

In the Name of "/S"?

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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" may harbour clues in relation to the idea of his having been a divine being centuries before he appeared on the scene, and in their controversial book *The Jesus Papyrus*, Carsten Peter Thiede and Matthew D'Ancona offer grounds for thinking that this may actually be the case. From a detailed study of three tiny fragments of papyrus locked up in a forgotten Oxford college showcase, Thiede had conjectured that these fragments of papyrus had probably been written no more than forty years after the crucifixion, it being conceivable that they had been handled by "one of the 'five hundred brothers and sisters' whom Paul said had witnessed the resurrected Jesus." If correct, then Matthew's Gospel reflected early 1st century perceptions of Jesus, a notion strengthened by the fact that this gospel sometimes abbreviated Jesus' name, so creating a *nomen sacrum*, or "holy name". This was done by taking the first and last letters of Jesus' name in Greek, which is *Iesous*, and rendering it as *IS*, a more ordinary example of a *nomen sacrum* being the same system used in relation to the Greek word *kyrie*, meaning "Lord". Taking the "K" and the "E" from *kyrie*, Matthew had rendered it as *KE*.

It is with trepidation, therefore, that I would like to 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 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 dimension.

The name "Essa", written in Arabic as either "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 known as the "Nasara". As *Nasara* translates as "Nazareth" in Arabic, would a *nomen sacrum* for the gospel Jesus not make more sense if this abbreviation of a common Jewish name referred not to the gospel Jesus as such, but to the prophet Essa, Isa of Issa, founder of the sect to which Jesus belonged? Essa transliterates as *Iesous* (Jesus) when passed from Arabic into Aramaic and then Greek, and in conjunction with the *nomen sacrum* appearing only in Jesus' Greek name (*Iesous*), this suggests a connection with the early Arabian-based Nazarene sect. In this vein it is interesting to note that on every occasion Jesus is referred to in the gospels as *of Nazareth*, the word "Nazareth" ought to read *Nazarene*? This subterfuge strongly suggests that Jesus' close affiliation with the Nazarene party has been deleted, and this suggests in turn that as a group, the beliefs of the Nazarene sect played a much more important role in Jesus' life than the Gospels 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 the others is perfectly plausible, but it may in fact signal much more than that. The Gospel Jesus may have been perceived by his followers as in some sense sacred, the key to understanding what this meant lying not in Jesus himself, but in what he represented as a dynastic leader of the Nazarene sect. This is to suggest that his name was not arbitrarily given, and that it reflected the origins of the sect to which he belonged. The name "Jesus", when abbreviated, was then not only a code-name for this other Jesus (Issa), it was also a power-name belonging to the sect's distant past. Jesus, it should be remembered, gave his *name* to his disciples to use as a power-name when healing the sick or exorcising demons, and it is possible that he too used the name of his sect's founder for that purpose. There is no record of this, but that is hardly surprising given the implications of this suggestion.

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 Hugh Schonfield back in the 1960s. This might also explain why Paul, after his conversion, heads for Arabia and *not* Jerusalem; he had been dispatched (by whom?) 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. When Paul returns from Arabia he is a changed man; so also is the Jesus he preaches. Paul the lightning-struck convert does not preach the messianic Jesus known to the Jerusalem-based Nazarenes, he preaches the mind-transforming "Christ" of 400 BCE that the Church will later transform into their judgmental divine emperor beyond the skies. *This*, I would suggest, is the Arabian Jesus of the Hijaz mountains *superimposed* on the Jesus of the gospels by Paul, a Jesus believed to have been in some sense divine by his *Nasara*-based followers.

As I suggest in my explorative book *Jesus the Heretic*, this is the phantom Jesus of the New Testament, the one intuited by scholars never to have existed in real life. Yet utterly real in relation to that ancient Arabian Jesus of which the New Testament Jesus was a probable successor. Essa, or *Issa*, was a Jewish prophet freed from exile in Babylon who rallied the Jewish community of the Hijaz mountains, whereas Ezra, also a prophet, returned to a decimated and demoralised community of Jews in Palestine and launched "Judaism" as a new religious institution. Judaism had not existed prior to that moment, Israelite monotheism having been the ancient form. Followers of the Arabian Jesus (Issa) would split into two groups, one treating him as a prophet, the other, for obscure reasons, as a species of divine being. Here then is the probable root of the two Nazarene factions evident in the New Testament: the Jerusalem-based Nazarenes led by Jesus' brother James, and the Damascus-based Nazarenes who took Paul under their wing. So similar, yet so different in their view of Jesus and their interpretation of the Law. Eventually promoted by Paul, this

faction will spawn the embryonic "Christian" party at loggerheads with what remained of the Nazarene party in Rome.

