father will grant them anything they ask for. (Here it is not Jesus Who receives and grants His disciples' requests but God Father.)

Jesus then closes this section of His talk by what He considers its fundamental point: "These things I command you, that ye love one another."⁴³⁵ All He is saying seems to come down to that single statement: love each other. It is as if nothing else matters.

⁴³³ John 15:15

⁴³⁴ John 15:16

⁴³⁵ John 15:17

The world's hate of Jesus will be transferred to His disciples

Jesus contrasts His commandment of love for each other with this statement of fact about our world order: "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you."⁴³⁶ The Greek word translated as "hate", "misei" (μισει), can also be translated by "detest", which to me is even stronger. Jesus claims that this world order detests Him, and will detest His agents, as they are continuing His work.

This is a rather strong statement. Is Jesus basically paranoid? Is this world order really detesting Him and all He stands for? Are not His present agents well considered by our present world order? We certainly cannot say that the Pope is reviled by our world's establishment, its presidents and prime ministers; nor are the bishops persecuted by most of our world's media, tycoons and politicians. So it thus seems that Jesus is plain wrong here. In fact, most if not all Church officials seem to be rather cozy with the powers that be. Could this be explained by the fact that they do not teach this fundamental message of love for all and sundry irrespective of the crimes committed? Could it be because they do not insist on the need to turn the other cheek at all times? Could it be because they do not preach the need to forgive everyone, whatever the crime? Could it be because they do not stand against all forms of violence, including that done by the police under the law or by a country's armed forces under the orders of a legally constituted government? Did any member of the clergy suggest to the American people that they should turn the other cheek after the destruction of the World Trade Center?

Jesus adds on this subject: "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you."⁴³⁷ Jesus makes it clear that this world order has no problem with those who act according to its laws and customs. Those it cannot cope with are the individuals who act outside those laws and customs, as they by their very existence put into question the whole scheme on which it is based. And, adds Jesus, He has taken His disciples out of this scheme as His commandment of love towards one another is con-

⁴³⁶ John 15:18

⁴³⁷ John 15:19

trary to this world order. This makes them outlaws, people to be hunted down and destroyed.

He goes on to say: “Remember the word that I said unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept my saying, they will keep yours also.”⁴³⁸ Jesus is sending His disciples as His agents, to proclaim His message. This world’s order’s reaction to them will thus be the same as it was to Him.⁴³⁹ Those who accept Him will accept them; those who persecute Him will persecute them.

Jesus then goes one step further in His claim: “But all these things will they do unto you for my name’s sake, because they know not him that sent me.”⁴⁴⁰ The reason why some will persecute them for following Jesus, He says, is because they do not know the One who sent Him, God Father. Indeed, their god is not every human’s Father, but someone who crushes his enemies and makes them pay to the full; a god of justice, a god of war, a god that divides people between the “saved”, his personal friends, and the “damned”, those his friends cannot stand.

This world order’s mistakes are now faults

Jesus then utters some sentences that I find difficult to understand in the King James Version: “If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin.”⁴⁴¹ Here we have the first reference to “sin” in Jesus’ discourses after the Last Supper. The Greek word so translated, “amartian” (αμαρτιαν), means “error”, “mistake” or “fault”. This text would be better translated as: “they had no fault until I came and spoke to them, but now they have no excuse concerning their mistake.” Jesus has come to correct the mistake good religious people had made in interpreting Who God Is and what He wills. But now the excuse of ignorance is no longer valid as Jesus has made these corrections,

⁴³⁸ John 15:20

⁴³⁹ from this we should be able to conclude that we can determine how truthful to Jesus’ message we are by how we are treated: we are truthful to Jesus if we are treated like He was.

⁴⁴⁰ John 15:21

⁴⁴¹ John 15:22

has proved that He indeed speaks for God, has proclaimed Who God really is, has clearly stated what we must do to be saved.

That this is the correct interpretation is made evident by what follows: first Jesus' assertion to be the incarnation of His Father "He that hateth me hateth my Father also"⁴⁴² in which He makes clear that He speaks for God Father, and then by "If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both me and my Father."⁴⁴³

Jesus clearly says that before He came, gave the message He did and did the miracles He did, the people's errors were not faults; they just did not know better. They could not be blamed for their misinterpretation of God's message. This statement is very important as in it Jesus states categorically that the message found in the Septuagint is neither clear, nor correct, nor complete.

But now that Jesus has given God Father's message clearly, correctly, completely, now that He has proven conclusively that He is representing His Father by signs and miracles that no mere human could have done without God acting through Him, there is no longer any valid reason to pursue the wrong values and attitudes. What was an error is now a fault.

He follows with: "But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated me without a cause."⁴⁴⁴ It is freely that people detest Jesus. They have definitely no cause as He proved that He was God's Voice by His miracles. But God's message is totally unacceptable to this world order; so those who follow it have no choice but to attack both Jesus and His disciples (as they represent Him)⁴⁴⁵ and so attack God Father as well as Jesus definitely represents His Father.

The rôle of the disciples' Helper

Jesus then says that His disciples will have a Helper: "But when the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Fa-

⁴⁴² John 15:23

⁴⁴³ John 15:24

⁴⁴⁴ John 15:25

⁴⁴⁵ or should I have written "in the measure that they effectively represent Him"?

ther, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me.”⁴⁴⁶ Jesus again tells His disciples that God Father will send them the Breath of Truth as a Helper. These are mostly points He already made in His talk at table that evening although there are also two new points.

The first is that this Helper “proceeds from the Father”. What does this term mean? The Greek word “ekporeuetai” (εκπορευεται) means “come out”. This Breath of Truth comes out of God Father; I suppose we could say that this Breath is an exhalation of God Father.

