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MONTHLY LETTER

Devoted to Spiritual and Philosophical Problems -- by Manly P. Hall

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JESUS

Dear Friend:

In the Protevangelium of James it is written that Joachim was a man of great piety and considerable wealth who devoted his life and his means to works of charity. But when Joachim brought his gifts to the temple Reuben, the high priest, of Israel, reproached him, saying: "It is not lawful for thee to offer thy gifts first because thou hast been the father of no child in Israel." It followed that Joachim, bowed with grief, went forth into the wilderness, fasting and praying for forty days and forty nights. His prayer to the God of Israel was answered. Anna his wife conceived and bore a child and when the infant was delivered the midwife said: "It is a girl," and Anna gave thanks to God and named the babe Mary.

Now Anna had taken a vow that if God granted unto her an issue she would dedicate it unto the Lord to the service of the sacred house. So when Mary reached the age of three years Joachim and Anna brought her to the steps of the temple and the high priest received her as one dedicated to the holy life.

In the years that followed Mary dwelt in the apartments of the temple and so gentle and charm-

ing were her ways that all of the house of Israel loved her. So things continued until her twelfth year at which time, according to the law, the priests gathered in council to decide her future, it being unlawful that she should dwell longer in the house of God. Now the priests decreed that the high priest should enter into the Holy of Holies and ask of the Lord what should be done with the girl. Zacharias was at that time the high priest and he put upon himself the robes of glory and the breastplate and he entered into the presence of the Lord; and the angel of the Lord spoke unto him, saying: "Go forth and summon the widowers of the people and let them take a rod apiece, and she shall be the wife of him to whom the Lord shall show a sign."

Now Joseph, the Panther, was the most aged of the widowers of Israel and hearing the summons of the priests he laid down his axe and came with the others to the porch of the temple. The priests gave to each man a rod, each with a different marking upon it. The rods were then taken into the temple to be blessed. Afterwards they were distributed again and the last to have his rod returned

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS AND BEST WISHES FOR A HAPPY NEW YEAR

was Joseph, and as he took hold of the rod a dove flew out of it.

Joseph was greatly embarrassed, for he had grandchildren as old as Mary and was himself close to ninety years of age. He said to the priests: "Let me not become ridiculous before the children of Israel." But the priests replied that only misfortune could come to one who gainsaid the will of the Lord. So Joseph took Mary into his house and continued in his trade of a builder.

When Mary was about fifteen years old and had been three years in the house of Joseph a voice spoke to her as she stood one day drawing water from the well. She could not see where the voice came from and in great fear ran back to the house. As she sat spinning one day a celestial being appeared, announcing that she should bear a son, that his name should be Jesus, and he should be the savior of his people. And Mary answered, "Behold the servant of the Lord is before him; let it be unto me according to thy word." In the course of time Joseph learned that Mary was to bear a child and he was sorely troubled and afraid. The angel of the Lord came unto him also and Joseph went to the priests, and the priests doubted and tested Joseph and Mary, but finding them without fault, the high priest said: "If the Lord God hath not manifested your sins, neither do I judge you," and dismissed them.

An order had been issued by Augustus Caesar that a census should be taken of all the people of Israel. It was further decreed that they should come up to Bethlehem to be enrolled. Joseph was deeply troubled for he did not know how to enroll Mary, being ashamed to list her as his wife because of the difference in ages and afraid to register her as his daughter. He finally comforted himself with the thought that the Lord would reveal the way, so he saddled his ass and to one of his sons he appointed the task of leading it. He placed Mary upon the animal and following behind started for Bethlehem.

They were about three miles from the city when the time came for Mary to bring forth her child and Joseph found a cave and it was there that the

infant was born. A great light shown in the cavern and gradually the light withdrew into itself and the clouds which filled the place parted and the babe was seen. After three days they moved to the inn and the hostelry being filled there was only room in the stable, and the child was cradled in a manger.

