

## *The Masters of Wisdom*

*J.G. Bennett*

### *Chapter 4 "The Time of Christ"*

We have followed the slow emergence of human nature from its brutish origins through the two great transformations by which man was endowed first with consciousness and then with creativity. The history of the twelve thousand years since the end of the Ice Age has seen the partial transfer of responsibility for human progress from the Demiurge to man himself. This has led to great achievements but also to great disasters, for human nature when it acquired creative power became, at the same time, tainted with egoism. Man has used his creativity to dominate rather than to serve nature. Two thousand five hundred years ago the lust for power was in danger of poisoning the human race and the Great Revelation was set in motion to prepare man for the coming of the higher cosmic impulse of love, without which consciousness and creativity lead man to destroy his own birthright. We human beings have a deep awareness, deeper than egoism itself, of our kinship with nature. We feel that creativity without love is daemonic, but we are forced to recognize that love has no power to overcome egoism. Life on Earth is threatened today, not by man's failure to love his fellow-man, but by his inability to love at all. Love untainted by egoism is to be found only in the rarest of the rare.

We have traced the consequences of the first Revelation and must now come to the Time of Christ. The preparations for the great event were continuous from the time of Zoroaster, but were concentrated particularly into the two centuries before and after the earthly life of Jesus. Our concern is with the role of the Masters of Wisdom. We have followed the obscure indications of the role of the Sarman Society, who at every stage have remained in the background. We have now to look at two societies that played a more visible but still misunderstood part. These are the Chaldean Magi and the Jewish Community of the Covenant known as the Essene Brotherhood.

The Magi were members of a caste or class that existed in central Asia from before the time of Zoroaster. They accepted Zoroaster when he came to the court of King Vishtaspa, the Bactrian king of Khorasmia. Two Magi were given the task of testing Zoroaster's credentials and found that his initiation went beyond anything they themselves knew of. The king was converted on their advice. Through the conquests of Cyrus, the Magi spread all through the Persian empire and reached Syria and Egypt. The Greeks looked upon the Magi as Masters of Wisdom. Porphyry in his book *On Abstinence* says that magus means 'one who is wise in the things of God and serves the divine.' The word *maga* meant the gift or 'grace' of God, by which men have the power to perform great works. This sacred power was the secret of the Magi. During the four hundred years that cover the time of Christ, the Zoroastrian religion had no royal devotees such as the Achaemenid kings before and the Sassanid kings after.<sup>1</sup> The Arsacids left no record of their religious beliefs, but the Magi retained their position and spread even more widely. They were experts in astrology and divination and it is in this capacity that they are mentioned in St. Matthew's Gospel.

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<sup>1</sup> The Achaemenids ruled Persia from Cyrus 623 BC to the defeat of Darius III by Alexander 323 BC. The Sassanids AD 240 to the rise of Islam in AD 650

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It seems to me that the Magi were divided into three castes or categories. The first was exoteric: in this capacity the Magi were priests, whose presence was necessary for any religious ceremony, even non-Zoroastrian. This role was very similar to that of the Brahman caste in India and of the Egyptian priests described by the Greek travelers. The second caste or order of Magians were those who preserved the sacred literature and who possessed special knowledge and powers. They were the 'magicians' of popular legend. The third order of the Magi were the true esoteric society who were aware of the significance of the great\* The Achaemenids ruled Persia from Cyrus 623 BC to the defeat of Darius III by Alexander 323 BC. The Sassanids ruled from AD 240 to the rise of Islam in AD 650 event that was being prepared. They had a centre in Asia Minor that continued to work for three or four centuries after the time of Christ and transmitted its secrets to the Christian brotherhood in Cappadocia. They also played a part in the establishment of the Essene Brotherhood inaugurated in Judaea about two centuries before Christ.

There is no longer any doubt that the Essenes were connected with the central Revelation. Thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls, we now can confirm what was written about them by Pliny the Younger and Josephus the Jewish historian. The Essenes were a brotherhood whose mode of life was very different from that of their Jewish compatriots. They were highly organized and very selective in admitting new members. They particularly revered the Teacher of Righteousness who lived about 150 BC and was himself a high priest. He was persecuted and murdered. Professor Dupont Somer identifies the Teacher of Righteousness with Onias the High Priest treacherously murdered at the instigation of Menelaus. The episode and the indignation it provoked caused repercussions beyond Israel.<sup>2</sup>