The second is that this Breath will “testify of me”. The Greek word translated by “testify” is “marturesei” (μαρτυρησει). It is a legal term that means “be a witness”, “give a statement as a witness”, “testify” or “attest”. From this word comes the word “martyr” as the one who attests with her life what she is stating. How this Breath of Truth will attest to Jesus is not said. But Jesus is very much someone who believes in actions rather than just words. So this Breath will have to act in ways that are clear for people to see.

Jesus then goes on to say “And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with me from the beginning.”⁴⁴⁷ The Greek term translated here as “bear witness” is the same one that was translated a line earlier as “testify to me”. The *rôle* of the disciples is to give an account of Jesus’ life, acts and words. Theirs is a *rôle* of telling the truth about Him, of giving us the facts. They are to tell us “the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth” with God Father’s Helper within them.

The disciples’ hardships predicted

Jesus goes on to tell His disciples that He is preparing them for the hardships to come by predicting them, by telling them that they are unavoidable. This way they will not be scandalized when they happen: “These things have I spoken unto you, that ye should not be offended.”⁴⁴⁸ He does not want His disciples to think for a moment that their hardships to come are to be construed as a sign that God

⁴⁴⁶ John 15:26

⁴⁴⁷ John 15:27

⁴⁴⁸ John 16:1

Father is abandoning them, a sign that He is really on the side of their adversaries.

He goes further. Indeed, He forecasts a violent reaction by the Jewish leaders against them: "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."⁴⁴⁹ His disciples will be persecuted by the Jewish authorities and their followers, all convinced of acting in the true service of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Of course, the reason why they will be so acting is because their knowledge of God is erroneous: "And these things will they do unto you, because they have not known the Father, nor me."⁴⁵⁰ The fundamental problem is their ignorance of Who God Father Is, an ignorance based on an ignorance of Who Jesus is, the Manifestation of God Father.

Jesus then goes on to say: "But these things have I told you, that when the time shall come, ye may remember that I told you of them. And these things I said not unto you at the beginning, because I was with you."⁴⁵¹ For Jesus, it is important that His disciples know that He is well aware of the great difficulties facing them ahead. But He trusts that they can and will cope with them, that they are now mature enough to face the music. He did not tell them things like that before as He was there to hold them by the hand when the going got tough.

He tells them why He trusts in their newly found maturity: "But now I go my way to him that sent me; and none of you asketh me, Whither goest thou?"⁴⁵² Indeed, though He is on His way to God Father, the One Who sent Him on His mission, His disciples are not holding on to Him, pleading that they cannot cope without Him. For Him, the very fact that they are not asking where He is going implies that they are ready to be left alone on their mission.

Which of course does not mean that they do not feel very sad at seeing Jesus go: "But because I have said these things unto

⁴⁴⁹ John 16:2

⁴⁵⁰ John 16:3

⁴⁵¹ John 16:4

⁴⁵² John 16:5

you, sorrow hath filled your heart.”⁴⁵³ They are sad, but also ready to accept the fact of His departure, His death.

The many rôles of the Advocate

Jesus now proceeds to try to cheer His disciples up by talking about their new Helper. At first glance, His first statement is rather odd: “Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you.”⁴⁵⁴ Here we have quite a long sentence. He says that it is to their advantage that He leaves them, as it is the only way the Helper can come to them.

But why does Jesus have to go away for their Helper to come? We have seen earlier that Jesus is both His disciples’ first Helper and their Master. As He goes, they have to take over: after being mere assistants in Jesus’ earthly mission, they now are put in charge. This new Helper is coming to help them take charge, make decisions, face difficulties without the earthly physical presence of Jesus as guide.

This is followed by a very strange statement about this Helper: “And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.”⁴⁵⁵ Here we have quite a few words whose translation need to be checked.

The Greek word translated by “reprove”, “*eleigksei*” (ἐλεγξει) means “accuse”, “refute”, “reproach” someone about something. We have already seen that the Greek word translated by “sin”, “*amartias*” (αμαρτίας), means “error”, “fault”. The Greek word translated by “righteousness”, “*dikaiousunè*” (δικαιοσύνης) means “justice”, “practice of justice”. And, finally, the Greek word translated by “judgment”, “*krisèôs*” (κρίσεως), means “deciding”, “choice”, “election”, “separating”, “judgment”, “condemnation”.

But what are we to make of this sentence even after having examined the proper meaning of these four Greek terms? What does it really mean? Perhaps this can be understood more easily if we

⁴⁵³ John 16:6

⁴⁵⁴ John 16:7

⁴⁵⁵ John 16:8

notice that Jesus follows this preliminary statement by the reasons He gives for its validity. So perhaps it should be examined within the context of the proofs He offers.

The first of these is: "Of sin, because they believe not on me."⁴⁵⁶ Considering the previous sentence, Jesus says that the Helper will accuse this world order of "sin" for not believing Him. This translation does not make much sense to me. I can make much more sense of it with the substitution of "error" for the word "sin". Jesus would then be saying that the Helper would be clearly stating to this world order that it was for them an error, a serious error, not to believe in Jesus' message.

The second argumentation is: "Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more."⁴⁵⁷ This is again bizarre! Why is Jesus' going to the Father, disappearing from His disciples the reason for the Helper to accuse this world order? Furthermore, since when does one accuse someone of righteousness?

We have seen that Jesus going to His Father and disappearing from view means His death. So Jesus' statement could be paraphrased as: "Of righteousness, because of my death." But this does not make much sense either. Of course we have seen that the Greek term translated by "righteousness" could also be translated by "practice of justice". Could this then be better translated as: "the Helper will accuse them about their way of practicing justice, as they will have condemned me to death?"

At least it does make definite sense within the context of the Acts of the Apostles, where the disciples accuse on many occasions the leaders and members of their world's order of putting to death an innocent man, Jesus, the Manifestation of God Father as well as of being stubborn in refusing to recognize Jesus as God's Mouthpiece.

