

announces the disappearance of the world of flesh and the rise of a new world of the Spirit. Jeremias's celibacy had prophesied the first part of the mystery. To Mary it was given to see the fulfilment and to prophesy, in her life, both aspects of the imminent consummation.

Mary's virginity was prophetic: it turned towards the Cross and anticipated the end; it inaugurated the new world where the flesh has no power, for that world knows no other fecundity than the fecundity of the Spirit. The charism of virginity in the Church continues and completes that prophetic function. Like Mary and Jesus, the Christian celibate renounces any worldly hope, for he knows that the world has no hope to propose. But, in his loneliness, he announces and through faith already enjoys the eschatological visitation of the Spirit.

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## ESSENISM AND CHRISTIANITY—II<sup>1</sup>

### *Comparison of Essene Theology with the Message of Jesus*

How does the thought of Jesus in the Gospel compare with such grandeur, a grandeur none the less limited by its paradoxes and its narrowmindedness? Let us attempt a comparison of the two. For our Lord, it is not a question of preserving the light already existing in the world and leading it back to God, a kind of centripetal movement, as it were. That is the view of the Essene: to lead the light to the light is how he conceives his role, a choosing out of what is pure in this world and leading it all back to its origin, to God Himself. But this is by no means the idea that Jesus has. He has quite a different perspective. For him the divine light itself comes into this world to lighten the darkness. It actually enters into the world—the light, which is the Word, is made flesh and itself penetrates our darkness. That is the new element. It is a sort of new conquest by the light, which is God Himself, and victory over the darkness which is on all sides.

Viewed in this way infidelity is not some kind of created reality, obscure and unchangeable, standing in contrast to fidelity. It is not that at all. It is merely the refusal that a heart, always free, can make

<sup>1</sup> cf. *Scripture*, 1960, pp. 119–26

to fidelity. Infidelity has no other existence than in the liberty of man. It is not some kind of destiny to damnation that God has given to some and indeed the majority of mankind. The possibility of infidelity is simply the price God has to pay for giving man freedom—and freedom itself is a consequence of love. Hence for Jesus there is a kind of integration of everything in love, something an Essene would never have imagined. In other words, for Jesus the fundamental point is that God is love, whereas for the Essene that notion is not at all central. For him God is the incorruptible light, and the concept of love is much less basic.

If, therefore, we establish as the basis of everything the fact that God loves and man is essentially someone whom God loves, then it will follow that the response to this love which God expects cannot be something obligatory or forced. When one loves someone, one does not force their love in return; one expects their love but does not force it. It is quite clear that there would be no question of love if one could create some sort of immediate reflex in the other, due to a sovereign mastery over his will. That would not be the response expected by love. A love that was not free would not be love at all. It is for this precise reason that it has been stressed above that the liberty of man is an immediate consequence of the fact that he is loved personally by God. Infidelity therefore is a possibility for whomsoever is free; it is the possibility of saying 'no,' which exists side by side with the possibility of saying 'yes,' the possibility of refusing to love which goes hand in hand with the possibility of complete submission to the love offered.

God therefore is calling the whole of humanity to salvation and to share in His love, even though a certain number turn a deaf ear to this call. In other words the whole world is given the invitation to salvation, but in fact certain men will not achieve this salvation due to their refusing the invitation. This is the only limit to predestination. Hence, in the eyes of Jesus, there is room in the heart of every man for a genuine spiritual drama which is not determined beforehand. The 'yes' and the 'no' are possibilities for everyone and they remain possible as long as a man lives. A ready-made reprobation does not exist. Clearly the consequences of this are enormous. We can never say of anyone that he is a reprobate, or that he is predestined, and most especially that can never be said of oneself. In that lies all the difference between Jesus and those who came to hear him. When someone like Simon the Pharisee said: 'This woman, if he only knew to what class she belonged, he certainly would not let her approach him.' For Simon, the very fact of being a prostitute betrayed this woman as one of the reprobate. For Jesus, on the

contrary, her tears and the very fact that she comes to him is the sign that already she is no longer what Simon thinks her to be.

The tragedy of the Essene consciousness of personal predestination is that it inevitably leads to the foolish exaltation of a group of perfect men, whom it thus perverts through their self-love, while at the same time it singles out a brood of sinners whom it expels into the darkness for all time. For Jesus, however, what is important is not to be conscious of predestination but to be poor in spirit. It is there that we approach the crux of the distinction between Christianity and Essenism. It is not a matter of crying to the Lord, 'Thank you, my Lord, for having made me of another species to that man there at the back of the temple.' That is the attitude of the Essene who believes that the species are already determined. In Christianity the important thing is to say, 'Lord, you have not made me of another species to the rest, but I do recognise my misery and I realise that you alone can change it; hence as a beggar, I am here to implore you to change it.' There is the truly predestined. He is the man who is fully conscious of his misery because he has a presentiment of what God offers him; he has a presentiment of what the love of God is and so he calls out to this love. Moreover he does not call out on his own behalf alone but he cries on behalf of all the others, since he knows that the burning desire of God is not merely to save him, but all those who still refuse His love because they know nothing about it. He cries on their behalf, therefore, and on behalf of all, since the love of God wishes to save all.