The connection between the Essenes and the Magi is proved above all by their belief in two opposing spirits of the Truth and the Lie, exactly as in the Zoroastrian Scriptures. The sacredness of Truth was a cardinal teaching of both the Magi and the Essenes. According to many legends the Essenes had the power to foretell the future. Josephus tells the story of the way the murder of Antigones was foretold by Judas the Essene. Judas was renowned for the invariable accuracy of his predictions. One day, he saw a man named Antigomes passing through the temple and cried out to the circle of pupils whom he was instructing: "Ah! I had better die now, since truth has died before me. Here is Antigomes alive when he should have been dead today. He was fated to be killed at Straton's tower a hundred miles from here. It is now the fourth hour of the day, so that time has made a mockery of my prophecy." These were the words of the old man. Shortly afterwards, however, the news came that another Antigomes had perished in a subterranean place called Straton's tower. It was the identity of names that had disconcerted the seer. Another Essene, Menahem, foretold that a young boy would be king of Israel and when this boy unexpectedly came to the throne as Herod the Great, he honoured the Essene Brotherhood.

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<sup>2</sup> Maccabees II, 4:21-50.

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Although the Essenes were described in glowing terms as an ideal society by both Greek and Jewish writers they are not once mentioned in the canonical books of the Old or New Testament. This is the more surprising as both Philo and Josephus state explicitly that there were three principal sects among the Jews: the Pharisees, the Sadducees and the Essenes. From the evidence of the Dead Sea Scrolls we can now confirm what Philo said about the Essenes: that they were represented in the chief cities of Israel, but had their principal settlement near the Dead Sea. This was at Qumran close to the caves where the scrolls were found.

The Essenes were not only influenced by Zoroastrianism and the Magi. They were also close to the Pythagoreans and knew the Pythagorean teaching about number and harmony which was incorporated into their liturgy. They were also in contact with the Buddhist missionaries whose teaching about the Noble Eightfold Path must have influenced the Rule of the Community of the Covenant. It seems probable that the great Teacher of Righteousness, whose title could equally be translated as Master of Wisdom, was responsible for combining the different traditions in a teaching and way of life that attracted the very finest spirits among the Jews, including many of the 'Sons of Zadok', the Sadducees before they divided into worldly and other-worldly branches.

The Essene way of life was based on mutual love and the sharing of all possessions and activities. In their rule it is written: "For all things shall be in common, beyahad: truth and virtuous humility and loyal love and the zeal for righteousness, each towards his fellow in the Holy Party and as sons of the Eternal Assembly. They shall eat communally, yahad, and bless communally and take counsel communally." We are not concerned with the strict conditions for admission, nor with their customs, except the great ritual acts performed daily. They rose before the sun and stood together to give thanks to the sun for all the gifts of nature. After working until the fifth hour they put on white garments after a purifying bath and ate a solemn meal which included the distribution of freshly baked bread and wine. The same ritual was repeated in the evening.

Now we must come to the heart of the matter. It seems clear that some at least of the Essenes were Masters of Wisdom. The Teacher of Righteousness and his immediate followers possessed great knowledge and supernormal powers. They were in contact with all the streams of spirituality of Asia and Egypt. They had strict methods of training and a long novitiate. Those who became elders were regarded with deep veneration and their word was law for all the ordinary members of the community.

There is a very ancient tradition that John the Baptist and Jesus Christ both received their first training with the Essene Brotherhood. Certainly, John began baptizing in Jordan very close to Qumran where the principal Essene community had been established for a hundred years. It is probable that John received a personal revelation that compelled him to separate himself from the brotherhood and take a more open stand against the hypocrisy of the ruling priesthood. St. Matthew, 3:7, tells us that John was taken aback when Pharisees and Sadducees came to his

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baptism. His message: "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand", was meant for the ordinary people, who had not the courage and singleness of mind needed to accept the severe discipline of the Essenes. The Pharisees also claimed to follow the law in all its purity, but had been involved in the persecution of the Essenes and were remembered in connection with the murder of the Teacher of Righteousness. This was the reason for John's outburst: "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

