

In the Name of “IS” ?

by: Douglas Lockhart

The name 'Jesus', its sacred significance in relation to the Nazarenes and the Christians, and the conquering, revealing, sacrificing, dying and reappearing Jesus-archetype in Jewish history

The name "Jesus" contains within it a reference to a time centuries before Jesus; birth and also harbours clues in relation to the idea of Jesus as a divine being. In relation to this, Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona's highly controversial book *The Jesus Papyrus* is worth looking at. Arguing clearly and cogently for Matthew's Gospel being much earlier in date than the 80s of the first century, these researchers have turned New Testament studies on their head. From a detailed study of three tiny fragments of papyrus locked up in a forgotten Oxford college showcase, Thiede conjectures that these virtually ignored fragments of papyrus were probably written no more than forty years after the crucifixion. It is therefore conceivable that this papyrus was handled by "one of the 'five hundred brothers and sisters' whom Paul says saw the resurrected Jesus." This is the claim on their book's inside cover, and it is an important one. For if correct, then Matthew's Gospel reflects early first century perceptions of Jesus, and as argued in my essay 'Satan Chats with Jesus', the wilderness temptation story suggests an attempt to obscure a much earlier scenario - one of political rather than scribal content.

Keeping all of this in mind, it is interesting to note that the writer of Matthew's Gospel sometimes abbreviates Jesus' name, so creating what Thiede terms a *nomen sacrum*, or 'holy name'. This is done by taking the first and last letters of Jesus' name in Greek, which is *Iesous*, and rendering it as *IS*. Fascinated as I was to stumble on this strange system of abbreviation, and convincing as Thiede's explanation for this curiosity seemed to be, I could not

help wondering if there was perhaps another explanation, not so much an alternative as a parallel explanation harking back to a much earlier period in the history of the Nazarenes. This in spite of the fact that Thiede and his colleague also cite a more ordinary example of a *nomen sacrum* using the same system in relation to the Greek word *kyrie*, meaning "Lord". Taking the "K" and the "E" from *kyrie*, Matthew renders it as *KE*. This is a very convincing explanation, and seems to rule out any alternative. So it is with trepidation that I suggest that *IS* may also refer to a holy name of much greater antiquity, namely, that of the Jewish-Arabian prophet Essa, founder and leader of the Nazarene sect in approximately 400 BCE. For at the end of the day I find it difficult to understand why Matthew would want to abbreviate Jesus' Greek name to the equivalent of "JS" in English, and why the abbreviation of what was at that time a very common Jewish name should be construed as carrying a sacred overtone.

The name Essa, written in Arabic either as "Isa" or "Issa", but pronounced "Essa" in both Arabic and first century Coptic Egyptian, belonged to the founder teacher of the western Arabian Nazarene sect then known as the "Nasara". So in developing a *nomen sacrum* for the Gospel Jesus, would it not make more sense if this abbreviation of a common Jewish name referred not to the Gospel Jesus as such, but to the founder of the sect to which Jesus belonged? *Essa* transliterates as *Iesous* (Jesus) when passed from Arabic into Aramaic and then Greek, and this fact, in conjunction with the *nomen sacrum* appearing only in Jesus' Greek name (*Iesous*), suggests a connection with things Nazarene. For is it not odd that on almost every occasion that Jesus is referred to in the Gospels as being of Nazareth, the word "Nazareth" ought to read "Nazarene"? This subterfuge strongly suggests that Jesus' close affiliation with the Nazarenes has been deleted, and this in turn suggests that as a group, the beliefs of the Nazarene sect played a much more important role in Jesus' life than the Gospels are willing to convey.

To use the first and last letters of Jesus' name in Greek as a code to signify that this Jesus was more important than *all the other Jesuses* is perfectly plausible. But I would argue that such a curious abbreviation signals much, much more. The Gospel Jesus may

well have been perceived by his followers as in some sense sacred, but I think the key to understanding what this meant lies not in Jesus himself, but in what he represented as a Nazarene dynastic leader. Which is to say that his name was not arbitrarily given, but that it reflected the origins of the sect to which he belonged. And so it can be said that the name "Jesus", when abbreviated, was not only a code-name for this particular Jesus, but also a power-name belonging to the sect's distant past. For it should be remembered that Jesus gave his name to his disciples to use as a power-name when healing the sick, and when exorcising demons, and it is probable that he too used his own name for similar purposes. There is of course no record of this, but that is not surprising when one considers the political implications of such a statement, and that Jesus has been intentionally shorn of all political significance in the Gospels.

In relation to Jesus, I think the *nomen sacrum* refers not to Jesus himself, but to the fact that he carried this ancient name by way of blood relationship; he was, in other words, part of a dynasty or caliphate as suggested by the Jewish scholar Dr Hugh Schonfield back in the 1960s. This might also explain why Paul, after his conversion, immediately headed for Arabia and *not* Jerusalem; he had been dispatched (by whom?) for a purpose, either to retrieve documents (the now lost *Gospel of the Nazarenes*), or to undergo initiation into the heterodox Arabian branch of the Nazarene sect. This is not as strange as it may sound; something doctrinally odd is at the back of Paul's Christology; and the possibility of Jesus carrying an ancient and holy name signifying "sacredness" is perfectly plausible. When Paul returns from that journey he is an utterly changed man; and so also is the Jesus he preaches. Paul the lightning-struck convert does not preach the Jesus known to the Nazarenes of Jerusalem (the historical Jesus), but the Jesus of the Hijaz mountains of western Arabia *superimposed* on the Jesus of the gospels. Here then, as I suggest in my book *Jesus the Heretic*, is the phantom Jesus of the New Testament, the Jesus so accurately intuited by scholars never to have existed in real life. And yet as real as real can be in relation to that ancient Arabian Jesus carrying the theological trappings of a man somehow become divine.

