

THE FAILED CHURCH

Jesus was born in an era when the Roman Empire demanded the utmost submission and conformity on the part of its subjects. People bowed their necks to the yoke of taxation, and submitted to every form of economic evil without protest. In Judea, at this time there were several religious sects, which were also in a way political parties, scheming for place and power, and influence with Rome. The Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes, Zealots, etc., disagreed on various questions, as the interpretation of prophesy, the existence of angels, the resurrection of the dead, baptism and so on. The strife between these parties was desperately bitter, often to the point of personal violence, their arguments frequently ended in riots. We read they were always ready to "take up stones" to end a dispute, often only the commanding personality of Jesus saved them from being stoned by the religious mobs. It was in this contentious and discordant environment that Jesus "began to preach and say 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand'" (Matt. 4:17). We would think the Jewish nation would, in this religious, physical and social milieu, readily accept and embrace the one who said: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor. He sent me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19). He was not the man they expected their Messiah to be. Even though they had the word of the ancients and prophets they had a distorted picture of the personal character of the Messiah.

Much of the concept of who Jesus was that has been held by the Orthodox Church through the years has been based upon such passages as Isaiah 53:3-7: "He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and one from whom men hide their face, he was despised and we did not esteem him. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so he did not open his mouth"... scriptures speaking of the crucifixion and not his entire ministry. This is a prophesy concerning Jesus' death, but it has been interpreted in teaching and sermons as a description of his life, not his death. Thus this description of Jesus has been held up to us as representing his whole life, and as a result of this Jesus has become "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," a pale, effeminate, pathetic figure. As a result Christianity has become sentimentalized and romanticized and Jesus himself is identified with effeminate characteristics. The fact that Jesus is not only the "lamb of God" (John 1:29), but is also "The Lion of Judah" (Rev. 5:5) has been overlooked. Ann Douglas in her book *The Feminization of the Church* wrote: "Between 1820 and 1875, the Protestant Church in this country was gradually transformed from a traditional institution, which claimed certain real justification to be a guide and leader to the American nation, to an influential ad hoc organization which obtained power largely by taking cues from the culture on which it was dependent." This is a result of the church failing to know Jesus of the Bible.

Jesus said "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me" (John 12:32). He has not drawn all men, not even a majority of men, and it may be he has never been lifted up as the Scriptures show him to have been. An unreal, imaginary and weak Jesus who is rather placid, unpretentious and timid is being lifted up instead, and men are not being drawn by it. Jesus did say "I am gentle and humble in heart" (Matt. 11:29), but this was spoken to common people who were in need. His confrontation with religious leaders and unbelievers was quite different. When he said this he had just pronounced woes upon Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum. He has been held up as a man despised, friendless, poverty-stricken and regarded with scorn because of his lowly origin as a carpenter from the hick town of Nazareth, who had no friends except fishermen, laborers, outcasts and sinners; who bore insults and persecutions with meek submission and walked around barefooted and bereft of any manly character. He has been pictured as a rather weak character. The church has failed to see him as he is really pictured in the four gospels.

He was more of an aristocrat, a son of the royal house of David than he was a nobody from Galilee, and was frequently saluted as the "son of David." He was so popular at one point in his ministry they tried to take him by force and declare him King (John 6:15). This was the misguided thought in the minds of the pilgrims in Jerusalem for the feast of Passover when he made his triumphal entry into the city: "And as he was now approaching, near the descent of the Mount of Olives, the whole multitude of disciples began to praise God joyfully with a loud voice for all the miracles which they had seen, saying 'Blessed is the King who comes in the name of the Lord; Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!'" (Luke 19:37, 38).

Because Jesus said "The foxes have holes, and the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Matt. 8:20) he is pictured as poor and homeless, but he had many wealthy and influential friends. Luke 8:3 states: "Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward and Susanna, and many others were contributing their support out of their private means." The king's steward was a high official and his wife probably a prominent lady. Joseph of Arimathea was a dwell-to-do man who came for the body of Jesus, bought a linen sheet and wrapped Jesus and laid him in a new tomb" (Mark 15:43) Matthew states that Joseph was a "rich man" (27:57). Jesus healed the families of rulers and high officials. This is not a picture of the "poor and down and out" the church has painted of Jesus. He wore a cloak that must have been a Rabbi's garment (not a cheap rag), and not only was a woman healed when she touched its fringe (Matt 9:21), but "men recognized him and brought to him all that were ill and they began to entreat him that they might just touch the fringe of his cloak; and as many as touched it were cured" (Matt. 14:36). When he was crucified the garments he was wearing were divided by the soldiers, and they cast lots for them (Mk. 15:24, Matt. 27:35). Nicodemus brought a hundred pounds of myrrh and aloes (not cheap spices) to entomb him (John 19:39). On the night he was betrayed when Judas went out the disciples thought he was sent to give money to the

poor (John 13:29). It must have been a custom for Jesus to give to the poor. Jesus owned no real estate, but in that country and climate his and his Apostle's wants were fully supplied.

In his *Clark's Epistle # 79* the late Floyd Clark had an interesting thought about the "poor" carpenter from Nazareth. He wrote: "A number of things have been misconstrued about (the visit of the Magi). There could have been more than three. And nothing is said about the small army that would have traveled with them to protect them from bandits along the way. And not enough is said about the wealth they brought and gave to Jesus. No small army would have traveled such dangerous 1000 mile road to bring Jesus what was taken up in Sunday School last Sunday. All the gifts would have been very costly, and light enough for Joseph and Mary to have carried those treasures safely to Egypt and back. Archeology has revealed one bit of evidence to support the fact that these visitors supplied all the money Mary needed to provide for Jesus till he was thirty years of age. When Joseph returned to Nazareth he still had enough money to buy just the right place to raise his family, inside the walls of the city. Jesus was not raised 'in the sticks,' but 'downtown' where all the people went by."