Jesus was a Galilean and would not be expected to know about Qumran: but there were Essene groups not only in Galilee but even in Samaria. Much of Jesus' teaching, and especially the Sermon on the Mount, is so close to the Essenes' own doctrines that it is reasonable to suppose that in his early manhood he went through the full training and initiation of the brotherhood. They alone among the Jews could understand the meaning of: "except your righteousness exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no wise enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Some authorities believe that Joseph died when Jesus was in his middle twenties and that he returned to Nazareth to support his mother as a carpenter. The references to his brothers and sisters indicate that there were at least eight or nine in the family and that at some point Jesus left home and never returned. He was attracted by the preaching of John, a fellow-Essene, and accepted his baptism in the Jordan. Baptism played a great part in the Essenian ritual and was the preliminary to every act of initiation. In the moment of his baptism in Jordan, Jesus became aware that he was to preach a new Gospel of the Fatherhood of God and the bond of love. There was, however, a transcendental mystery which the evangelists either did not understand or were forbidden to reveal. This was the secret of the way in which the Power of Love was to be transmitted to man. This is the secret which was known to the innermost circle of the Masters of Wisdom and we must try to unravel it, as far as it is permissible to do so, by looking at the account given in the four Gospels.

The four Gospels were compiled by four different schools of wisdom, each entrusted with a different task. St. Mark's Gospel recounts the story of the event as it appeared to the uninitiated disciple. It could be recognized and confirmed by eye-witnesses or those who had had contact with them, such as their children and grandchildren. St. Luke's Gospel was written to connect Christianity with the Great Mother tradition through the Virgin Mary. The Asian Christians for centuries venerated Mary to such a degree that she was virtually deified. St. John's Gospel is an interpretation based on the Gnostic tradition. It expresses the true significance of the event in symbols and, of course, it emphasizes more than any other the need for full mutual acceptance and love between the disciples. St. Matthew's is pre-eminently the Gospel of the Masters of

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Wisdom. It is a legominism<sup>3</sup> carefully constructed according to the pattern that connects the three worlds.

There are three ways of interpreting the mission of Jesus as the Holy One of God. I shall not consider the picture of Jesus as a 'great and good man with an extraordinary power to arouse the devotion of his followers'. Such an image totally fails to account for the lasting change that came over the world from the Time of Christ. The three ways can be regarded as: exoteric, or for the world; mesoteric, or for the disciples, and esoteric, for the true initiates. The first is Pauline Christianity that presents Jesus as the Lamb of God sacrificed to propitiate God and obtain the forgiveness of sins. This interpretation encounters the serious objection that God could have forgiven sins without the need for the Incarnation of His Son and without the sacrifice of Calvary. The exaggeration of human sinfulness which is required to justify Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo*, "Why did God become Man?", is another objection. Man is not so much sinful as weak and ignorant. Modern psychology has thoroughly established the absurdity of holding man responsible for all the terrible things he has done and is still doing. Pauline Christianity has taken such a firm hold on the Roman world that very few theologians have attempted a radical revision without losing the deep significance of the Event.

The second, or mesoteric, picture is that of the small brotherhood of Judaeen disciples led by James the brother of the Lord, who himself was put to death. It seems that this brotherhood to a great extent reverted to the way of life of the Essene community to which they had belonged and put their faith in the promised coming of the Son of Man in glory to redeem Israel and establish the reign of righteousness. This was apocalyptic Christianity as presented recently by Albert Schweitzer in *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*. The vision looked forward to great disasters which were to prepare for the coming of the Son of man, Parousia. The destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70 and the massacre of most of the members of the Judaeen church was not followed by the expected Parousia, and the Judaeen church lost the foundation of its faith. No more was heard of the Judaeen Christians after they had retired to Pella. The great service rendered by this community was the preservation of authentic accounts of the acts and sayings of Jesus during the period between his baptism in Jordan and the resurrection.

These enable us to relate the event as a whole to the evolution of mankind and recognize the important part played by the Masters of Wisdom: I shall not attempt to justify in detail the interpretation that I believe to be the nearest approach we can now make to the esoteric truth. It was first suggested to me by my teacher Gurdjieff, who once said at a gathering of many of his

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<sup>3</sup> Editor's note: This term is introduced by Gurdjieff in *Beelzebub's Tales* to designate information intended for posterity and put into a work of art in such a way that its meaning can be deciphered only by initiates

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pupils at his ritual evening meal: "One day Mr. Bennett will give a conference on the Last Supper, and many people will be thankful for what he will say."<sup>4</sup>

The one thing certain is that a tremendous event did occur and has left its mark on humanity for nearly two thousand years. I believe that we do not and cannot know what the event was in its full majesty, because it took place in a region that human consciousness cannot reach. To grasp what this means, we need to have a clear picture of the 'other worlds' that are not perceived by our senses. To bring about great and dramatic changes in the visible world it is necessary to bring about an interaction between all the four worlds.<sup>5</sup> To bring absolute creativity into direct contact with absolute laws would create an impossible situation. Put in another way, there is perfect freedom and there is complete constraint. These two cannot be reconciled; but the ultimates are never reached, so there are regions whose reconciliation is almost, but not quite, impossible. We can say that God is not so free in His creativity as the Absolute Source, that is the Godhead, and that man is not so constrained to obey the laws as the material world in which he exists. Between God and man, a reconciliation is possible, but it is still very difficult.