Nomina Sacra/Nomina Divina

Of further interest is the use of "holy names" in the Gospels, a system of abbreviations so striking 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". Abbreviations such as *IS* in the New Testament "implied a dramatic theological claim about the nature and role of Jesus", and this, in alignment with the beliefs of the ancient Nazarene faction who considered their Jesus (Issa) to have been divine, strongly suggested that the early Pauline Christian community's evaluation of their Jesus as "divine" had not been added to the Gospels at the end of the first century, but that it had been an integral element of their belief system right from the start.

But as I was about to discover from the work of Professor Stephan 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. 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 a "power name" such as a magician might own or use, it being

recorded in the New Testament that he gave his disciples the authority, or 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 through the use of Jesus' name, Mark's Gospel recording that King Herod heard of Jesus because his "name was spread abroad". (Mark 6: 14) And there was also the factor of Jesus' habit of forgiving *sins*. Taking over John the Baptist's group of followers, Jesus seems to have reinterpreted John's message of forgiveness through baptism and repentance and replaced it with what Morton Smith describes as "trust in his power". On this basis the Scribes accused Jesus of *claiming* "divine power", so the question had to be: Was it part of his Messianic mission to claim such a capacity? What kind of being was a "Messiah" if he could heal the sick, forgive sins and pass on such powers to his followers?

Thiede and D'Ancona speculate that the abbreviating of Jesus' Greek name to that of a *nomen sacrum* 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'". True as this is in relation to the newly-named "Christian" community in Antioch (the term *Christian* was a form of abuse aimed at Paul's followers), it cannot have applied to the Jerusalem Nazarenes led by Jesus' brother James who, as the New Testament records, was at loggerheads with Paul over numerous issues to do with the Law *and* his expanded view of Jesus. These Jesus-based communities were *not* interchangeable; they were opposed on many levels and only peripherally capable of relating. The supposition that the Nazarene community in Jerusalem could have sanctioned or upheld a Pauline conception of Jesus is therefore highly improbable, the attempt by later writers to make the Apostle Peter a Pauline sympathiser an historical distortion used by the later Church to legitimise its claim to apostolic succession. Christian theology had so clouded the historical canvas that such a notion was being accepted without question. I delved more deeply and came across the *Birkat ha-minim* 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

In conjunction with the term *Minim*, the term *Nosrim* had been translated by Thiede as "the Christians", so obscuring the fact that *Nosrim*, as Professor Pagels states when citing the same curse, refers specifically to the Nazarenes, *not* the Christians. The *birkat-ha-minum* curse separated *Nosrim* from *Minim*, the word *Minum* being a blanket term for "heretics" of all persuasion. In this context *Minim* referred to the Christians with their notion of a "divine" Messiah, whereas the term *Nosrim* referred to the Nazarene sect held responsible along with the Zealots for the destruction of Jerusalem and everything Jewish.

The problem lay in the use of "Christian" as a blanket term for the Jerusalem and Antiochene communities, plus the persistent inclusion of James the Just in this mix *as if* these communities were 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. Two Jesus-based communities had existed, but to lump them together and call them "Christian" was inaccurate. 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 ruptured, Paul's assemblies being "spied upon" by the orthodox camp due to worrying reports. Peter shuttles between these communities, his sympathy's made out to be in accordance with Paul's more relaxed attitude to the Law, but evidence from other sources makes this claim untenable

The name "Christian" was not used by the Nazarenes; it was used in scorn of Paul's converts (Jews and predominantly Gentile women) by Antioch's Jewish community. The Jerusalem community was Nazarene (*Nozrim, Nazrim or Notzerim*), and all but "Nazarite" in its observance of the Torah. The Antiochian Christian community, composed of converted Jews and Gentile "God-fearers", was anti-Torah and under the sway of ideas considered heretical by the Nazarenes. As Maccoby shows, however, there were Christian sects specifically called Nazarenes, and they "believed in the Torah, but also believed in the virgin birth of Jesus and in his divine nature."⁴ This clarifies the issue; it bolsters the contention that there were *two* distinct Nazarenes groups, and that one of them accepted the idea of Jesus being divine and born of a virgin. So was this the faction who nurtured Paul back to health after his Damascus-road experience? Was this the faction who sent him into Arabia to complete his religious education? These Damascus Nazarenes lie at the heart of this puzzle, every attempt made to blend their conception of Jesus' nature and purpose with that of the Jerusalem Nazarenes a task requiring further scrutiny and adjustment.