From the birth of Jesus the Gospels take up the story, and, with certain minor points of difference, describe particularly the years of the Ministry, beginning with the Baptism by John and terminating with the Ascension. Little is known of the childhood of the Master. The shepherds pay homage at his crib and wise men, coming out of the East, bring gifts to him. ~~Jesus is taken as an infant to Egypt to escape the wrath of Herod. Later, by inference, he returns to his own country and appears in the synagog at the age of twelve, arguing with the priests and elders. Again, by inference, it is suggested that he practiced the trade of Joseph, at least for a time.~~

From the Apocryphal Gospels we gather a few more details, uncanonical but probable. The Gospel of Thomas describes him growing up in the house of Joseph, performing miracles and manifesting even in infancy evidences of extraordinary powers. On one occasion he molded little sparrows of clay. He clapped his hands and the birds came to life and flew away. Jesus was at that time five years of age. Later he studied with a certain teacher, Zaccheus by name, who soon acknowledged his incapacity to instruct him.

The Gospel of the pseudo Matthew reports many sayings of Jesus attributed to his childhood years. The Arabic Gospel of the infancy, of a much later date, and highly embellished with the traditions of the first seven centuries of the Christian era, devotes considerable space to the questioning of Jesus by the learned during his twelfth year. In this account Jesus is examined in theology, philosophy, science and medicine, and is discovered to be completely learned in all these matters. In the 51st chapter of the Arabic Gospel, it relates that Jesus demonstrated his skill as an astronomer, and the

inference is inevitable, that he was learned in the mysteries of astrology.

From the twelfth year on little can be discovered from even the Apocryphal Gospels. The Talmud offers a clue. He is said to have visited Alexandria with a certain Rabbi Jehoshua Ben Berach-



JESUS AND HIS DISCIPLES FROM A FIFTEENTH CENTURY WOODBLOCK

iah. In Egypt he studied the occult and metaphysical arts, and having mastered certain of the abstruse sciences of the Egyptians, he returned to Syria expounding the doctrines which he had received. From this account it would appear that Jesus studied in the Hermetic colleges of the Ptolemies. Alexandria was a melting pot of Asiatic and

Hellenic cultures. Most of the religions of the known world were represented there and the public mind was remarkably liberal and tolerant. From the priests and philosophers of Alexandria Jesus could have learned not only the metaphysical arts but the great systems of world philosophy—the proper background for the Ministry.

Edouard Schuré, the distinguished French mystic, associates Jesus with the Essene Order. Earlier writers have also suspected that the references in the Bible to Jesus the Nazarene have been mistranslated and should have read Jesus the Nazarite, that is Jesus of the Order or Society of Nazarites. The Nazarites and Essenes were either branches of the same Brotherhood or else closely associated orders, imposing similar vows and obligations and expounding similar mystical philosophies.

It is quite possible that the historical Jesus was born of parents who were members of the Essene colony of which Josephus wrote with deepest respect. The Essene sect seems to have been founded by Pythagoras. It was certainly of Greek origin, and, having been adapted to Syrian soil, flourished particularly in the villages and towns about the Dead Sea, and on Carmel. The doctrines of the society included both Grecian and Egyptian elements, and the order may be regarded as a legitimate Mystery School, bestowing initiation and conferring the arcana. The Essene cult was divided into two distinct groups. The highest consisted of monks and recluses who had renounced all worldliness to live in the caves or monasteries of the Order. The second division consisted of lay brothers and sisters who had taken vows of purity but still lived in the family relationship, supporting themselves by certain arts and crafts. According to the laws of the Order, these lay brothers and sisters could not engage in any business of bartering or exchange but might follow only such pursuits as were of a simple, constructive nature. For this reason they frequently took the trade of carpentry, pottery or building. Among the symbols of their Order were builders' tools as in the case of modern Freemasonry. The Essene communities flourished under cooperative economic policies and the lives

of the members were devoted principally to learning, teaching, acts of piety, healing and befriending. So well educated were these Essenes, in a time of general ignorance, that Roman officers stationed in the Holy Land frequently engaged them as tutors for their children. Crime was unknown in their midst and they were by far the wisest and noblest of the Jewish sects.