The Old Testament is to a very great extent occupied with telling us how hard this reconciliation is. It is very necessary to grasp this, because through misunderstanding it we are led either to deny God's Love or man's limitations. Man's repeated failure to respond to the destiny offered to him from Above is a common theme in all sacred writings but we do not so readily see what is done to redeem the failure.

The Christian message is greatly concerned with redemption, but the secret of its working has remained hidden. Non-Christians ask why, if God is all-merciful and all-powerful, it should be necessary for Him to be incarnated as a man and die on the cross to enable Him to forgive sins? This question has never been answered in convincing terms. The reason is that we attempt to make sense of the visible event as it was recorded in the memory of onlookers. We seek to interpret an action that is beyond the mind of man in terms that derive from our human experience of this visible world.

Job was asked if he could bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades or loose the bands of Orion to remind him that he had no conception of the working of the supra-terrestrial forces. We have forgotten their salutary lesson and seek to catch the heavenly Leviathan with an Earthly hook.

After this parenthesis, I dare say no more than what I have come to understand for myself. I believe that the mission of Jesus was no less than an attempt to bring mankind to the next stage of human evolution when love will be an inherent property of the human essence as creativity has been for the past thirty-five or forty thousand years. The experience of the Great Revelation

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<sup>4</sup> This present chapter is based upon a talk I gave to the Third Basic Course at Sherborne House on Sunday, August 4th, 1974.

<sup>5</sup> Editor's note. The fourth is the absolute world of the unfathomable godhead, lahut.

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of the sacredness of the human individual had shown that this would not help mankind to a better way of life unless men were capable of accepting and loving one another. Although the worst horrors of the Heroic epoch had been mitigated, men were no more capable of loving than they had been before.

Now, we have seen that the bringing of creativity was a prodigious step made possible only by the complete ascendancy gained by the Magicians over the Neanderthal tribesmen. Even so, the Magicians themselves could do nothing. It required the incarnation of the Demiurge in human bodies to enable creativity to be transmitted by way of sexual reproduction. The same expedient would not avail to bring love to mankind. There were several reasons for this. Men had grown independent and, moreover, had little confidence in their rulers and priests whose chief concern was to maintain their authority. Moreover, love cannot be transmitted either through body or mind, because it is an attribute or energy of the will. Love is an unconditioned energy and cannot be transmitted by any conditioning process, physical or mental. Therefore, it requires an action that is beyond body and mind. This action will influence both body and mind, but they are not the locus in which it takes place. Love can flourish only in freedom, that is in the third world.

None of this is obvious and to develop the theme in all the depth that it requires would be beyond the scope of this book. It is sufficient to say that only those whose perceptions have been opened to the worlds beyond form, *alam-i imkan*, could be witnesses of the event and they could not express their understanding in language that would be understood by those who had not shared the experience.

The third world is, in ordinary circumstances, able to act in the first, that is, the visible or material universe, only through the second, that is, through mind. When a break-through is made, the freedom of the third world manifests in this world as a miracle. Since the action is concerned with love, the miracles of healing and conversion fit into the picture. But they do not account for the action itself: we must turn to the Gospels.

The first question that most people ask when they begin to study the first Gospel, Matthew, is why the genealogy of Joseph is traced back for forty-two generations if he was not the father of Jesus. The perplexity is increased by the abrupt transition to the statement that Mary was with child of the Holy Ghost. Many explanations are given but the true one is missed. Three groups of fourteen generations are cited. From Abraham to David, the Jews were connected with the Creator God tradition. From David, Jerusalem and the Temple were the pivot of Judaism and, as I have suggested, Jerusalem stood for the Great Mother. This is strengthened by the association with Wisdom, the feminine associate of Jahweh in the Creation. The third period specifically mentions the Babylonian captivity when the children of Israel assimilated the Saviour God tradition and the belief in the coming Messiah. Having conveyed in this way the connection of Christ with the three traditions, we find an immediate reference to the Great Spirit as the direct progenitor of Jesus. The extreme reverence shown by the authors of the first Gospel to the Holy

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Spirit is nowhere so strikingly manifested as in Matthew 12:31. in the words of Jesus: "Wherefore I say unto you; all manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Spirit shall not be forgiven unto men". Thus, in the very first chapter the Gospel tells us that the events to be described are concerned with integrating the four great traditions into one Revelation.