Historical Confusion

The complexity of this situation is highlighted by Thiede and D'Ancona when writing of the persecution of Rome's Christians by Nero in 64. A strange situation erupts as Nero arrests and accuses many 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 "disagreements", "divisions" and "jealousy" between Christians, the situation leading to the arrest and execution of both Peter and Paul. Interesting. Of even greater interest is a passage 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 Therein, I would contend, lies the key to this whole complicated affair.

The Romans eventually work out who was who and persecuted only those who offended their sensibilities, the persecuted more likely to have been the Nazarene sectarians than Paul's predominantly Gentile converts. The Romans had worked out who was who, whereas modern scholars seem to be all at sea on this question. "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

There is a twist in this text that makes Nazarenes into "Jews" and the not-so-subtle difference between Nazarenes and Christians disappear. Jews, Nazarenes and Christians must have suffered and died as a result of Nero's pogrom, but it was the Nazarene community preaching Jesus as the awaited Messiah of Israel who probably took the brunt of Nero's savagery. The historian Peter de Rosa nudges this situation into shape when he says: "Christians were taken by the Romans to be a Jewish sect",⁸ the historian Will Durant describing these Nazarenes and Christians as "hardly distinguished by Rome from the orthodox Jews."⁹ What is being described is not a persecution of Paul's "Christians"; it is the persecution of Nazarenes mistakenly called "Christians" by later Christian writers.

Rivalry between the Christian and Nazarene groups was intense; they denounced and betrayed one another because of divisions in attitude and interpretation. As we are not told what these words mean, the problem of what they were fighting over slips into the mist of later Christian exegesis. But not entirely; there are clues. The major clue is that in 65 war broke out between the Romans and the Jews, a war lasting 5 years that resulted in the siege and destruction of Jerusalem in 70. Jewish hatred of the Romans had been gathering for years, and when it burst into the open Rome responded with her usual swiftness. Also in Rome, I would imagine; but not without some kind of warning. Chaos is said to have reigned in the Jewish-Christian communities, the

doctrinal squabbling that erupted serving Nero's purpose. A large part of Rome would end up in ashes, and the Nazarenes, who were Jews, yet different from the Jews, oddly similar to the Christians, yet not Christians, were earmarked by Nero and punished. Doctrinally separated these groups may have been, but many of them probably burned side by side in the Emperor's garden, their screams one indistinguishable cacophony of pain.

The Agreement

According to his Galatian letter, Paul came to Jerusalem to face the leaders of the Nazarene community not immediately, but three years after his conversion, spent fifteen days with Peter and did not return for a further fourteen. Proof of doctrinal continuity between the two communities is therefore 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 this abundantly clear in his study of Paul, Peter and the so-called Jerusalem "church": Peter never renounced his Nazarene beliefs, there being numerous technicalities of Jewish Law at work within the text of Acts that disallow such an idea. 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 and clumsy addition to the text. Unlike Paul's call to the Jews, Peter's call for them to be "baptised" is not a call to a "new religion"; it is a call for them to join the Nazarene sect and adopt a "religious stance" against Rome. Seen in this light, the argument against Peter ever having set foot in Rome takes on substance.

Jesus' brother James continued to be held in high respect by orthodox Jewry right up until his death in 62. 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. As Will Durant shows, what is mistakenly called "Judaic Christianity" survived for a further five centuries in the form of the Ebionim ("the poor"), a spin-off Nazarene group reminiscent of the Qumran Essenes who continued to practice community sharing and the full Jewish Law.

The doctrinal agreement Paul came to with the leaders of the Jerusalem community did not last long. Showing an almost complete disregard for the Torah, Paul angered orthodox Jews everywhere and incurred the wrath of the Nazarenes, who sent leading disciples to Antioch in an attempt to reverse such a dangerous trend. Forced back to Jerusalem to explain himself before the Jerusalem Council, Paul made his case and James, aware of the Paul's Damascus-based Nazarene background, agreed reluctantly that pagan proselytes should not be forced to accept the full Law of Moses, and made only to obey the injunctions against immorality and the eating of strangled, or sacrificial animals. A compromise and a promises of financial support from Antioch eased the tension. On returning to Antioch, however, Paul resumed his subversive preaching against the Torah and was again forced to report to James. To advocate reduced observance of the Torah for Gentile "God-fearers" was acceptable, to tell orthodox Jews that they should abandon the Torah altogether and replace it with a belief in Jesus as a divine being, unacceptable.