The third argumentation is: "Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged."⁴⁵⁸ We have the Helper refuting the world about "judgment" because the "prince of this world" stands "judged". The verb translated by "judged" is from the same root as the noun

⁴⁵⁶ John 16:9

⁴⁵⁷ John 16:10

⁴⁵⁸ John 16:11

translated by “judgment”. We have already seen that the Greek word translated by “prince”, “apchôn” (αρχων), means “head” or “magistrate” and so the one who is first, shows the way, guides others.

This being said, what sense can we make of this? Why is the leader of the world “judged”? One judges between choices. If there is only one choice, there is no judgment. But Jesus’ life, death and resurrection establish another choice from that offered by this world order: we do not have to fight and defend ourselves as this world order compels us to do, we can actually refuse to fight and defend ourselves as Jesus tells us to do; we do not have to hate our enemies as this world order instructs us, we can actually love them; we do not have to exact revenge as this world order requires of us, we can actually forgive from the bottom of our heart; we do not have to use violence to create law and order as this world order has done from time immemorial, we can live by non-violence as we can actually accept to be used and abused like Jesus was.

The Helper will be there in the disciples to remind them of these choices, to remind them that the world order’s way of life is not the only one, that Jesus brought them a totally different way. So they have a choice to make, a judgment call to make.

Jesus then goes on to say: “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now.”⁴⁵⁹ This again is a rather strange thing to say. Jesus would really like to tell His disciples much more, but they would not be able to manage the load of these sayings of His. What can these things be? Why can they not manage them now?

He follows this by: “Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come.”⁴⁶⁰ So the Breath of Truth will come and He will guide Jesus’ disciples. The Greek verb translated by “guide”, “odègèsei” (οδηγήσει), means “lead”, “guide” on the way. So this Helper will guide the disciples on the way to the Truth. How will He do that? By telling them what He Himself has heard. Whom from? Jesus does not say just here. But He adds that He will announce things that are just starting to happen.

⁴⁵⁹ John 16:12

⁴⁶⁰ John 16:13

Jesus adds: “He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”⁴⁶¹ This I would rather translate for reasons already given as: “He will make Me known as He will announce to you what He will receive from Me.” So Jesus makes it clear that what this Helper will announce is nothing else than what Jesus has provided Him with. He then goes on to explain how that is: “All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall shew it unto you.”⁴⁶² So basically, what this Helper will be telling Jesus’ disciples comes both from God Father and Jesus as Jesus and His Father share everything in common.

I can imagine that this is followed by a period of silence, silence needed to let Jesus’ words take hold in the minds of His disciples. One way or another, there is definitely a hiatus between what was just said and what is coming next.

Being somewhat of a romantic, and eager to embellish an already perfectly good story, I imagine a noise being heard at some distance: the groans of a woman in the very last stages of labour. Jesus and His disciples are hearing her cries of pain and agony as she is trying to push her baby out. These noises could easily be heard outside as people’s houses were without window panes. And cries of pain were commonplace in a world without painkillers, epidurals and effective medications.

I can imagine that Jesus and His disciples are getting closer to the house where she is. She is moaning louder than ever, and more frequently, suggesting that her delivery is near. The encouragement of the midwife also suggests the same.

The effect of the next few days on the disciples

Jesus breaks His silence. He tells His disciples that He will soon go away to His Father and then come back: “A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye shall see me, because I go to the Father.”⁴⁶³ We have seen that it means that the disciples will not see Him when His Body is in the tomb, when He is

⁴⁶¹ John 16:14

⁴⁶² John 16:15

⁴⁶³ John 16:16

dead, when He is with His Father, but He will show Himself to them alive though dead.

This is not understood by His disciples who cannot figure out what Jesus is saying:⁴⁶⁴

Then said some of his disciples among themselves,
What is this that he saith unto us, A little while, and
ye shall not see me: and again, a little while, and ye
shall see me: and, Because I go to the Father? They
said therefore, What is this that he saith, A little
while? we cannot tell what he saith. Now Jesus knew
that they were desirous to ask him, and said unto
them, Do ye inquire among yourselves of that I said,
A little while, and ye shall not see me: and again, a
little while, and ye shall see me?⁴⁶⁵

I can finally imagine that a cry now pierces the air: the cry of a new-born child! This is followed by the midwife telling the mother that the child is a boy! The disciples and Jesus can hear the cries of joy from both mother and midwife as a new child is born into the world.

After this interruption (real or just imagined by me), Jesus starts to explain things: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, That ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice: and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy.”⁴⁶⁶ He tells His disciples that they will cry and lament as they mourn His death, a death that this world’s order will celebrate as it will show clearly to its leaders that this troublemaker was not protected by their God, the God who saves those He loves and crushes the ones He hates. His death will prove to them that they were right in crucifying Him, that they were right in accusing Him of blasphemy, that they were right in saying He was a devil, that they were right in saying that He wanted to fight Roman rule. The disciples will wail because they will have lost a

⁴⁶⁴ This could suggest that both these talks could not have given one after the other as Jesus’ disciples had already had these problems and Jesus had answered them. It could be that this “second” talk is just another version of the same talk we have seen before, insisting on somewhat different points, with a different style and inner dynamic. But it could also be that He is not always walking next to the same disciples, and that some had not heard everything He had said at table, if only because some must have been busy with the housekeeping at the hall where they ate.

⁴⁶⁵ John 16:17-19

⁴⁶⁶ John 16:20

good friend and someone they had hoped would procure them power and prestige as assistants to the Messiah.

Jesus then goes on to say: “A woman when she is in travail hath sorrow, because her hour is come: but as soon as she is delivered of the child, she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.”⁴⁶⁷ Jesus now interprets the disciples’ sorrow, affliction, distress, hardship, terms that are all translations of the Greek word “lupèn” (λυπην), as the birth pangs of a woman in labour.