Nomina Sacra/Nomina Divina

Imagine my mounting interest when I came across further reference to the use of "holy names" hidden in the Gospels, that such system of abbreviation were a "striking feature", and that Thiede and D'Ancona interpreted these shortened versions of Jesus' Greek name as a conscious attempt to "emulate the Jewish custom of abbreviating the name of God". I was stopped in my tracks when I read that, for I knew instinctively what was coming, and it exactly matched what I had already suggested in relation to the god/man *Essa*. For these authors proposed that abbreviations such as *IS* in the New Testament "implied a dramatic theological claim about the nature and role of Jesus", and this meant that the early Pauline Christian community saw Jesus as "divine", so undermining the idea of a developed Christology having been added to the Gospels near the end of the first century.

But as I was about to discover from the work of Professor Stephen Hoeller, a similar connotation of divinity was attached to Jesus' name in Hebrew. Hebrew too could be shown to carry a set of meanings pertinent to the notion of divinity in relation to Jesus. For Hoeller's studies in comparative religion revealed a curious dual carriageway of meanings in the name "Jesus" as it appeared in Hebrew, and this made the name of God (*Yahveh*) and the name of Jesus (*Yehoshva*) expressive of one another. In Hebrew, the four-lettered name of God came out as *Yod, Heh, Vav, Heh*; the name of Jesus as *Yod, Heh, (Shin) Vav, Heh*. The addition of the holy letter *Shin* in Jesus' name could therefore be interpreted as a completion or rectification of the name of God, and this reflected an evolved form of thinking found not only in the canonical gospels, but also in the so-called apocryphal, or Gnostic Gospels.¹

In his intriguing book *Jesus the Magician*, Professor Morton Smith suggests that magical deification may have been unusually prominent in Jewish tradition.² In this context, Jesus' name was indeed a power name, such as a magician might own or use. Jesus was accused of being a magician, of being in league with dark forces. And as I have previously noted, he gives his disciples the

authority (the power) to heal the sick and cast out devils in his *name*. Living as itinerant exorcists, Jesus' disciples find that they too can control what are conceived of as demons if they use Jesus' name. Mark's Gospel records that King Herod heard of Jesus because his "name was spread abroad". (Mark 6: 14) There is the added factor of his having the habit of forgiving "sins". Taking over John the Baptist's group of followers, Jesus seems to have reinterpreted John's message of forgiveness through repentance and the new rite of baptism and replaced it with what Morton Smith describes as "trust in his power". So the scribes are offended, and accuse Jesus of claiming "divine power". Credited by the populace to possess this divine power, it was not too big a step for Jesus to fulfill expectations and function as a species of divine being. Particularly if he believed himself to embody, through his name, the spirit of Essa, the divinely attributed founder-teacher of the Nazarene sect.

Thiede and D'Ancona then speculate that the abbreviating of Jesus' Greek name must have been "developed and introduced by one of the two Christian communities which possessed such authority, the Jerusalem Church or the Church at Antioch where the followers of Jesus were first called 'Christians'" Suddenly, I was back on familiar territory, and I was in disagreement. Yes, Jesus had been viewed as divine by the early Christian Church, and this view (as confirmed by Stephen Hoeller) was reflected in texts other than those eventually declared canonical, but I could not agree that the use of a coded abbreviation could have been introduced by the Jerusalem Church in conjunction with the Church at Antioch. When I read this claim, I immediately doubled back to a previous statement about the two communities. Yes, there it was again, the supposition that the Nazarene sectarian community in Jerusalem (the Jerusalem "Church", so-called) under Jesus' brother James, could have sanctioned the idea of Jesus being divine. *That* was a head-scratcher. Had Christian theology so clouded the historical canvas that such an utterly impossible notion was being accepted without critical hesitation? I went further back further, and came across our old friend the *Birkat ha-minim*, the prayer/curse authorised by the Academy at Jamnia

against the heretics and hotheads who had caused Rome to attack the Jewish state.

May apostates have no hope and may the kingdom of impertinence be uprooted in our day. May the *Nozrim* and *Minim* [the Christians] disappear in the twinkling of an eye. May they be removed from the book of the living and not be inscribed among the just. Bless you, Lord, you who cast down the proud.³

What fascinated me about this was not the prayer in itself, but the historical oversight in relation to the word "Nosrim", for Thiede had, in conjunction with the term *Minim*, translated this term as "the Christians", and in doing so had obscured the fact that *Nosrim*, as Professor Pagels so clearly states when citing the same curse, refers to the Nazarenes. The very fact that this prayer separates *Nosrim* from *Minim*, and the word *Minim* is a blanket term for "heretics", rather suggests the use of a double, not a single, category of rejection. Yes, the term *Minim* refers to the Christians with their notion of a "divine" Messiah; but the term *Nosrim* refers specifically to the well-known Nazarene sect by that time held equally responsible with the Zealots for the destruction of Jerusalem and everything Jewish. In this context the Jewish scholar Hyam Maccoby also remarks that the name used for Jesus' followers was *notzerim*, and sees this word as similar to Nazarene. So not so much a translation of these two ever-so-different words, I realised, more an interpretation due to preconceived ideas about the nature of the early Jerusalem community.