During this period, Peter arrives in Antioch and proceeds to eat with Paul's Gentiles thinking that the food before him has been prepared in accordance with the Law (a technicality highlighted by Maccoby), only to discover that it has not - Paul has not kept his part of the agreement with James. Forced to abandon table, Peter shows 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 what took place will be solely imaginary. Other incidents follow at Corinth, and these filter back to James and cause Paul to journey back to Jerusalem where he is reminded that "thousands" of Torah-loving Jews have now been added to the Nazarene party. Advised to undergo purification in the Temple to prove that he too observes the Law, Paul submits and causes a riot. Accused by the High Priest and some elders of having preached a "new religion", Paul's devious dealings with the Nazarenes are at last brought out into the open.

This is not the impression one gets from reading the book of Acts; strict observance of the Law is not the only factor separating Paul's Christians from the Jerusalem Nazarenes. Mutual adjustment of attitude in relation to the Torah is required, and agreed on, but as the story in Acts unfolds Paul goes well beyond this basic requirement by preaching Jesus' death on the cross as an act that in itself annuls orthodox Jewry's doctrine of atonement. *That* is what all the fuss is about: Paul is single-handedly dismantling Judaism's principle doctrine, his previous willingness to take part in the Temple purification rite alongside Nazarites an attempt to escape censure on this issue. Playing at being an orthodox Jew when among orthodox Jews, he is beaten at his own game and walks into James' doctrinal trap.

The True Prophet

Orthodox Nazarenes interpreted their beliefs about Jesus' status in accordance with Judaism, not apart from Judaism. Their choice of Messiah was not acceptable to Jewish orthodoxy, but their execution of the Law and their adherence to the rites of Judaism were beyond question. Striving to perfect the Law in their lives, they rejected Paul's evaluation of Jesus and upheld Judaism's basic tenets. In *A Separate God*, 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 Rigorously monotheistic, they rejected Paul's extravagant notions about Jesus and steered a careful path

between Jewish orthodoxy and Paul's heterodoxy - a fact that should not be overlooked.

Paul's *new* thinking about Jesus was simply not new; it most likely had its origin in the heterodox Arabian "Issa" cult where divinity and the human had coalesced, and James must have been aware of that fact. To think that he was somehow ignorant of this connection is untenable given that the Damascus Nazarenes figure so prominently in Paul's initial story, then, without explanation, disappear without trace. We are left with the Jerusalem-based Nazarenes *as if* they constitute the only Nazarene party, and that is unlikely given the tenor of what Paul was preaching about Jesus, and what Jesus himself had preached during his ministry. Paul was an admitted Nazarene and Jesus is referred to as "the Nazarene" in the Gospels, but neither sound like the Nazarenes led by Jesus' brother James - they echo one another's broadminded religious vision, and that may indicate a common source. Paul's sophisticated notions of the "Christ-mind" will be later retro-fitted to fit with Roman Christianity's pagan-influenced interpretation of the same phenomenon, his early promotion of religious freedoms and his recognition of women as spiritually equal to men erased and replaced with the Church's dour evaluation of both. Something of Paul original thinking about Jesus is however still detectable in his genuine Epistles, but it has elsewhere been usurped in favour of a Jesus that has ceased to be human in any sense that matters.

The giveaway texts in all of this are to be found in Paul's Galatian Epistle (Gal. 1: 17-18.) where he tells us that he did *not* go up to Jerusalem after his conversion as has been reported (Acts. 9: 26-27.), but that he went into Arabia and stayed there for a period of three years. (Gal. 1: 18.) Hugh Schonfield pulls this claim of Paul's into sharp historical focus in *The Passover Plot* (1967) where, in relation to the *Similitudes of Enoch*, he explains what lay behind Paul's conception of messiahship and, I think unintentionally, why the Jerusalem Nazarenes tried to accommodate Paul's mystically-oriented view of Jesus' mentality.