According to my imaginings, Jesus would have been using what He and His disciples had just witnessed as a metaphor. Whether this is the case or not, it remains that the time of delivery is for the expectant mother a time of excruciating pain and distress, but pain and distress are followed by joy when her baby is born, cries for the first time, when she first holds her baby in her arms and nurses him.

There is something a bit odd in Jesus’ analogy; in it, it is the disciples who are giving birth and Jesus Who is being born! The disciples rejoice when Jesus is well and truly born alive after time in His disciples’ common womb. His disciples’ pain and travail brings forth Jesus’ birth to new Life. In this analogy even more than in the vine parable, Jesus has a passive *rôle*.

Perhaps the explanation is this: Jesus’ disciples have to let Him go, let Him be born to new Life. They cannot keep Him with them, in their collective “womb”. This parturition, this parting is difficult for them; in fact, it is excruciating for them. But it is necessary if Jesus is to be “born” into Life. Letting go of those we love is not an easy task, but it is a necessary part of growing up, both for them and for us.

Jesus continues to develop this point: “And ye now therefore have sorrow: but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.”⁴⁶⁸ Jesus states that His disciples’ sorrow at His death is like that of the woman in travail, but just as she rejoices when her child is born alive, so will they when they see that, although dead, He is more alive than ever; that instead of being confined to the womb of this earthly life, He is now free in the Real World.

⁴⁶⁷ John 16:21

⁴⁶⁸ John 16:22

This future experience of the risen Jesus will be one that no one can take away from them as they will know for a fact that Jesus is more alive than He ever was before he died. This event will prove once and for all that Jesus is right and that this world order with its deification of violence is totally wrong.

So Jesus can then add: “And in that day ye shall ask me nothing”⁴⁶⁹ as the disciples will then finally make sense of it all and so will not need to ask Him anymore questions (the “ask” of this sentence is really “ask questions”).

Asking in Jesus’ name

Jesus now proceeds to something different: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”⁴⁷⁰ We have already examined what Jesus meant by “asking the Father in His name”. But He adds that His disciples have so far never asked for anything in such a way, which is hardly surprising according to the interpretation that I gave earlier. But there is more: asking in such a fashion will always be efficacious, and this will fill the disciples with joy. “Joy” is as apt a translation of the Greek term “chara” (χαρά) as is “pleasure”. Following Jesus, asking to become more and more like Him and becoming more and more like Him brings the disciple an ever growing joy. Indeed, noticing that we are growing up to be more and more like Jesus is a source of real joy.

It is highly probable that there was again a period of pregnant silence as they continued their walk. This again was interrupted by Jesus on a different subject.

He goes on to say: “These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall shew you plainly of the Father.”⁴⁷¹ Jesus acknowledges that He has been speaking in elliptical terms but adds that He will now speak frankly, calling a spade a spade as the expression goes. The term “proverb”, the correct translation of the

⁴⁶⁹ John 16:23a

⁴⁷⁰ John 16:23b-24

⁴⁷¹ John 16:25

Greek term “paroimiais” (παροιμιας), implies a style somewhat obscure and partly allegorical. Jesus did not use the term “death” but terms like “going to the Father”, “seeing Me no more”, He did not use the term “resurrection” but “seeing Me again”. The Greek term “parrèsia” (παρρησία) translated by “plainly”, could also be translated by “frankly”, “without any artifice”.

Whether or not what follows is said plainly is open to debate, but it is a good summary of quite a few points: “At that day ye shall ask in my name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father himself loveth you, because ye have loved me, and have believed that I came out from God.”⁴⁷² It could be translated as: “Then I will not have to ask God Father on your behalf what you ask as My officers as He Himself loves you, and the reason why is because you loved Me and trusted that I came from Him.”

Then He goes on to repeat Himself: “I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father.”⁴⁷³ He says again that He came from God Father into this world order, on this planet, to live a human life, and now He is leaving this world order by dying and so going back to Whom He came: God His Father. By this statement He clearly, straightforwardly and categorically states that, contrary to all other humans, He existed before He was conceived in His mother’s womb, as He is with God Father from all eternity.

At this point we have the disciples’ only interjection: “His disciples said unto him, Lo, now speakest thou plainly, and speakest no proverb. Now are we sure that thou knowest all things, and needest not that any man should ask thee: by this we believe that thou camest forth from God.”⁴⁷⁴

From this, I gather that the disciples found Jesus’ last statement easy to understand; that they indeed understood that Jesus was from before He was born, came from God Father, and would go back to Him through death very soon indeed; that He knew what would happen next, just like He knew what was on their mind, though I cannot but marvel that they would be in awe of such a normal gift

⁴⁷² John 16:26-27

⁴⁷³ John 16:28

⁴⁷⁴ John 16:29-30

as Jesus being able to read their faces after all this time. Still, the authority with which He spoke, the solemnity of the occasion all conspired to make them trust that He was telling the truth when He was saying that He Is with God before being born into this world.

The hardships to come are predicted

This trust in Jesus permits Him to go further, to tell them in greater detail what will happen to Him. This is clear by the way Jesus starts this prediction of things to come in the next hours: “Jesus answered them, Do ye now believe?”⁴⁷⁵ Indeed, He has to make sure that they really trust Him before He ventures further in telling them what will happen to all of them.

Taking His disciples’ silence for the “yes” it is, He then proceeds: “Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me.”⁴⁷⁶ Jesus foretells that in the next hours they will all run their own way trying to escape from the authorities, leaving Him well and truly alone, though He is never alone as God Father is always, but always, with Him as He Is within Him.

Jesus then concludes this talk on a walk by: “These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.”⁴⁷⁷ This is a rather strange saying, albeit a significant one. It is worth examining it closely.