The problem, as usual, was the use of "Christian" as a blanket term for the Jerusalem and Antiochene community, plus the persistent and incomprehensible inclusion of James the Just in this mix, as if these communities were fundamentally one and the same. They were not. James upheld the Torah and everything it contained; Paul paid lip-service to the Torah when it suited him. James believed that his brother Jesus was the Messiah of Israel; Paul had other ideas. Yes, there were two communities, and yes they both preached "Jesus", but to lump them together and call them "the Christians" is less than accurate. The Nazarenes

certainly sustained the orthodox Jewish community's attitude of inclusion for Gentiles, and may well have altered the rules somewhat to accommodate Paul's early mission, but when they discovered the true nature of his Christology that relationship was severed. And the games played with Peter as he shuttles backwards and forwards between these two communities would be laughable but for the seriousness of the results.

As shown elsewhere, the name "Christian" wasn't used by the Nazarenes at all, but only in scorn of Paul's converts (Jews and predominantly Gentile women) by fellow pagans at Antioch, and from then on of the Pauline community alone. The name "Christian" was a later development and had nothing whatsoever to do with the Nazarenes. The Jerusalem community was Nazarene (*Nozrim, Nazrim or Notzerim*), indeed virtually Nazarite in its observance of the Torah; the Antiochian "Christian" community, composed of converted Jews and Gentile "God-fearers" was virtually anti-Torah and under the sway of ideas considered heretical by both orthodox Nazarenes and Jewish orthodoxy. And yet, as Hyam Maccoby shows, there were Christian sects specifically called "Nazarenes". Rather than confuse the issue, this fact actually clarifies it; it bolsters the contention that Paul's Nazarenes were not quite the same as those in Jerusalem. It was probably a Nazarene faction who schooled Paul in the notion of Jesus being in some sense divine. Again Maccoby comes to our rescue: "We also read of Nazarenes who believed in the Torah, but also believed in the virgin birth of Jesus and in his divine nature."⁴ This has to be the Nazarene sect Paul stayed with for three years; the sect who sent him to Arabia to complete his religious education; the sect who still worshipped the mystic Essa (Jesus), and who would evolve with their Jewish and Gentile converts into the Christians of New Testament fame. For as the Koran reveals, Essa was born of a virgin, was considered divine, and his followers were an heretical branch of the *Nasara*, the Nazarenes of the Arabian Hijaz. Professor Renke-Heinemann, like most other scholars, sees the Koranic Jesus as no more than a garbled version of canonical or apocryphal gospel accounts; whereas Professor Salibi (a specialist in Arabic and Hebrew) sees the Koranic Jesus as original and ancient. Speaking of the

Christian interpretation, Salibi says that it cannot be otherwise for theological reasons.

Historical Confusion

The complexity of this situation is touched upon by Thiede and D'Ancona themselves when writing of the persecution of Rome's "Christians" by Nero in 64. A strange situation erupted as Nero accused and then arrested many of these followers of Jesus for starting the great fire of Rome. The authors inform us that "there were divisions among Roman Christians over questions of attitude and interpretation. Christians denounced and betrayed other Christians when the persecution started".⁵ There were apparently "disagreements", "divisions" and "jealousy" between Christians, and the whole mess led to the arrest and execution of both Peter and Paul. Interesting. But of even greater interest a paragraph further down the same page where we read: "All our sources suggest that Christians and Jewish Christians were by now clearly distinguished from the Jews. In the early years, Jewish Christians and Jews were often confused by outsiders."⁶ Indeed they were. But what a pot puree this all is. And perhaps not as historically tidy as we are led to believe. Yes, the Romans eventually work out who was who and persecuted only those who offended their sensibilities, but the persecuted are more likely to have been Nazarene sectarians than Paul's Gentile Christians. The Roman's may have worked out who was who, but modern scholars seem to be having problems doing the same thing. "The Authorities," writes D'Ancona, "sought out and punished the Christians and only the Christians; Jews were not affected. A wall between the two communities was erected in the largest city of the empire and the dialogue was not resumed."⁷

True. But I sense a twist in the text here, a twist which makes "Nazarenes" into "Jews", and by doing so makes the "wall" between Nazarene sectarians and Christians disappear. Yes, Jews and Nazarenes become heretical Christians must have suffered and died as a result of Nero's pointing figure, but for my money it was the Nazarene community preaching Jesus the Messiah who probably took the brunt of Nero's savagery. The historian Peter de

Rosa nudges the situation into context when he says: "Christians were taken by the Romans to be a Jewish sect",⁸ and the historian Will Durant, agrees; he describes these so-called Christians as "hardly distinguished by Rome from the orthodox Jews."⁹ It is pretty certain then that what is being described is not a persecution of Paul's "Christians" as such, but more a persecution of James' Nazarene community mistakenly called "Christians" by later Christian writers.

And so we come to the in-fighting between Christian and Christian; an in-fighting that had them reaching for each other's throats. We are told that they denounced and betrayed one another. Denounced and betrayed? And done because of divisions over attitude and interpretation. Divisions of attitude and interpretation over what? Alas, we are not told. Tacitus and Clement of Rome do not spell out the reasons, and so the whole problem of what was actually going on slips away into the mist of later Christian exegesis. But not entirely; the major clue is the rather obvious one that in July '65 war broke out between the Romans and the Jews; a war which went on for 5 years and resulted in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70. Just like that, a war between the Romans and the Jews. Well, not quite, Jewish sectarian hatred of the Romans had been gathering for years, and when the dam finally burst Rome responded with her usual swiftness.