He [the Messiah] is named and hidden from the beginning in the secret thoughts of God, finally to be revealed in the Last Times as the Ideal Man who will justify God's creation of the world. In this sense he is the Second Adam, answering to the Light Adam of the Nazorean-Mandaeans, and the Nazoerean-Ebionite 'mankind figure invisible to men in general'. From such teaching, probably while he was in the borders of Arabia, Paul acquired the inspiration from which he developed his concept of the heavenly Messiah who had incarnated in the earthly Jesus.¹²

The bottom line in both James' and Paul's conception of Jesus is that they perceived him in much the same fashion, as a "man" *visited upon* by God, yet not altogether the same in that Paul's Jesus is a mystically extended version of James' traditionally grounded Jesus. Both Jesus' are *fully* human, both carry messianic responsibilities, and both reflect a profound religious mystery, but there is one major difference: the phenomenon of Jesus' messianic consciousness is for Paul something that can be shared in by others. Not in the sense of being *possessed* by Jesus consciousness, but in the discovery that his dramatically heightened level of awareness is a *new mind* available to all. Messiahship, for Paul, ceased to be a heavenly gift granted only to preordained individuals in terms of leadership and Israel's future; it became, for him, a mental state, or condition, made visible in Jesus as the *Ideal* "Man" that could be experienced by others. *This* is the Jesus being preached by Paul, and it justifies the creation of the world not because *one man* has been so gifted, but because *all men* have the opportunity to realise the same gift in their lives. Hence Paul's claim that there is no difference between genders or nations; he has taken an ancient teaching, a lost teaching, a secret teaching couched obscurely in terms of Israel's future and brought it back to life. It is however not Israel's future that concerns Paul; it is the world's future that concerns him.

The Joshua Connection

In *Jung and the Lost Gospels*, Stephan Hoeller, Professor Emeritus of Comparative Religions, speaks of a "Joshua connection" in relation to Jesus' messianic status, the name Joshua embodying 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."¹³ 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 figures as "organically connected", he defines them as conquering, revealing, sacrificing, dying and reappearing images, and informs us that the Essenes were conscious of their Teacher's archetypal connections with spiritual figures from the past, namely, "Joseph" and "Asaph". 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."¹⁴ Expanding on the name "Asaph", we are informed that a teacher called Jo-Asaph (Joseph) is to be found in ancient Islamic records, and that the Ahmadiyya movement (an influential Moslem sect) believed Jo-Asaph to be identical with Jesus even to the extent of his having survived crucifixion.¹⁵ Crucifixion? It is however Hoeller's summation that is of interests, for his detailed overview reveals that "the figure of the Christian Saviour is the last and greatest of a series of archetypal images manifesting in Jewish tradition".¹⁶

In *The House of the Messiah*, Ahmed Osman draws our attention to Professor of Theology A. T. Hanson's perplexity over Paul apparently throwing Christ's activity back into the Old Testament,¹⁷ not in the sense of these ancient texts being fulfilled in Christ, but rather: "This is what Christ says". This suggests, to me at least, that Paul's "speaking" Jesus on the road to Damascus may not have been the "voice of conscience" as scholars suspect, but more likely a "documented" voice retrieved from Arabia and used later to construct his supposedly new conception of Jesus' cosmic status. A figure of ancient vintage seems to be at large in Paul's

writings, a figure of immense power and prestige who mirrors the Gospel Jesus, but is not the Gospel Jesus. This, I would contend, is the Christ-like figure Paul detects in the Old Testament and designates a *Prophet of God*, a figure called "Joshua" (Jesus) that he believed to have succeeded Moses as the leader of the Israelites (Deut 18:15). This is not the Gospel Jesus popping up in the past; it is *another* Jesus figure, a cultic figure whose name reflected, as we saw earlier, the name of God and whose teachings seem to have paralleled those of the Gospel Jesus.

Simone Petrement makes sense of this situation in relation to the Jerusalem Nazarenes when she speaks of the sect's known speculation on successive appearances of the "true prophet" having formed the base of a belief system that exalted the great figures of Judaism and underlined the continuity between the Old Testament and the New.¹⁸ Hoeller's description of these figures as "archetypal images manifesting in Jewish tradition" pulls their identities into focus, for this is not the incarnation of one being or identity age by age, it is 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 possible that the Jesus Paul preached was an amalgamation of the Gospel Jesus, the Arabian Jesus Essa and other Jesus-type figures in Jewish history such as Joshua or Jo-Asaph. The concealed letters *IS* in Jesus' Greek name could then be an allusion to one of the two versions of Is[sa] (Jesus) held to be either a prophet or a divine being by the original Hijaz-based Nazarenes. This is of interest in itself, but when one adds Stephan Hoeller's observation that the name "Joshua" embodies "the first archetypal prefiguration of the messianic principle: a conqueror, a lawgiver, a concealer, and preserver of the *true Gnosis*, or *secret doctrine*", (my italics) and links this to Joshua, son of Nun, meaning 'fish', then to the Essene Teacher of Righteousness and to the Jesus of the Gospels, one is left with what Hoeller terms an *organically* connected group of "conquering, revealing, sacrificing, dying and reappearing images" suggestive of a divinity cult. In this light Jesus' whole demeanor in the Gospels takes on ritualistic significance, his planned entry into Jerusalem (the prearranged donkey ride), his planned betrayal by