Thus, for the Christian there is no such thing as absolute reprobation. There is only unbounded love, and it is that which makes all the difference. It means that there is the liberty of all, face to face with this love, and there is the poverty of all, faced with it, and there is prayer on behalf of all for this love. That is the corner-stone of Christianity. It is not the separation of what is already pure from what is impure, an isolation in order to ascend to God. The call of love is to all, inviting each and every one at the same time.

The final perspective of the Essene is one of uniting himself to the other spirits of light, that is to those already in a state of purity before the face of God. It is his aim to enter into their ranks. For the Christian on the other hand, his concern is not so much with the angels but with his own present situation in this world. Admittedly he sees the dichotomy between the kingdom of fidelity and the domain of infidelity, and to that extent his diagnosis is not unlike that of the Essene. However the difference lies in the fact that the Christian sees himself as a part of this world. For him it is a matter of becoming incandescent with the light which is none other than the love of God

Himself, and which can transform each and every one. In that way the darkness will become light—and surely that is quite a different conception to that of the Essene. It is a penetration, and an irradiation through the heart of everyone it penetrates, and its rays go out towards the hearts of those who do not know this light which is communicating itself in order to transform them.

The truth is that for the Christian the measure of a man's sanctity is the very holiness of God Himself. That is something which an Essene would never have imagined. As it was, he could hardly believe that the sanctity of the angels should be made the measure of that of man, and he was amazed that this being, fashioned from dust and clay, should be able to join the company of those spirits who see the face of God. For the Christian, however, the cause of his amazement is much more profound. For him it is not just a case of becoming a servant even among the very highest servants of God, but of living with the very life of God—'Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.' This all-powerful love penetrating and transforming the whole of humanity through those who allow themselves to be inflamed by it is on quite a different plane to Essenism.

The writer of this article confesses that up to a couple of years ago he tended to be quite overcome with enthusiasm for Essenism and saw it as something really wonderful. Now however he sees that its logic, for all its profundity, is a logic that can only lead to despair, with its irreconcilable division in creation and the possibility of saving nothing but the light. It is true that this promotion of man to share in the angelic role of praise is a very high conception, but it is by no means the message that Christ came to give us.

But for all its defects we must not ignore the important positive elements that Essenism stressed. As mentioned above, these can be reduced to three main points. First, there is the need of a personal conversion through some sort of new alliance, so that the predestined can draw near to God—this is the new birth of which Jesus spoke to Nicodemus. Secondly, the fraternal community is the temple which God prefers infinitely more than any building of stone—remembering, however, that they limited this fraternal community to the predestined, and that the notion of love of one's enemies was something they never realised. Thirdly, sincere and interior praise of God is preferable to all the bloody sacrifices.

There is no doubt that these elements are already an important positive contribution. Nevertheless it is difficult to know what is the dominating factor there—is Essenism a light which God has prepared for the coming of the fulness of light, destined to proceed along the same lines, or is it a kind of chiaroscuro, a doctrine of shadows in

contrast with the sudden optimism springing from that love of God which is capable of conquering the whole of humanity ?

J.-D. BARTHÉLEMY, O.P.

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## QUESTION AND ANSWER

### MARANATHA

*In 1 Cor. 16:22 we find the word Maranatha, one of the few Aramaic expressions to be preserved in the New Testament. What does this word mean, and what is its doctrinal significance ?*

The words—for there are two of them—come immediately after a plea for the condemnation, *anathema*, of those who do not love the Lord Jesus. In antiquity the phrase was divided into *maran atha*, 'The Lord has come' or 'The Lord comes.' There is found in old Jewish formulas of condemnation a similar expression, 'The Name (i.e. God) has come.' Thus, if St Paul was thinking along similar lines when he was finishing his epistle, such a condemnation would be a manifestation of our Lord's capacity of sovereign judge who punishes the wicked (cf. Mt. 25:31-46).

In more recent times many scholars divide the expression into *marana tha*, 'Our Lord, come !' If this is the meaning of the phrase as used by the Apostle, then he shows his desire for the definitive stage of the reign of Jesus to arrive. Such a desire is certainly implicit in the petition of the Lord's Prayer, 'Thy kingdom come.' In this understanding of the phrase there is reference to Jesus as judge, for he will upon his return immediately pass judgment upon mankind (cf. Mt. 25:31-46) ; moreover it is precisely as judge that our Lord is asked to come in Apoc. 22:17-21 where the command 'Come, Lord Jesus' is equivalent in meaning to *marana tha*.

The importance of the second coming of Jesus in Christian belief is reflected in the article of the Apostles' Creed 'I believe . . . in the resurrection of the body.' The general resurrection will take place at the time of the parousia (cf. 1 Thess. 4:16-18). The importance of our Lord's second coming and what follows from it was better realised by the members of the early Church than it is by most today. This return of the Saviour was the hope and expectation of the first generation of believers, though they knew 'Neither the day nor the hour' (Mt. 25:13 ; cf. 1 Thess. 5:1-3). At the second coming of our Lord his victory over sin and death will be complete, for Satan will