The Gospel starts with three incidents not recorded by the other evangelists. The first is Joseph's intended repudiation of Mary and the dream that reveals the working of the Holy Spirit. The second is the coming of the Magi and the third is the flight into Egypt with the strangely artificial explanation quoting Hosea 11:1: "Out of Egypt have I called my son". The significant part occupied by the dreams of Joseph and the Magi in these incidents tells us that we are concerned with the invisible worlds. Thus, we start with two clues to the interpretation. First, the Masters of Wisdom are involved, the Magi and the Egyptian priests and second, revelations are coming from the higher worlds.

We pass immediately to John the Baptist who is represented as "more than a prophet". In John's Gospel he is a "man sent from God". He is also "Elias which was for to come". The Spirit of God appears as prophesied in Isaiah 11 where He is specifically associated with Wisdom and Power. The incident again serves to prepare us for an action that will bring together the highest and the lowest worlds. The role of the denying principle is brought out immediately afterwards in the temptation in the desert. Jesus now endowed with wisdom and power starts upon his mission, the story of which is interrupted by the long digression of the Sermon on the Mount. The purpose is to show that those who were to participate in the mystery were no ordinary men. Again, and again in this Gospel, Jesus is represented as making a total distinction between those who are chosen and prepared and those who follow him because of his mighty work. The preaching of the Kingdom was for all and it was made public though veiled in parables. The action that was to bring the Kingdom was performed in secret and never made public at all.

When Jesus had been baptised by John, he accepted the task entrusted to him by His Father, which was to transmit to those able to receive it the direct action of Divine Love. This is the highest Cosmic Impulse that can enter the Creation. Beyond it is the Unfathomable Source of which nothing can be said or even imagined. When man is united with Love, he is God; but Divine Love can enter only into a soul that is utterly empty of itself and liberated from all taint of egoism. How then was Love to come to sinful man? This is a far greater mystery than that of the redemption. The Essene Teacher of Righteousness had led his followers by the path of self-denial and humble obedience to superiors. They had access to the power of Love in their ritual meal of bread and wine, which as we know required total purity and was open only to those who had undergone three years of rigorous training. John the Baptist remained an Essene in his ascetic discipline and in his demand for repentance and submission, but he was not an Essene missionary, for he did not invite his penitents to join the brotherhood, but told them to return



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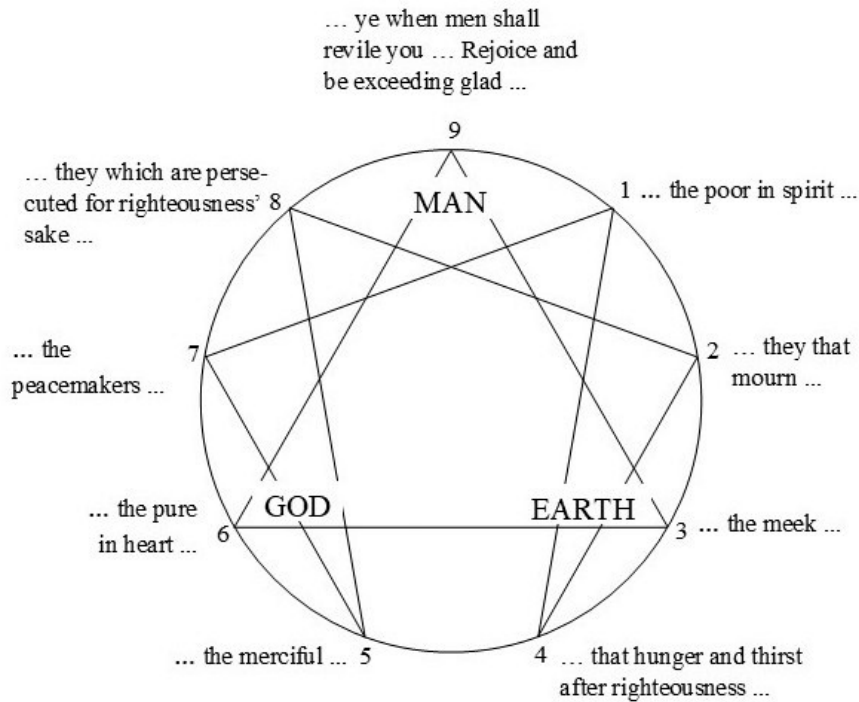
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home and prepare for the imminent coming of the Kingdom. He did not yet understand what the 'Kingdom' meant.