The Greek expression translated as “might have peace”, “*eirènèn echète*” (εἰρηνὴν ἐχῆτε), means “to be at peace” in opposition to the contrary expression, “to be at war”. What Jesus says here is odd because He says that His disciples will be at peace *in Him*, which is not the kind of thing usually said as you are normally either at peace or at war! The fact is that the state of affairs the disciples are to live under is that of “tribulation”, the translation of the Greek word “*thlipsin*” (θλίψιν), which could also be translated as “pressure”, “compression”, “oppression”. We are to conclude that the disciples

⁴⁷⁵ John 16:31

⁴⁷⁶ John 16:32

⁴⁷⁷ John 16:33

will live under this world order's oppression while being at peace in Jesus! What can this really mean?

He goes on to tell them to "be of good cheer", the translation of the Greek term "tharseite" (θαρσεῖτε), which would be better translated as "have confidence", "be resolute", "be courageous". Jesus is telling His disciples to be courageous in the hard fight ahead.

As encouragement He tells them that He has already won the war against this world order as the term "overcome" is the translation of the Greek term "nenikèka" (νενίκηκα) that comes from "nikaō" (νικάω) which means "win against", "be the winner over".

So Jesus tells His disciples that He has already won the war against this world order. This again, is rather strange if taken very literally, as He has yet to go through His passion, death and resurrection. But it can be seen as the kind of morale booster a general will give to his troupes before the start of hostilities. He predicts to his men that victory is a sure thing with him at their head.

So Jesus is providing His disciples with some greatly needed reassurance that victory will be theirs, even though the fight will be very rough and they will start by losing some ground, by being scattered when the enemy's first onslaught comes.

Jesus finishes His talk on the walk with the promise of final victory and of succour during the fight as His disciples will be able to be at peace in Him, will be able to refresh themselves in a safe haven when the going gets too rough.

Beaulieu's revised version!

Again, let me paraphrase Jesus' talk on a walk, concentrating only on His sayings:

I am truly a vine and my Father is its farmer. He cuts off My fruitless branches and prunes My fruitful ones. Only by being part of Me can you be fruitful just like it is only as part of the vine that a vine branch can produce fruit. A cut off branch is dead; so are you without Me. If you are in Me, nourished by My words, following them, whatever you ask so as to be more fruitful will be done to you. Bearing much fruit, that is, following My orders, is how you show Who God Father Is.

I love you just like God Father loves Me. Just as I have to follow God Father's orders for Me to stay in His love, you have to follow Mine to remain in Mine. I am telling you this so that I can continue to be happy with you, and that you can also be happy. My order to you is to love each other just like I love you. Giving up one's life for others is the greatest show of love.

You are My friends if you do what I order you to do. You are not My servants as they do not know why they are given orders. You are friends as I told you all that God Father told Me. I chose you and gave you a mission. As I want you to continually bear fruit, everything you need for your mission and ask for will be given by God Father. Your mission is to love each other.

If this world order detests you, do not forget that it detested Me first. The reason why this world order hates you is because you do not follow its rules and regulations, but Mine. Those who accepted My message will accept yours; those who persecuted Me will persecute you. It is because of Me that they will persecute you, because they do not understand He Who sent Me.

People were without fault until I came and spoke to them, but now they have no excuse concerning their mistake as I proved that I am representing God by the miracles that came from Me. These prove that I spoke for God just as I claim. So anyone who detests Me necessarily detests God Father Who demonstrated that He supports My claims. So it is without reason that they detest Me.

I will send you a Helper, the Truthful Breath Who emanates from God Father. He will testify on My behalf; and so will you, who have been with Me since the start.

I am telling you now, so that you are not taken aback, that you will be excommunicated and killed by people who by so doing will think that they are obeying God. This will happen to you at the hands of those who know neither God Father nor Me. You must always remember this. The reason I did not tell you this before is that I was still with you but now I am going to die.

As you do not cling to Me, I can see that you are ready to be left alone, though you are very sad at My departure.

Still, this is the only way the Helper can come to you to help you take charge. This Helper will give you the courage to tell people off, to state that not believing My message is a great error; that condemning Me to death was an act of grave injustice; to show them My alternative to this world order's choice of violence and force, an alternative of love and service, of total non-violence.

I would like to say more, but this is all you can manage. But the Truthful Breath will guide you on the way. He will make Me known as He will announce to you what He will receive from Me. All that is My Father's is also Mine.

Soon I will die; soon after, I will show Myself alive though dead. At My death, you will weep while this world order will rejoice; but when you see Me alive though dead you will rejoice, just like the woman with child rejoices when she gives birth although she was in pain and agony beforehand.

You are sad, but when you see Me after My death you will rejoice with a joy that cannot be extinguished. Then you will understand. God Father will give you whatever you ask to achieve your mission. You will be happy when you are more and more able to perform your mission.

I have not always been as clear as I could have been, but I now speak to you frankly. I will not have to beg God Father on your behalf; God Father will give you whatever you ask as My officers as He Himself loves you. The reason for His love for you is that you love Me and trust that I came from Him. I came from God Father, was born on this planet and now will die and return to God Father.

As you now accept that I am telling you the truth, I can also tell you that you will soon all desert Me, leaving Me alone with God Father Who never deserts Me.

I am telling you all this that you might find peace in Me. You will be oppressed by this world order, but you must be courageous as I have won the battle over this world order.

JESUS' PRAYER BY THE CEDRON

This last text, a very rich prayer of Jesus to God Father, is a logical follow-up to the previous talks. It builds on them. Could it have been said on the way to meet Judas, let us say, on the side of the road, as Jesus stopped for a few minutes to pray aloud with His disciples close by?

After all, the Gospel writer clearly stated that Jesus left the hall with His disciples after His first talk. And he added, at the very end of this prayer: "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Cedron, where was a garden, into the which he entered, and his disciples."⁴⁷⁸ So it seems to me to make a certain sense to assume that this prayer was said just before crossing the brook in question.