The Essenes were a Messianic sect, looking towards the advent of a promised Messiah who would rise in Israel. Some of their members took the vow that they would cut neither hair nor beard until the "Desired of Israel" should come. It has been suggested that John the Baptist, seeing Jesus for the first time, recognized him as a holy man because he wore his hair and beard according to the vow of the Nazarite and was also dressed in the raiment of the Order.

Joseph was of the chosen profession of the Essenes—a builder—possibly in the mystical sense rather than in the literal one. This might also explain why Joseph was selected to receive Mary into his house and also why Joseph and Mary were chosen as the guardians of an incarnating adept.

If Jesus was born into an Essene community his religious education would have begun in infancy. He would have grown up in an atmosphere of gentleness and piety. He would have enjoyed rare opportunities to release the depth and greatness of his own soul. His youth would have been spent in study and travel, and after a proper probation-ship and having reached the proper year, the age of thirty, could by choice have taken the vows of the initiate and entered the higher division of the Order. In this way the several accounts of his life might be parts of one fact. As an Essene he would have travelled in Egypt, possibly in Greece, and he might even have undertaken the difficult journey to India as did Pythagoras before him. The Mysteries had no religious prejudice and disciples travelled from one school to another, perfecting themselves in the wisdom of all nations and all ages.

In the Homis Monastery in Little Tibet there are said to be manuscripts proving that Jesus joined a caravan bound for India where he remained for

some time, returning to Syria in his twenty-ninth year. It is quite possible that records concerning the youth of Jesus were suppressed or destroyed by the early church to prevent members of the new faith from discovering that Christianity was rooted in the religions of the so-called pagans. Unfortunately, the bigotry and fanaticism of a few people is responsible for nineteen centuries of misunderstanding and persecution in Christendom. Hundreds of books were destroyed by the Council of Nicea and among them may have been the records of the childhood and training of Jesus.

The Ministry of the Master which followed upon the Baptism by John continued for less than three years. The Ministry was devoted to two principal lines of activity—the performing of miracles and the teaching of the New Covenant, usually translated as Testament. By the miracles Jesus is made to appear as a wonder-worker like the fabled Mahatmas of Asia, and by his teaching he is made to appear as a reformer of the corruptions which had arisen in the orthodox Jewish faith. He states definitely that he has come not to tear down the faith of Israel but to fulfill it and to bear witness to that which had been prophesied by the patriarchs.

Like most great teachers, Jesus could not ignore the social problems of his day. Jerusalem, the city of the prophets, Judea, the land of the patriarchs, were in bondage to Rome. Numerous groups had sprung up among the Jews, praying, plotting and planning for deliverance. Jesus could scarcely fail to be involved in the political problems of his people. Philosophers are not politicians, but nearly all great philosophers have realized that the perfection of mankind cannot be accomplished without certain reforms in the social and political state of humanity. Jesus soon drew about him followers and disciples who visualized the teacher not only as a man of God but as the political liberator of their nation. From various walks of life Jesus chose twelve disciples of the first order, and it is also related seventy-two others who formed a second circle. These disciples and followers, in their enthusiasm, contributed to the destruction of that which they loved most. Through their religious non-con-

formity they alienated the Jewish priests, and through the political inferences of their message they alienated the Roman governors. All that remained was the common people—a force easily molded by ulterior motive.

As the years of the Ministry drew to a close, Jesus and his little band of followers were drawn fatally and inevitably to the city of Jerusalem. Jesus realized that the end was near but the message had to be brought to the City of the Kings, the very heart of Israel. Misunderstood most by those closest to him, Jesus gathered them about him for the last time in fraternity and celebrated the Passover with the Last Supper. There was much more to this sacrament than is preserved in the Gospels. It was the last secret meeting of the twelve who were to carry on after the passing of their Master. Of these twelve only one died a natural death. Judas, it is said, destroyed himself, and all of the others except St. John were martyrs. It is said that the disciples and the Master sang together and St. Augustine, in the 236th letter to Bishop Ceretius, preserves the words of the song:

"I wish to unbind, and I wish to be unbound.
I wish to save, and I wish to be saved.
I wish to beget, and I wish to be begotten.
I wish to sing; dance ye all with joy.
I wish to weep; be ye all struck with grief.
I wish to adorn, and I wish to be adorned.
I am the lamp for you who see me.
I am the gate for you who knock.
Ye who see what I do, do not tell what I am doing.