Judas (the last supper directive), his planned crucifixion (take this 'cup' from me) and his planned (promised) resurrection being part of an ancient archetypal scheme linked to *atonement*. Something of this kind was going on in Paul's Nazarene-based imagination, and that "something" was a doctrine of spiritual atonement linked to the preservation of a "secret" doctrine, a *Gnosis* that earmarked the Nazarenes and their future spinoffs as special. Hence this doctrine's *universal* application by Paul; it was not a set of "beliefs" to be slavishly followed: it was a mystical "practice" developed in relation to the human mind that had to be taken up *by* the human mind.

Promotion/Demotion

In this essay we have seen Jesus promoted to the level of divinity, then demoted to the level of an ordinary man carrying a tradition of divinity, albeit a tradition brought to a pitch of experiential refinement in his inner life. This is the *numinous* aspect of Jesus' behaviour and thinking; he radiated a changed consciousness and it affected everyone who came in contact with him. There was a sense in which he *was* Issa, Joshua, Joseph or Jo-Asaph. His life was given over to an archetypal "idea", his living out of that idea the mechanism that transformed him into what others sensed to be that archetype in person. Oswald Spengler captures something of what Jesus was caught up in when he says: "[T]here was a moment in [Jesus'] life when an inkling, and then high certainty, came over him - 'Thou art thyself It!'"¹⁹ Unable at first to accept such an astonishing idea ("Whom say men that I am?"), Jesus eventually gives in to the presence of the archetype and *embodies* the archetype as in the *Similitudes of Enoch*.

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 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."²⁰ Using this quote in his study of Jung and the lost gospels of Qumran and Nag Hammadi, Hoeller 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 world of the human psyche, they are also detectable in the arena of human history.²¹ 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 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 confounded by his reasoning. And so Thiede and D'Ancona use the word "numinous" in relation to the mentality of that historical period, for it indicates another reality, a reality only occasionally sensed in our own time; the awe-inspiring reality and presence of the archetypal in everyday life.

The Day of Reckoning

The Jerusalem Nazarenes grew rapidly into a major religious party with many orthodox Jewish connections that caused Paul's Christian movement to struggle for survival. In the end, however, it was all for naught, for 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. So too the Christians; for although carrying a different name, they were in fact Nazarenes by origin, albeit it of a different doctrinal hue. 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 this exclusion from Jerusalem was eventually lifted for 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."²² That is odd, for were not the Christians already ear-marked as having participated in that revolt? Did the Roman's have such a short memory that the name "Christian" did not ring alarm bells? Or is this proof that it was not Paul's Christians who suffered the brunt of Nero's madness, but rather the already established orthodox Jewish community and its dangerously militant Nazarene element.

According to Hugh Schonfield, the original Jerusalem-based Jesus community survived and was still in existence in north and east Palestine right up until the fifth century. To suggest, as many Christian scholars do, that this original community was absorbed back into Judaism, is therefore incorrect - the exact opposite case could be argued given the substantial numbers of orthodox Jews who joined with the Nazarenes. Hyam Maccoby also rejects the tendency among 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 disappear. Paul's Christology was certainly different from that of James', but the belief system that eventually developed around Jesus by Rome's Christian leaders was as different from Paul's as Paul's was from that of the Jerusalem Nazarenes. It is not only the Nazarenes who have been made to fit into a pattern that did not belong to them, Paul too has been forced into a pattern not entirely of his own making. By what margin this is the case is yet to be determined, but no one seriously interested in Paul's theological-cum-social constructions should ignore the two faces of Paul as presented in the New Testament, the two types of Nazarene belief engaged in by Paul and James, or the blatant difference between Paul's Damascus-influenced Christian party and James' Jerusalem-based Nazarenes.

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