And similarly in Rome itself, I would imagine. But not all in the one evening; and probably not without some kind of warning. And so chaos reigned in the Nazarene/Christian communities over what had attracted Nero's attention, and the doctrinal squabbling which erupted served Nero's purpose all the more. A large part of Rome ended up in ashes, and the Nazarenes, who were Jews, yet different from Jews, and oddly similar to the Christians, yet not Christians, probably became Nero's scapegoats. Doctrinally separated they certainly were, but as these two groups burned side by side in the Emperor's garden their screams must have become one indistinguishable cacophony of pain.

The Agreement

Paul came to Jerusalem to face the leaders of the Nazarene community not immediately but, according to his Galatian letter, three years after his conversion, spent fifteen days with Peter, and did not return for a further fourteen. So proof of doctrinal continuity between the two communities is, in anyone's terms, scant. Peter is said to have interacted with Paul and his converts, and may have done so in the role of roving Nazarene apologist; but the apologetics of the book of Acts make a nonsense of his ever having agreed with Paul's dismissal of the Torah. Hyam Maccoby makes it abundantly clear in his riveting study of Paul, Peter and the so-called Jerusalem "church", that Peter never renounced his Nazarene-Jewish beliefs - there are numerous technicalities of Jewish Law at work within the text of Acts which disallow such an idea. This is to say that Paul's notion of "salvation by faith" in Jesus as the Mystic Christ did not replace Peter's belief in, and his adherence to, the Torah. Which makes Peter's account of a vision in which a voice instructs him to eat unclean meat a rather obvious Christian addition to the text, and a clumsy one at that. And unlike Paul's call to the Jews, Peter's call for them to be "baptised" is not a call to a "new religion", but a call for them to join the Nazarene sectarians and adopt a "religious stance" against Rome. Seen in this light, the argument against Peter - supposedly the first Christian pope - ever having set foot in Rome can be modified to allow for that historically suspect possibility.

The Jerusalem Nazarenes were lovers of the Torah. Jesus' brother James continued to be held in high respect by orthodox Jewry right up until his death in 62, and during this period the Nazarenes boosted their numbers to approximately 8,000 through the inclusion of orthodox Jews (and Essenes?) into their party.¹⁰ What has to be understood is that, prior to the Roman invasion of Judea, the Nazarene community dominated Paul's scattering of churches in authority; it was only after the Roman invasion that the Nazarene community waned in both numbers and power and the Jews ostracised *both* the Nazarenes and the Christians as heretics and trouble-makers. What is mistakenly termed "Judaic Christianity" survived, as Durant shows, for a further five centuries in the form of the Ebionim ("the poor"), and this group,

reminiscent of the Qumran Essenes in many ways, continued to practice community sharing and the full Jewish Law.

The agreement Paul came to with the leaders of the Jerusalem community over the Gentiles was soon broken. Showing an almost complete disregard for the Torah, Paul angered orthodox Jews everywhere, and as a result eventually incurred the wrath of the Nazarenes, who sent leading disciples to Antioch in an attempt to reverse such a dangerous trend. And so back to Jerusalem Paul was forced to go, to explain himself before the Jerusalem Council, and it was reluctantly agreed that pagan proselytes should not be forced to accept the full Law of Moses, but made to obey only the injunctions against immorality and the eating of strangled, or sacrificial animals. A compromise. And promises of financial support from Antioch to help ease the tension. So Paul returned to Antioch, resumed his subversive preaching against the Torah, and was again reported to Jerusalem for going too far. It is one thing to advocate reduced observance of the Torah for Gentile "God-fearers", but it is quite another to tell orthodox Jews that they should abandon the Torah altogether and replace it with the divine Jesus. At that moment Peter arrived, proceeded to eat with Paul's Gentiles because he thought the food before him had been prepared in accordance with the Law (a technicality highlighted by Maccoby), then discovered that it had not; Paul had not kept his part of the agreement with the Jerusalem Council. Forced to abandon the table for that reason, and that reason alone, Peter showed himself to be a true Nazarene and a good Jew. Later, Paul will tell the story of how he challenged Peter to his face over this event, but his description of that event will be almost solely imaginary. Other incidents followed, at Corinth, and these incidents filtered back to James and caused Paul to again journey back to Jerusalem where he was reminded that "thousands" of Torah-loving Jews had now been added to the Nazarene party. Advised to undergo purification in the Temple to prove that he too observes the Law, he submitted and caused a riot. Accused by the High Priest and some elders of having preached a "new religion", his devious dealings with the Nazarenes were at last brought out into the open.

Up until that moment, the impression one gets is that observance of the Law is the only factor separating Paul's Christians from the Jerusalem Nazarenes; and that only because of the massive influx of Jews to the Nazarene party. With further adjustment of attitude to the Torah on both sides (allowing for the fact that many Jews would have refused to consider any such adjustment) everything would have been alright. Yes, the Jews were a bit of a problem. All they had was the Torah. Paul, on the other hand, had Jesus, and Jesus was *the Christ*. For in spite of how things seem in the early stages of Acts, Paul wasn't just preaching cessation of the Law; and neither was he preaching Jesus the Jewish Messiah; he was preaching Jesus as Son of God and Saviour of the whole world, thus doing away with the heart of Jewish atonement doctrine. That is what all the fuss was about; he was single-handedly dismantling Judaism. But perhaps not always as obviously as one might think; for his willingness to take part in the Temple purification rite was in direct contradiction to Jesus' power to save, and this highlights both the deviousness detected in Paul by Hyam Maccoby, and the fact that Paul's teachings reflected a view of Jesus which straddled traditions. As he travelled around, Paul may have played at being a Jew to Jews and a Greek to Greeks, but he was never a theological crook, at least not consciously. But he was eventually beaten at his own game by James, the Lord's brother, who asked him to prove himself an obedient Jew and enter the Temple with some Nazarites. He had met his match. Walking into the Temple, he walked into a doctrinal trap.