I have enacted all in this discourse,
And I have not been in any way deceived."

The hymn was followed, in the ancient Jewish custom, by the breaking of the bread and the passing of the cup. After this, according to one of the Apocrypha, Jesus and his Apostles celebrated the Mystery with a ritualistic dance, after which certain matters were discussed which might not be revealed to the profane. The Last Supper took place on Wednesday the last day of April in the evening.

In a sense the Last Supper concludes the Ministry. The Master has put his house in order, has finished the communication of such arcana as he gave to his disciples. The only hint that we have as to the nature of the secrets which Jesus imparted are to be found in the Gnostic Gospels, the Pistis Sophia and the Books of the Saviour.

The Garden of Gethsemane follows. The suffering man appears briefly through the otherwise tranquil tradition. The arrest of Jesus follows. He is brought before both Jewish and Roman law, and having been found guilty by the former, is brought before Pilate who, finding no guilt in him, washes his hands of the whole matter.

The exact circumstances surrounding the death of Jesus are extremely obscure. The Gospels insist that he was crucified, but such a death is most improbable for it was distinctly against Roman law as crucifixion was not a punishment meted out to civil prisoners, being reserved for robbers and murderers. Even in the early centuries the crucifixion was a mooted question, and we can sum up the early opinions in a few sentences:

According to the Gnostics of the first century it was not Jesus but Simon the Cyrenean who died upon the cross in Jesus' place. Other early schools which held the divinity of Jesus as Christ declared that an illusion was sent by God upon the people so that they appeared to see him die, but that Christ as God could not die or even appear to die. Another school insists that he was taken from the cross still alive and resuscitated and that he left Syria, traveling eastward on a journey to India. These accounts accept the crucifixion as at least a partial reality, but Ireneaus, one of the early fathers contemporary with the Disciples and claiming to have spoken with some of them, declared that Jesus died in fullness of years. In the Jewish records a prophet, who some have tried to identify as Jesus, was stoned to death by an incited mob. Be these opinions as they may, Jesus disappeared from history and tradition in his thirty-third year, completing in less than three years a Ministry that was to affect the whole of civilization, and from its humble begin-

nings in the barren, rocky lands of Syria was to spread to every corner of the earth.

THE TEACHINGS OF THE MASTER

The principal sources of information concerning the teachings of Jesus are of course the Gospels and Epistles to which may be added a few fragments from the Ante and Post Nicean fathers. The orthodox churches have rejected the Gnostic Gospels and such words of Jesus as were recorded in the Apocryphal texts. The teachings of Jesus in the Gospels are for the most part simple statements of spiritual or moral truths intended for the comparatively uneducated multitudes who gathered to hear his words. From the beginning the church was perplexed by the absence of a systematic religious or philosophical system. They coped with the problem in two ways: first by incorporating the Mosaic theology into the Christian system to give foundation and background to the sermons of the Master; second by a series of church councils they legislated into existence a Christianized system of philosophy which they distinguished by the term orthodox or canonical.

Actually there is no evidence to prove that modern Christianity, particularly modern church organization, is really founded upon or consistent with the original teachings of Jesus. Rather the church is the product of a dilemma, the result of numerous interpretations and reforms. The absence of facts always results in a chaos of opinions. There is no other religion in the world in which there are so many discordant sects, each claiming a peculiar integrity of interpretation. It is extremely difficult, after the passing of nineteen centuries, to discover with anything resembling certainty the genuine precepts of Christian doctrine.