How would Jesus have prayed this prayer? We know that today's Jews tend to pray standing up with a rapid to and fro movement of the upper body. Would He have prayed like that? I do not know. But it is highly possible that He would have been standing rather than squatting, kneeling or lying down. The last position does not permit the people around Him to hear Him properly. Squatting does not sound respectful enough.

Jesus had made clear that the goal of prayer is not to tell God Father something He does not already know about our needs or our wants; it is to work out for ourselves what we need to know and to do. Jesus is here praying loud enough so that His disciples hear His words to God Father and so figure out what they need to know and do. So Jesus is still basically teaching His disciples through His prayer to God Father.

Again I will examine the prayer verse by verse, in the order of appearance.

Jesus' final report to His Father

This prayer starts by: "These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee."⁴⁷⁹ We have already exam-

⁴⁷⁸ John 18:1

⁴⁷⁹ John 17:1

ined this kind of phraseology before, and we have seen that this could be translated as: “Father, this is the time when you will attest to and make known Who I am, so that I can now attest to and make known Who You are.” Jesus’ next few days, not to say hours, are crucial to understand both Him and His Father. Never before and never again will there be an event in which God will be seen in so clear a fashion.

This is a statement that we found in both Jesus’ talks. It is the basic starting point of everything He said that evening.

We can notice that Jesus does seem to imply that the time of His arrest is very close indeed; this fits well with the idea that Jesus and His disciples were indeed arriving at the garden.

Jesus follows this first statement with: “As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him.”⁴⁸⁰ This is a rather odd statement. Here we have Jesus on the point of being arrested by the powers that be, both political and religious, so as to be sentenced to death for insurrection and blasphemy, tortured, humiliated and crucified stark naked so as to die slowly in excruciating pain as a slave. This is nothing to boast about. It is not the fate of someone in authority, but of a worm of a man, of someone without any rights.

Still, Jesus says that He has been definitely given by God Father full and complete authority over all living flesh! And He follows that by saying that since He has been given that authority, He can bestow “eternal life” to all God Father gave Him!

It is not Jesus who decides who gets eternal life but God Father by “giving” that human to Jesus. It is only to those God Father bestowed to Jesus that He can give that “present”. All others are out, left without. Where is free will? Everything seems to be preordained, an idea that I obviously cannot accept. But is this really what this text says?

Jesus then goes on to define what He means by “eternal life”: “And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent.”⁴⁸¹ Jesus’ definition of

⁴⁸⁰ John 17:2

⁴⁸¹ John 17:3

what constitutes “eternal life” is odd; how is it that “knowing the one and true God” is the definition of “eternal life”? But first, what does it mean to know God Father as the One and Only True God?

First, Jesus states with all the Jews that there is only one God; then He states that this One God is Father; and He goes on to say that He, Jesus, is the Christ, the Anointed One (this is the Greek translation of “Christ”), the One marked by God as His Perfect Messenger, as His perfect Ruler, Master on this earth.

Only those who know these facts to be true can be given “eternal life”; the others cannot share it. And those who know these facts to be true will spend this “eternal life” knowing these more and more intimately, completely. The ones who cannot accept these facts will not be able to go on this trek of increased knowledge as they will not have the required basis to do so.

Still, this is certainly a strange thing to say. But perhaps the rest of the text will help to understand how this all works. Jesus goes on to say: “I have glorified thee on the earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do.”⁴⁸² We have seen that this can be read as: “I have made You, God Father, properly known as I have revealed You to humans, which was what you sent Me to do.”

This He follows by: “And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.”⁴⁸³ This I understand to mean that Jesus wants His Father to make Him known now as He Is, as He has been known by His Father from before this world came into existence. He wants His Father to make clear to humans Who He, Jesus, Is.

He then goes on to say: “I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me; and they have kept thy word.”⁴⁸⁴ The Greek term translated as “manifested”, “*ephanerōsa*” (εφανερωσα), could be translated as “made visible”, “made known”. Jesus says that He has made known God’s real Name, Father, to those He gave Him as followers and that they have received all His instructions, His words,

⁴⁸² John 17:4

⁴⁸³ John 17:5

⁴⁸⁴ John 17:6

which He passed on to them. Again here, Jesus mentions the fact that it is only those that God Father “gave Him” that took in His message; the others are left out.

He expands on this theme that His followers have received everything that He was to tell them and, in so doing, believe Him as God Father’s Mouthpiece:

Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.⁴⁸⁵

This could be said to conclude the first part of His prayer by the Cedron. In it, Jesus basically states that He has completed the job God Father gave Him, a job consisting in making Him known for Who He really is, Father, and that this message has been accepted by some, those that God Father “gave Him” to accept His message as coming from God Father as He Himself came from God Father.

This could be said to be a repeat of things Jesus has already said to His disciples that evening. But let us not forget that these words are directed to God Father. So Jesus is really filing here His last report on His mission to His Superior, God His Father.

Jesus is to be known through His disciples

Jesus goes on to pray for His disciples, those who have believed in Him: “I pray for them: I pray not for the world, but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine. And all mine are thine, and thine are mine; and I am glorified in them.”⁴⁸⁶

Jesus says that He now petitions God Father for His disciples, those individuals that God Father “gave” Him. He makes it clear that the individuals that are part of this world order are here excluded. What follows is for and about His chosen few. He is praying for the disciples as these individuals are not only His, but also God Father’s, as they are the ones who are going to make Jesus and His ways known. This is why this prayer concerns only His disciples:

⁴⁸⁵ John 17:7-8

⁴⁸⁶ John 17:9-10

they are His only agents on earth, the ones who have to take up the task He started.