The True Prophet

In relation to Jesus, orthodox Nazarenes seem to have interpreted their beliefs in accordance with Judaism, not apart from Judaism. It is true that they were sectarians with a vision of things integrally different from Judaism, but their execution of those differences was within the strict framework of the Law. As wilderness sectarians, they strove to perfect the Law in their lives, not to obliterate it like Paul. In *A Separate God*, the respected French scholar Simone Petrement observes that the Jewish community in

Jerusalem “did not believe one could be saved simply by grace and faith, setting themselves against Paul on this point”;¹¹ it seems that they were more inclined to view Jesus as an ordinary man adopted by God because of his holiness, not as divine in origin. Rigorously monotheistic, they rejected Paul’s notion of Jesus’ divinity, which rather suggests that something very odd was going on in Paul’s Christian community. To complicate the issue further, it is quite probable that Jesus was responsible for what was going on; but only in the sense of his being the carrier of what was probably an ancient Jewish-Arabian tradition. The abbreviation of Jesus’ Greek name to *IS* certainly suggests an early first-century belief in his sacredness or divinity by the Gospel writers; but this too seems to reflect a much earlier period, and another Jesus altogether. For as we saw earlier, a cult centred on the name Jesus seems to have existed in relation to a branch of the Nazarene sect as early as 400 BCE, and the chances are that it was this heterodox branch of the Nazarenes who quickly blossomed into the Christian community led by Paul, thus explaining the rapid growth of the community, its organisational ability and its highly evolved doctrinal ideas. This is a point of wonderment among some scholars, but the early Christian community’s capacity for organisation and doctrinal sophistication is easily explained if it existed previously under another name.

Professor Hoeller speaks of a “Joshua connection”, and in doing so refers to the curious fact that the name “Joshua” embodies what he terms “the first archetypal prefiguration of the messianic principle: a conqueror, a lawgiver, a concealer, and preserver of the true Gnosis, or secret doctrine.”¹² Identifying three Joshuas, Hoeller names them as Joshua, son of Nun (a word meaning “fish”, the traditional symbol of Christ), the Essene Teacher of Righteousness and the Jesus of the Gospels. Perceiving these three figures as “organically connected”, he defines them as conquering, revealing, sacrificing, dying and reappearing images. Then, as one would expect, he points out that the Essenes were conscious of their Teacher’s archetypal connections with spiritual figures from the past, and in doing so adds the names “Joseph” and “Asaph” to the list. Joseph the patriarch and Asaph the Levite embody, we are told, “the archetypal qualities appearing as the suffering holy one

and the inspired seer and miracle worker."¹³ So far so good. And then Hoeller expands on the name "Asaph", showing that in ancient Islamic records there was a teacher called Jo-Asaph (Joseph), and that the Ahmadiyya movement (an influential Moslem sect) believed that Jo-Asaph was identical with Jesus, and that he survived his crucifixion.¹⁴ But it is Hoeller's summation of all of this that interests me, for his detailed overview finally states that "the figure of the Christian Saviour is the last and greatest of a series of archetypal images manifesting in Jewish tradition".¹⁵

It is therefore interesting to note, as Ahmed Osman does in his book *The House of the Messiah*, that "Paul frequently perplexes us by apparently throwing Christ's activity back into the Old Testament".¹⁶ Osman, a teacher of Arabic, is in fact referring to the perplexity of A.T. Hanson, Professor of Theology at the University of Hull, and goes on to show that Hanson did not consider Paul to be saying that these texts were fulfilled in Christ, but rather "This is what Christ says". Now that is an interesting statement, for it suggests that the Jesus Paul was talking to in his so-called visions was well aware of the traditions backgrounding his own teachings. And so to Osman the idea of Jesus having been present with the Israelites in the wilderness is no surprise, for as Paul inadvertently reveals, they too had had the Gospel of Jesus preached to them without success. And so Jesus (Joshua) succeeds Moses as the leader of the Israelites, and Moses speaks of him as a Prophet of God. (Deut 18:15) Fine. But this is not the Gospel Jesus somehow popping up in the past as some literalist interpreters of these passages would like to think; it is *another* Jesus altogether, a cultic figure whose name reflected the name of God, and whose teachings seem to have paralleled those of the Gospel Jesus.

So we return to Simone Petrement, for in relation to the Jerusalem community, this scholar remarks on the sect's speculation on "successive appearances of the "true prophet". Putting this statement into context, she then says: "Whereas the incarnations of the "true prophet" in the Jewish-Christian myth have very little to do with the New Testament; they rather tend to exalt the great figures of Judaism and to underline the continuity between the Old Testament and the New."¹⁷ Hoeller's description of these figures as "archetypal images manifesting in Jewish

tradition" pulls these different identities into proper focus, for what we are quite obviously dealing with is not the literal incarnation of one being or identity age by age, but the conscious donning of an archetypal mantle in the tradition of Elisha and Elijah.