As a boy Jesus continued to live with his parents in Nazareth (Luke 2:39, 51). When Philip spoke to Nathanael and referred to Jesus as from Nazareth, Nathanael asked "can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" (John 1:45, 46). This implies the city was insignificant and was perhaps held in contempt by other cities in the area. When Jesus began his ministry "he was about thirty years of age, being supposedly the son of Joseph..." (Luke 3:23) and was referred to as "the carpenter" (Mark 6:3), "the carpenter's son" (Matt 13:55), and "the son of Joseph" (Luke 4:22; John 6:42), and "when he began to teach "many listeners were astonished, saying 'Where did this man get these things, and what is this wisdom given to him, and such miracles as these performed by his hands?'" (Mark 6:2). For this reason many were offended at him. All that Jesus did upon the earth he did as a *man*, not as a "God-man" as Trinitarians insist. Peter shows how he was able to do it as a man: "You know of Jesus of Nazareth, how God anointed him with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with him (Acts 10 :38). The life and works of Jesus shows us what man could have done if sin had not entered the world. C.S. Lewis in *Miracles* stated: "Whatever may have been the powers of unfallen man, it appears that those of the redeemed will be almost impossible." The title Jesus took for himself was "the Son of Man." He rarely spoke of himself in any other way. This term "son of man" was common in Jewish prophecies, being used 116 times, always referring to a man. Barnabas Lindars in his book *Jesus Son of Man* states: "The words 'Son of Man,' which in the Aramaic Greek spoken by Jesus did not amount to a Messianic title in Jesus' own day. Meaning simply 'a man,' a human being. It was a roundabout, somewhat idiosyncratic way of referring to oneself without saying 'I.'" In John's gospel, Jesus says of himself that the Father has given him authority to execute judgement because he is the son of man" (John 5:27). In Acts 2:23 In his sermon on Pentecost Peter refers to Jesus as "a man attested by God with miracles, and wonders and signs which God performed through him." Paul refers to him as a man through whom God will judge the world." (Acts 17:31). Also, "there is one God and one mediator also between God and men, the man Jesus" (I Tim.2:5).

There is no indication in the New Testament that the term "son of man" meant anything other than the fact Jesus was and is a man (not an ordinary man, having the nature of Adam as all other men, but having the nature of God, a sinless man, born of a virgin and begotten by God). God promised the "seed of the woman" would come to redeem man (Gen. 3:15) and this was "the man Christ Jesus" (I Tim.2:5).

Because the church has failed to see Jesus as he is revealed in the Gospels Christianity has become sentimentalized and romanticized, and Jesus became identified with feminine characteristics. Medieval artist pictured him as physically weak and tenuous, and modern Bible Story books and Sunday School Literature have followed suite. No longer is he regarded as the exalted Lord, the judge with fire blazing from his eyes, crowned with many diadems waging war in righteousness (Rev. 1:13-18; 19:11-21) as the Bible pictures a glorified Christ, instead he became "gentle Jesus, meek and mild," a pale and pathetic figure. The church throughout the centuries has failed to depict the powerful and commanding personal appearance of Jesus revealed in the Gospels. When certain officers were sent to arrest Jesus in the market place they must have lost their nerve in his commanding presence, and went back and said, "Never did a man speak as this man speaks" (John 7:46). On the night of his arrest the soldiers came and asked for Jesus of Nazareth; and when he answered "I am he." such was his authoritative presence they "went backwards and fell to the ground" (John 18:6). William Barclay in his *Gospel of John* wrote: "In that moment power radiated from Jesus showing a power flowing from him stronger than the might of his enemies."

How could the church embrace and perpetuate descriptions of Jesus that fails to see him revealed as one who, alone, enters the temple, "makes a scourge of cords, and drove all them out (religious leaders), with the sheep and oxen; and poured out the coins of the moneychangers, overturned their tables; and those who were selling doves he said, 'Take these things away, stop making my Father's house a house of merchandise.'" (John 2: 15, 16). Further: He destroyed a heard of swine, without regret or compensation to the owners (Luke 8:26-34; Mark 5:1-20)...He rebukes Peter as demonic (Matt. 16:23; Mark 8:33)...He says the Sadducees are biblically and spiritually ignorant (Mark 12:24) and calls the Pharisees "hypocrites" seven times in one chapter and says they are "fools, blind guides, serpents and vipers" and they would not escape the sentence of Hell"...(Matt.23)...He called king Herod "a fox" (Luke 13:32) His conclusion concerning them was: "You are of your father, the devil and you want to do the desires of your father" (John 8:44). This is just an example of his anger and distain for the religious system and its leaders in his day.

In his book *Jesus Mean and Wild* Mark Galli quotes the author of *American Jesus: How the Son of God Became an American Icon*, Stephen Prothero as saying: "Christians traditionally, as they've shaped Jesus, have been worried about getting it wrong, including the Puritans. Americans today are not so worried. There isn't the sense that this is a life and death matter, that you don't mess with divinity. There's a freedom and even playfulness that Americans have...The flexibility our Jesus exhibits is unprecedented in the modern church--that kind of chutzpah is something that was unknown even to Americans in the Colonial period."