There are three principal schools of interpretation, founded upon three opinions as to the nature of Jesus himself. We may say that the first school assumes the humanity of Jesus. By this we mean that it regards him as a highly evolved, learned and unselfish man who as a man lived, preached and died a martyr to his ideals. This school consequently encourages the development of the moral virtues,

fosters learning and has as its goal the ultimate elevation of all men to a similar state of perfection, with Jesus as their example and inspiration. The second school affirms that Jesus was of a divine and also human nature; human in his birth, growth and education, but divine in his ministry. The spirit of God descended upon him at the Baptism by John and from the Baptism to the Crucifixion he was the very embodiment of God. The words of Jesus are therefore divine and infallible utterances. It is the duty of the pious Christian to accept without question not only the teachings of Jesus but the dogma of his divinely over-shadowed church. The third school denies the humanity of Christ, maintaining stoutly that Jesus was God and that the whole life was a divine mystery unique in the history of humanity, superior to every other spiritual tradition of the race. This school also places man in a negative position of a supplicant, being nothing in himself and depending entirely upon divine grace for his salvation.

It is evident that these are hopelessly irreconcilable premises, and it is also evident that sects built up around these premises would be in constant conflict with each other. In the end argument and confliction over-shadow the moral and ethical teachings so that principles are lost in a confusion of creeds.

It does not seem to have occurred to most theologians that Jesus was himself a mystic and spoke in the mystical sense, speaking of matters beyond the experience of many and beyond the understanding of most. Probably the most tragic misunderstanding that has come out of the misconceptions of interpreters is the orthodox conclusion already noted that Jesus was God incarnate and that by that very fact Christianity occupies an ineffable place among the beliefs of man. This mistake is due to a complete ignorance on the part of the average member of the Christian laity as to the meaning of the mystical theology of the ancient Mysteries. Jesus, speaking in terms of mystical realization, is interpreted literally by a misunderstanding world. Jesus, as an initiate of Oriental mysteries, says: "I and my Father are one," where-

upon the ignorant orthodox thinker interprets this to mean that God in proper person withdrew into the body of Jesus and functioned therefrom. The words of Jesus actually mean that he had discovered in himself his identity with universal truth and life. The mystic knows what Jesus the initiate meant when he said that he came "to bear witness," but the narrow-minded have attempted to make out of a great spiritual truth the material for a small creedal notion. The words of Jesus concerning his relationship with divinity are typical of the utterances of all illumined mystics, but only the illumined mystic can properly understand the language of the soul. The words of Jesus regarding his identity with God are truths in spirit and to literalize them is to defame and destroy their significance.

Although Jesus preached in Judea and was first of all a prophet unto the Jews, it is a mistake to say that his teachings are primarily Judaic. Jewish elements are certainly present but so also are Egyptian and Grecian elements. With peculiar tolerance which evidences a generous understanding, he calls mankind to a high standard of integrity. He invites them to concern their minds with spiritual matters and admonishes them that they shall put the affairs of the spirit before those of the body. Jesus preached simplicity of living, honesty and virtue. He denounces a corrupted priestcraft for departing from the simple truths of the ancient patriarchs. As an ascetic he holds out the advantages of detachment from earthly interests, but in all his teachings he is practical and gentle.

The two most important sermons are the Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon delivered to the disciples on the occasion of the Last Supper. Together these two Sermons are Christianity, yet how deliberately and intentionally the words of the Master have been misunderstood. In his parables he points out the morals of thrift and devotion, and to the world he gave his Commandments—the true creed of Christendom: "These two commandments I give unto you, that thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul, and thy neighbor as thyself."

These two Commandments are the perfect sum-

mary of the whole Christian doctrine and Christian life. Jesus explicitly states that only those who perform these two Commandments with their whole heart shall have the right to call themselves his followers.

It seems then that in substance and fact there is no confusion in Christian doctrine, yet in the clash of creeds these two fundamental and inevitable principles of Christian living have been sacrificed and ignored and in their place have been advanced an elaborate and involved system which, with all its presumptions, has failed to practice these fundamental truths.