In light of what is now known of Nazarene origins, it is distinctly possible that the Jesus Paul preached and worshipped was a composite figure, an amalgamation of the Gospel Jesus, the Arabian Jesus Essa, and other Jesus-type figures in Jewish history. Hence the reason for Jesus' Greek name concealing the letters *IS*, a probable allusion to the Jewish-Arabian founder-teacher of the Nazarene sect. Now such information is of interest in itself, but there is the added factor of the "resurrection" to consider, which, when viewed in the light of a possible Arabian connection, is a connection strongly suggestive of a "divinity cult" of considerable antiquity. Jesus' survival after his crucifixion takes on ritualistic significance. For the Jesus of Paul's theological imagination is a saviour figure reminiscent of other saviour figures, and as such Jesus' crucifixion, burial and resurrection can be viewed as events concealing, like his name, divine content.

Yet he is at the same time an ordinary man, the abbreviation of his name reflecting not actual divinity (a view which Thiede's findings will no doubt further encourage), but a concept of man become a god well known in that part of the world. For it has to be said that just because the Christian disciples of Jesus may have thought him divine does not mean that he *was* divine; it just means that something very odd was going on in the Christian camp. Either that, or some important factor in relation to the idea of Jesus' divinity has been lost to us. Obscured perhaps by later theological development, the specialness of Jesus to these heterodox Nazarenes has probably undergone an unwarranted transformation. The very fact that the Nazarenes spawned, at a very early date, a heterodox branch centred on a "god-man" must surely cause hesitation, if not a re-evaluation of the whole Gospel story.

Well aware of the impact their detailed and absorbing study will have on Christian thinking, Thiede and D'Ancona offer a note of caution in the last chapter of *The Jesus Papyrus*. In relation to the

first century mind, they ask us to remember that the "peasants and townsmen believed in demons, miracles and charismatic healing. They saw the numinous, the divine and the supernatural at work in their daily lives; the 'open door' to heaven of Revelation 4 was always ajar. Reality was permanently subject to moments of petty transfiguration when the difference between the natural and the supernatural would appear blurred."¹⁸ Blurred indeed; and no less so than first century history itself when viewed through the eyes of twentieth century believers in Christ's divinity. The spell is still operative; reality is still vulnerable to archetypal pressure.

The authors then argue for the Gospels being perceived as a "mixture of myth and empirical information" (subjective truth and historical fact), and ask that such a juxtaposition of the "figurative" and the "literal" be understood as perfectly natural to the gospel writers. Oswald Spengler captures this point perfectly in *The Decline of the West* when he says, "This is what thrills us . . . the collision of facts with truths, of two worlds that will never understand one another, and his (Jesus') entire incomprehension of what was happening about him."¹⁹ Two worlds in collision - the so-called subjective, and the so-called objective. Thiede and D'Ancona add that it is a matter of personal faith whether one accepts the story of the Gospels at face value, but point out that the authors of these unusual books "considered them of overwhelming and perhaps even terrifying significance."²⁰ I like that; it clearly identifies the sense of urgency in the Gospels, the sense of men and women confronted by a great mystery: a mystery that changed lives. That fact cannot be denied. And then comes what is probably their most pertinent insight, an insight which differentiates between what is "true" and what is "authentic". They tell us that scientists cannot say whether the Gospels are true or untrue, but they can make judgments about their "authenticity" on the basis of empirical observation. Which allows - if fundamental authenticity *can* be shown - for a convergence of the Jesus of History and the Christ of Faith. Once again I found myself nodding in agreement, but even as I nodded I sensed danger; the danger of a Jesus only recently rescued from the too bright backing lights of Christian exegesis thrust back into the limelight as wholly God. Fine for some; but a right old bother

for anyone trying to make historical and psychological sense out of Jesus' life.

Promotion/Demotion

In this chapter we have seen Jesus promoted to the level of divinity, and then as quickly demoted to the level of an ordinary man carrying a "tradition of divinity". Viewed as divine because of this tradition, or, more accurately, as an ordinary man become divine (not quite the same thing as straight divinity), Jesus takes on a double aspect to his personality and general mentality. For if viewed as "special" *in this way*, then as carrier of that specialness Jesus too must have viewed himself as special, and lived that specialness out in everything he did and said. Here then is the numinous aspect of Jesus' behaviour and thinking: he too believed something extraordinary to have happened in his life, in his consciousness, and he radiated this extraordinary something wherever he went. There was a sense in which he *was* Essa, Joshua, Joseph or Jo-Asaph. His life was given over to an idea, and that idea eventually changed his life into an archetypal fact. Meaning what? Meaning that the discipline of holding such an idea in place minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, eventually transformed him into a truly awe-inspiring presence.

Again we must turn to Oswald Spengler to fully capture the flavour of this mighty dream Jesus was caught up in: the dream of Messiahship which came upon him suddenly as a terrible realisation. "But there was a moment in his life," writes Spengler, "when an inkling, and then high certainty, came over him - 'Thou art thyself It!'"²¹ Unable at first to accept such an astonishing claim for himself, Jesus eventually gave in to the presence of the archetype, and in doing so set in motion a mystery which enveloped not only himself, and his disciples, but the whole Jewish nation. The world was an illusion "that might at any moment without warning vanish into nothingness." So writes Spengler, and in penning those words he offers us a momentary glimpse into the creative darkness of Jesus' consciousness; an

archetypal darkness within which the past merges with the present. To grasp what Spengler is getting at here is to grasp the meaning of the New Testament, the lost meaning of Jesus' divinity brought dangerously close to a theological truism in Paul's ever-expanding Christology.