The disciples' need of love and unity

Jesus then goes on to say: "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to thee. Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me, that they may be one, as we are."⁴⁸⁷ Jesus talks as if He has already left this earth, has already died, which of course is not strictly correct. But He knows that His end is very near; He knows that His death is just a matter of hours, so He can say that He definitely is going back to His Father through His dying. After all, the present moment is not something that lasts only a nanosecond: it is something that lasts as long as the event which defines it.⁴⁸⁸

He knows that though He is going to die very soon, His disciples will continue to live within this world order; that they will need help. So Jesus asks God Father to "keep them". This is the translation of the verb "tèrèson" (τηρησον) which can also be translated as "guard", "look after", "keep", "preserve".

This kind of guard is somewhat strange: "in thine Name". What can that possibly mean? Jesus always uses the word "Father" when He mentions God. So this must be the Name He is thinking of here. God is to guard the disciples as His children, just as He guards Jesus His Son. The family unity that exists between Father and Son, this is the family unity that Jesus wants between the disciples as well as between them and Father and Son. This is the kind of unity that He is asking His Father to protect.

Jesus goes on with: "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in thy name: those that thou gavest me I have kept, and none of them is lost, but the son of perdition; that the scripture might be fulfilled."⁴⁸⁹

Jesus here says that while He was with His disciples, He kept them safe from the enticements of this world order. He made

⁴⁸⁷ John 17:11

⁴⁸⁸ something made clear by quantum mechanics

⁴⁸⁹ John 17:12

sure that none was lost, except for “the son of perdition”, Judas, who was “needed” to fulfill the Scriptures.

I must say I find that last little bit very difficult to swallow as it seems to imply that God made sure Judas acted the way he did. That would imply that Judas did not act according to his own free will in this circumstance, something I find totally unacceptable.

I think it makes much more sense to assume that what Jesus means here is that He let into His intimate circle someone whom He knew to be a “rotten apple”, someone who would keep believing in this world order whatever He did, someone who would quite willingly betray Him when the time came. This interpretation, it seems to me, fits the text just as well as the other.

The “advantage” of the first interpretation, which I refuse to accept, is that it corresponds to this world order’s way of thinking, the way of thinking we tend to go for most of the time as we are only in the process of becoming children of God, of thinking with His mind-set. We much prefer to think within this world order’s ways of violence, deceit, injustice, refusing at all times to consider that others have a will of their own but insisting that they are on this planet only to follow ours.

The text we are examining also talks about Jesus having kept His disciples in God Father’s Name. The Greek term translated by “keep” is the same as before; but it then reappears in “those that thou gavest me I have kept” and this time it is the translation of the Greek word “ephulaksa” (εφυλαξα), a military term about being on sentry duty, which could also be translated as “look after”, “be on guard duty”. Jesus is thus saying that in this battle against this world order, He has kept His little flock safe from its attacks, excepting Judas who was won over by the Enemy. Jesus thus states again that He fulfilled the obligations He was given by His Father.

The disciples and this world order

Jesus goes on to say: “And now come I to thee; and these things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves.”⁴⁹⁰ Jesus is leaving this world order for His Father; but before going, He is preparing His disciples for what will come, His resurrection, something to be really joyful about. That this world, with

⁴⁹⁰ John 17:13

its injustice, oppression, hate, is not the last word; that it is followed by the Real World where God reigns, where Love reigns, is good news indeed! To be presented with the proof of its existence, to know for a fact that this world order is going to be replaced by God's, this is a real cause for rejoicing!

Jesus then goes on to say: "I have given them thy word; and the world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."⁴⁹¹ Again we have this idea that those who are not "according to this world order" are hated by it as they are examples of an alternative to this world order based on violence and death. The reason why they are "not of this world" is because they have made theirs these words from God Father that Jesus had made His and has taught them.

Jesus goes on to say that He is not asking them to be removed from this world order but that they be protected from its evil onslaught: "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil."⁴⁹² Jesus cannot ask God Father to remove them from this world; after all, His job has been to prepare them so that they would go and preach God's word. This is God Father's will.

Of course, because His disciples are following God Father's will, they are not following this world order's ways any more than Jesus is: "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world."⁴⁹³

Practical dedication of the disciples to God's mission and message

Jesus now proceeds to say: "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."⁴⁹⁴ This is a rather strange expression: "sanctify them in the truth". What can this mean? The Greek word translated as "sanctify" is "agiason" (αγιασον) which can also be translated as "consecrate", "make holy". But again, what does that mean? It is a word which is used often, but what does it really refer to?

⁴⁹¹ John 17:14

⁴⁹² John 17:15

⁴⁹³ John 17:16

⁴⁹⁴ John 17:17

When one consecrates a building, one makes it holy, which implies here a dedication to the service of God. I think it is fair to assume that what Jesus is getting at is that His disciples will be dedicated to the service of God Father by their knowledge of the Truth, which has been revealed by Jesus as God Father's Word. It is because they are willing and reflective witnesses to Jesus' life that they can be dedicated to spreading God Father's message.

So basically, at this stage of Jesus' prayer, He is asking God Father to officially endorse the passing of the torch to His disciples. He asks God Father to give His disciples their commission – as “military” officers in the campaign ahead – to go and preach the Truth about Him.

This understanding permits to go straight into the next verse: “As thou hast sent me into the world, even so have I also sent them into the world.”⁴⁹⁵ The disciples are the next carriers of God's word; they are the ones Jesus is now sending to continue His work. Jesus clearly states that He was commissioned by God Father, and that He is still dedicated to Him. So His disciples, whom He formed, are also commissioned, dedicated through the Truth of His words: “And for their sakes I sanctify myself, that they also might be sanctified through the truth.”⁴⁹⁶ He is reporting to His Superior that the training of His disciples is now complete: God Father can give them their “commissions” as His officers so that they can be sent on their mission.