There is a popular belief that St. Paul was the first to preach a mystical Christian doctrine opposing the literalism of St. Peter. Certain it is that Paul recognized Christ as a spirit dwelling in man and not as an historical personality. This does not necessarily mean that Paul denied the existence of the historical Jesus or his Ministry, but rather that he recognized the mystical factor in the spiritual life. In the Epistles Paul clearly indicates that he is conversant with Eastern metaphysics and sees in Christianity a Mystery School teaching simple moral truths to the profane but reserving for the initiated a deeper and carefully concealed doctrine. In some respects it is remarkable that the Paulian viewpoint was admitted into the Canonical texts for even the superficial reader must realize that there are startling inconsistencies between the Gospels and Paul's Letters. There is also considerable internal evidence that the writings of Paul were "doctored" to make the contradictions less glaring, so that the modern reader discovers to his astonishment that Paul appears to contradict himself. The truth of the matter is that Paul, who never met the Master in the flesh, alone perceived the spiritual significance of the Life and Ministry. The Apostles saw with their eyes and tried to record what they saw, accepting all things in the flesh. Paul saw with the spirit, perceiving inwardly and recording Christianity not as a sect or a doctrine but as a mystical experience.

The viewpoint of Paul is sustained by the Gnostic Gospels and the metaphysical tradition. Jesus, the initiate, stands out as a teacher of an esoteric

tradition. It becomes evident that a true Christian is one "christened" within, not a follower after sects. Not by the Sacraments of the church but by the sanctification of the life is the righteous man admitted into the Assembly. Words without works are dead. True Christianity is not a faith but a discipline, not an acceptance but an achievement.

The early church, patterned after pagan Mysteries, sought for a little time to perpetuate the arcana, but such a procedure would doom the church to a humble and obscure existence, ministering only to a devout and dedicated few. The bishops of the church were mortal men instinctively desiring power and authority, and they sacrificed the spiritual doctrines of Christianity to temporal ambitions. The majority of mankind neither desires to improve itself nor to support an organization which demands a high degree of integrity. The outer body of the church increased to the degree that the standards of Christian living were lowered until at last, promising everything and demanding only temporal support, the church gained temporal power at the expense of spiritual authority. It is for this reason particularly that the Christian thinker must never confuse the Jesus of Nazareth with the Christ of the modern church. Nor must the Christian thinker permit the clergy to interpret for him spiritual matters of which the clergy itself is ignorant.

The proof of what we say is the present state of Christendom which is evidently and undeniably woefully lacking in nearly all of the virtues which the Master taught. Jesus stated that those who claimed to be his followers should do his works, that is should live the truths which he taught. Yet Christian society is not founded upon Christian ethics. The Master said "love ye one another" but Christian nations do not love one another, Christian sects do not love one another, and the peoples of Christendom do not love one another. Glaring inconsistency is due to the pernicious teaching that theology, by a special dispensation, is empowered to save man in spite of what he is instead of because of what he is.

There is no great teacher whose doctrines have been more intentionally misunderstood than those

of Jesus, but the intelligent thinker is able to distinguish clearly between Christianity and churchianity. Churchianity prays and pleads and exhorts, with formulas for every failing of the soul, washing out all the sins of man with holy water. The real teaching of Jesus simply states: that he who lives the life shall know the doctrine.

QUOTATIONS FROM THE WORDS OF JESUS AS RECORDED BY ST. JOHN

"I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth on me should not abide in darkness."

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, the servant is not greater than his Lord; neither he that is sent greater than He that sendeth him."

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another."

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you."

"Believest thou not that I am in the Father, and the Father in me? the words that I speak unto you I speak not of myself: but the Father that dwelleth in me, he doeth the works."

"If ye love me, keep my commandments."

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends."

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world and go to the Father."

"My doctrine is not mine, but his that sent me."

"Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God."

"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."

Yours sincerely,

MANLY P. HALL

P. S. There is still time to order Mr. Hall's books for Christmas presents to yourself or your friends. All orders will be filled the day received. Mr. Hall will autograph any bound book upon request.