Carl Jung's description of an "archetype" is worth quoting at this point, for it coalesces perfectly with what we have discovered about Jesus in historical terms, and with what Oswald Spengler surmised about Jesus in psychological terms. Being a primordial image (*Urbild*), an archetype is by way of definition "a figure - be it daemon, a human being, or a process - that constantly recurs in the course of history and appears whenever creative fantasy is freely expressed."²² Using this precise quote Professor Hoeller in his study of Jung and the lost gospels of Qumran and Nag Hammadi, confirms Spengler's sense of the archetypal by telling us that archetypes are autonomous, that they are governed by their own sovereign laws, and that although subjective, they manage to reflect themselves onto the screen of external human affairs. Archetypes are therefore present not only in the inner subjective world of the human psyche, they are also detectable in the arena of human history.²³ But as Jung came to realise, an archetypal image *is not the thing in itself*, merely an expression of a mysterious something belonging to an inaccessible level of psychic reality, and capable of interacting with us through dreams, reveries, visions and artistic creations. Here then is the dream-like force driving Jesus out of Galilee, the visionary force directing his feet towards Jerusalem, the irresistible creative force causing his words to lodge in the minds of those confronted by him. And so Thiede and D'Ancona use the word "numinous" in relation to the mentality of that historical period, for it accurately indicates another reality, a reality only occasionally sensed in our time; the awe-inspiring reality and presence of divinity in everyday life.

At first close to Jesus, his Baptist-oriented disciples eventually fell away and scattered, only to be galvanised back into life when he survived his crucifixion and appeared to them *in the flesh*. Like Paul, they were shocked to the core, frightened out of their wits, made as little children by this spectre who proved his physicality in a number of ways. I'm not a spirit, he told them. I'm

flesh and blood; and don't you forget it. And they didn't - not ever. Jesus' physical resurrection became the key to their future gospel, their story of how he surprised everyone and made even his reluctant brother James recognise his Messiahship, but only in orthodox terms. Jesus and James did not see eye to eye on everything, and would soon separate over Jesus' claim that he was now in some sense "divine". For James did not fully comprehend what had happened to his brother; but Paul did. James could not forget the fact that they had had a common father, Joseph, and a common mother, Mary. And he could not forget that Jesus' dynastic leadership of the Nazarenes was still in question because of the irregularities of his birth - many Nazarenes viewed Jesus as illegitimate. Paul, on the other hand, sensed the leap that had taken place in Jesus' mind, and responded wholeheartedly to the archetypal intensity of this remarkable man.

But not James. James would not buy the story that this brother of his had been mentally and spiritually transformed to such an extent; and that in spite of the fact that he recognised him as Israel's legitimate Messiah. No, he would not accept that Jesus should be made into a god/man; and neither would he accept Paul's theological justification for such a move. Perfectly aware of ancient Nazarene traditions, and of the early split in Nazarene ranks, he held to his orthodox views and kept Paul at arms length. Jesus, too, for that matter; for there is only one meeting between these brothers on record, and it is an informational blank. It was too dangerous, he must have felt, too close to past mistakes, too close to what these Gentile converts of Paul's expected from their spiritual leaders to ever be properly understood. Yes, the orthodox Nazarene idea of the Messiah was in itself a deeply spiritual vision different from that of the Jews, a majestic insight into how God bridged the gap between himself and his human creation, but to push this vision of messianic endowment as far as Paul had pushed it was to invite not just orthodox Jewish disapproval, it was to invite the accusation of full-blown heresy. Whatever happened, that had to be avoided.

Hyam Maccoby correctly interprets the situation thus: "The belief that Jesus had been resurrected was indeed the mark of the movement after Jesus' death. Without this belief, the movement

would simply have ceased to exist".²⁴ I agree. But perhaps the word "death" is too strong. For when speaking to the Jews at Pentecost, Peter says: "I speak of Jesus of Nazareth, *a man singled out by God* and made known to you". [emphasis added] A man? And then Peter too speaks of Jesus having been "killed"; but perhaps only because he doesn't really understand what has taken place. Shocked as they all were by Jesus' appearance in the upper room, the question of how he had managed to survive death would not have arisen for Peter in any practical sense. His Messiah was alive, ergo God had brought him back from the dead. It was that simple. And what a flutter it must have caused in the chest, Alive. ALIVE! Unique because of their mutual belief that Jesus was alive, the orthodox and heterodox Nazarene parties must have felt unstoppable as they went about their daily business. Jesus was alive and in Damascus, and the Kingdom of God was just around the corner. What a shock the Romans were going to get when that kingdom materialised and Jesus stood forth as God's chosen son.

The Day of Reckoning

But for the Roman invasion of Judea, James' orthodox view of Jesus would probably have prevailed - Paul's visits to Jerusalem at long intervals show that he was ultimately subservient to the Jerusalem Nazarene Council, and as his letters reveal, his "churches" were in varying stages of spiritual disintegration. The Nazarene sectarians grew rapidly into a major religious party with many orthodox Jewish connections, causing Paul's "Christian" movement to struggle for survival. But in the end it was all for naught, sectarian idiocy stirred the Roman beast into action, and the Jewish nation tumbled into a bloody abyss. Jerusalem fell, and with it the reputation of the Nazarenes *and* the Christians. Forced to abandon Jerusalem in 70, the Nazarenes were barred from the synagogue as heretics and dispersed to Caesarea and other cities. And so too the Christians; for although carrying a different name, they were in fact Nazarenes by origin, albeit it of a heretical variety. And so arose the *birkat ha-minim* ("benediction of the heretics"), the double-barreled prayer against the Nazarenes

(*Nozrim/Nazrim*) and the Christians (*Minim*), the two sectarian bodies with the same archetypally-driven leader.