Jesus makes clear that this commission to God's service is not only something that will apply to these few disciples only but to all who will make theirs His message of Truth: “Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word.”⁴⁹⁷

Thus Jesus commissions and dedicates to God Father *all* who will make theirs God Father's commands rather than this world's. And as this world order will fight back ferociously, they all will need the support of each other, of Jesus as well as of God Father: “That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in

⁴⁹⁵ John 17:18

⁴⁹⁶ John 17:19

⁴⁹⁷ John 17:20

thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.”⁴⁹⁸

This unity is required to give each and every one the strength to face this world order, which attacks very insidiously and with great perfidy. This unity does not entail uniformity, but love towards each other, help and understanding. It is the kind of Unity that is found between Father and Son: They are not the same, but they truly Love each Other, they are always there for the Other. Love is what identifies them, what permits others to identify, recognize them.

The perfidy of this world order is most obviously at work when schisms break between the disciples, when instead of being as one, they form their own little groups. This is perhaps the worst kind of problem facing the disciples and exactly the one Jesus wanted them to avoid.

This problem is the worst that they can face because the various factions all consider that they have the monopoly on the Truth, that they – and they alone – represent God. The problem is that as soon as they think such thoughts, they cut themselves from God Father and fall prisoners to the Enemy!

God Father wants us to think of others as His children, as part of His family, whatever they have done, whatever they think. God Father wants us at the very minimum to tolerate those who think and act differently from us, which implies refusing to judge them in any way, shape or form. As His children, we are not allowed to reject them, to ostracize them, to excommunicate them as these ways of acting are according to this world order.

On the contrary, we have to listen to them, and to engage in a dialogue between equals, never considering that others are wrong, foolish or bad. We have to give our views and our reasons in a respectful manner, never forgetting that the ones we are talking to are as much children of God Father as we are. And these remarks apply to all, from our beloved Pope Benedict to the very ordinary layperson that I am, from the Congregation of the Faith to the most insignificant lay organization.

This is why He goes on to say: “And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are

⁴⁹⁸ John 15:21

one.”⁴⁹⁹ He now says that the reputation that God Father is making known of Jesus is now passed also to His disciples. The unity of God Father with Jesus, the unity of love between God Father and Jesus, is also now to exist between His disciples, as well as between Father, Son and the disciples.

This statement is made even more obvious in the next verse: “I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me.”⁵⁰⁰ It is through the disciples’ proclamation that will be known God Father’s sending of Jesus as His Mouthpiece as well as His love for Jesus and His disciples. They are the new heralds of this Reality that far exceeds the “reality” of this world order based on oppression, violence and force. Church unity is not Church uniformity: Jesus and the Father are One, but They are different; They Love each Other, but They are not the same.

Jesus then goes on to say: “Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world.”⁵⁰¹ The Greek verb translated by “will” is “*thelô*” (θέλω); it can be translated as “will”, but also as “desire”, “want”. So Jesus wants His disciples to come and join Him, so that they can know Him for Who He Is, the One God Father has loved from ever.

Epilogue

The epilogue of this prayer takes again some of its main points:

O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee:
but I have known thee, and these have known that
thou hast sent me. And I have declared unto them thy
name, and will declare it: that the love wherewith
thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.⁵⁰²

⁴⁹⁹ John 15:22

⁵⁰⁰ John 15:23

⁵⁰¹ John 15:24

⁵⁰² John 15:25-26

Jesus again states that this world order does not know, understand Who God Father Is; but He, Jesus, and His disciples, whom God gave Him to teach and prepare to take over His mission, they know and understand Who God Father Is. Jesus concludes by stating that He indeed told His disciples that God is Father, is Love, so that the Love with Whom God Father loves Jesus may be in them, as He is also in them.

It is perhaps worth noting that Jesus here calls His Father “righteous”. As far as I know, this is the only case where He does so. This adjective is the translation of the Greek term “dikaie” (δικαίε), which can also be translated as “just”, “honest”, “proper”. It certainly could be understood as meaning that God is the proper Father, the One Who is truly Father, the One Who is the most excellent Father, Who is rightly Father.

Beaulieu’s revised version!

Again, here is my version of Jesus’ prayer at the Cedron:

Father, now You will attest to and make known Who I am, Your Son, so that I can now attest to and make known Who You are. You have set Me to rule over all, so that I can bestow to those You gave Me the knowledge of Who You are, the Only God, and of Who I am, Your Messenger.

I have made You, God Father, properly known on Earth, I have revealed You to humans, which was what You sent Me to do. Make Me known as You know Me from before time. I have made understood Who You are to those You took out of this world order to give Me; they were Yours, now they are Mine, and they have accepted Your message. They truly accept that I speak for You and that I came from You.

I petition You for them, the ones You gave Me after taking them out of this world order, as it is them that will make Me known.

I am to all intents dead, on the way to You, but they are alive. Keep them on Your mission so that they be united just like We are. I kept them on Your mission; I saw that none erred, except the one I accepted in My group though I knew He would not be faithful.

I am coming to You through death; I am saying all this so that they may be joyful as I am. I have given them Your Message. This world order detests them as they are not of this world order any more than I. I do not ask You to let them die, but to protect them from the world order. Commission and dedicate them to spread the Truth, Your message.

Just like You sent Me on Your Mission, I am sending them to continue it. I commission them just like You commissioned Me. This I am also asking for those who will follow them by their spreading of this message.

Unite them as We are so that this world order may see that You sent Me. I am giving them the reputation You have given Me: so that they may be united like Us. Our love will be made manifest by theirs. I ask You to bring them to Us so that they know Me like You know Me, loving Me from before time.

Most excellent Father, the world order does not know You, but I do, and they know that You sent Me. I have made You known, and will again very soon. Give them the love by which You have loved Me, so that I can be in them.

Solemnity of the Epiphany of Our Lord, January 6th, 2008