But it did not last for long, this exclusion from Jerusalem of the Christians, for as Thiede and D'Ancona record, "the city's Christians who had not participated in the revolt against the Romans were soon allowed to return, settling once more on the south-western hill, today's Mount Zion."²⁵ Now that is very odd, for weren't they already ear-marked as having burned down almost two-thirds of the Roman capital in or around 65? Did the Roman's have such a short memory that their by now well-known name did not ring alarm bells? Or is this the final proof that it wasn't the "Christians" who suffered the brunt of Nero's madness at all, but the Nazarene community not yet displaced by Paul's *ecclesia* in Rome? And as these Nazarenes will go on to create a dynastic succession based on Jesus' blood relations, a succession of "Heirs" (*desposyni*) preserved by name down to 132, should it not be self evident that the claims made by this same group as late as 318 before Sylvester 1 cannot any longer be ignored by Christian scholars?

The original Jesus community survived, and according to Hugh Schonfield, was still in existence in north and east Palestine right up until the fifth century. To suggest, therefore, as is common among Christian scholars, that this original community was quickly absorbed back into Judaism is to make a mockery of history. Hyam Maccoby too rejects this tendency of scholars to make the Nazarenes "slip back into Judaism", for it does not fit with New Testament evidence, and is patently born from the need to make uncomfortable facts vanish. Yes, Jesus seems to have been on Paul's side, and Paul's Christology was certainly very different from that of James' Nazarene party, but the extraordinary belief system eventually developed around Jesus by Rome's exalted Christian leaders was perhaps as different from Paul's belief system as Paul's was from that of the Nazarenes. For it is not only the Nazarenes who have been made to fit into a pattern that did not actually exist, Paul too has been made to creatively fit a pattern not entirely of his own making. By exactly what margin this is the case is still to be decided, but no one seriously interested in Paul's theological-cum-social constructions can surely ignore

the two faces of Paul as presented in the New Testament. Maccoby would argue for Jesus being of a Jamesian persuasion, and would, I think, consider the later Roman Church a natural extension of Paul's theological vision. I would argue for Paul's theology and historically suspect interaction with the Nazarene community (in both Jerusalem and Rome) being used by what remained of the Christian community, and eventually reconstituted by a usurping ecclesiastical hierarchy desperate to legitimise its growing power in the scattered Christian communities.

So not so much all Paul's fault then, but certainly born out of his basic theology, a theology based not on imagination, but on the verifiable facts of a Jewish-Arabian mysticism devoted to the god/man Essa. Totally integrated and elaborated upon by the end of the second century, and by the fourth part of a picture thought perfect in continuity. There was then no problem for Pope Sylvester to dismiss these rough Nazarenes when they turned up, these "poor ones" claiming right of apostolic succession from Jesus through James. For with the Emperor Constantine at his elbow, and the Roman army virtually at his command, Sylvester could see no good reason to rock the barque of Christ as it set sail for what he believed would be a glorious future.

References and Notes:

- 1 Hoeller, Stephan, *Jung and the Lost Gospels*, Theosophical Publishing House, Wheaton, Ill, (1993), p. 52.
- 2 Smith, Morton, *Jesus the Magician*, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London 1978, p. 114.
- 3 Thiede, Carsten P & D'Ancona, Matthew, *The Jesus Papyrus*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1996, p. 73.
- 4 Maccoby, Hyam, *The Myth Maker*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1986, p. 176.
- 5 Thiede, Carsten & D'Ancona, Matthew, *The Jesus Papyrus* (as above), p. 72.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid.
- 8 Rosa, Peter de, *Vicars of Christ*, Corgi Books 1989, p. 44.
- 9 Durant, Will, *Caesars and Christ*, Simon & Schuster, New York 1944, p. 587.
- 10 Ibid., p. 576.
- 11 Petrement, Simone, *A Separate God/The Origins and Teachings of Gnosticism*, Harper, San Francisco, 1995, p. 472.
- 12 Hoeller, Stephan, *Jung and the Lost Gospels* (as above), p. 51.
- 13 Ibid., p. 53.

- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid., p. 55.
- 16 Osman, Ahmed, *The House of the Messiah*, Harper Collins, London 1992, p. 54.
- 17 Petrement, Simone, *A Separate God* (as above), p. 473.
- 18 Thiede, Carsten & D.Ancona, Matthew, *The Jesus Papyrus* (as above), p. 149.
- 19 Spengler, Oswald, *The Decline of the West*, George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London 1980, vol 2, p. 215.
- 20 Thiede, Carsten & D'Ancona, Matthew, *The Jesus Papyrus* (as above), p. 148.
- 21 Spengler, Oswald, *The Decline of the West* (as above), p. 215.
- 22 Jung, C G., *The Spirit in Man, Art and Literature*, Collected works, Vol. 15, par. 127.
- 23 Hoeller, Stephan, *Jung and the Lost Gospels* (as above), p.58.
- 24 Maccoby, Hyam, *The Myth Maker* (as above), p. 125.
- 25 Thiede, Carsten & D'Ancona, Matthew, *The Jesus Papyrus* (as above), p. 72.