Jesus knew that he had to work through prepared people and his first task was to attract, to select and to train his disciples. This part of his mission can be reconstructed from St. Matthew's Gospel.

We learn from the Gospel that the disciples were very rigorously trained. They had to be free from all attachments, able to accept persecution and be expert in all procedures for the transformation of energies. The Beatitudes are of special significance not only by their content, but even more by their arrangement in three groups of three. They can be represented on the enneagram as follows:



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The points 3, 6, and 9 represent the three components of the action. This throws a new light upon the event, entirely different from the usual view that the Christian religion is concerned solely with the relationship between man and God. If the Earth comes in as an equal partner, then we must entirely change our way of thinking about religion. So, the third beatitude raises a more serious question than anyone who has commented on the first Gospel has yet supposed. Why should 'inheriting the Earth' be brought into a spiritual and indeed other-worldly document? It is because man's very existence is justified only to the extent that he accepts his responsibility towards nature; but he must be meek in his attitude towards her.

There are two basic duties for man in this life; one is to serve nature and the other is to find God. The keys to fulfilling these duties are meekness and purity of heart. Our duty to ourselves is to achieve perfection - "Be ye therefore perfect as your Father in Heaven also is perfect" - and for this we must be ready to suffer. In Gurdjieff's language, we must accept conscious labour and intentional suffering. The blunt assertion in the ninth beatitude that persecution is the common lot of all who fill the role of prophet or apostle is followed by "rejoice and be exceeding glad" to make it clear that the suffering is positive and creative. The perfected man who accepts the role of apostle, the one who is sent out, has to bear an immense burden. He has to endure the tension between perfect freedom and total slavery that is felt when the third world acts directly on the first.

The remaining six Beatitudes depict the total action by which the perfection of manhood is achieved. It begins with the 'realisation of one's own nothingness' expressed by "poor in spirit". Spiritual poverty is apparent to oneself, not to others, whereas material poverty is of the visible world. From spiritual poverty arises the hunger and thirst, point 4, that leads to the awareness of the gulf that separates us from the glory of God, point 2. At this stage awareness of the true meaning of discipleship enters and the soul has glimpses of "theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven", point 8. The realisation of our common nothingness before the Glory of God opens the heart to mercy, point 5. We can love others as ourselves when we all stand in the presence of the Glory. We then can act effectively to create harmony in place of discord, to make peace and ensure it, point 7. Realising that whatever we achieve is not our own doing but the working of the power of God brings us back to our own nothingness, point 1. This brief excursion into the legominism may convince the reader that there is much to be learned from St. Matthews Gospel that does not appear on the surface.

The Sermon on the Mount is a further development of the so-called 'Manual of Discipline' of the Essene Brotherhood, which is perhaps the most valuable discovery among the Dead Sea Scrolls. It teaches humility and contempt for this world and confidence in the world of providence. It requires a very high standard of non-egoistic behaviour, the merit of which is not 'seen of men' but by the Heavenly Father. A remarkable feature of the Sermon on the Mount is its timelessness. There is not a precept that is less applicable today than it was two thousand years ago. The disciples were trained first of all in moral discipline and then were initiated into the arts

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of divination and healing. Jesus himself could heal on all levels from the psychic to the truly spiritual. The disciples acquired as much as was possible in the time available.

All this happened in Galilee, especially north of the Sea of Galilee in towns such as Capernaum, Chorazin and Bethsaida. Jesus himself taught also in the synagogues, mainly on the Sabbath day when his deep training in the Essenian interpretation of the scriptures enabled him to astonish the people by his wisdom and the authority with which he spoke.

I am sure that we can accept literally the greater part of the accounts of miraculous healing and even the raising from the dead of the daughter of Jairus. The skeptical and positivist philosophy that has dominated Western thought for two centuries has conditioned us to reject miracles as 'impossible'. We forget how many 'impossible' events occur round us every day. True miracles are the working of the spirit of God within the material world.<sup>6</sup> When Divine Love works in a self-free being it can work more miracles than we can imagine.

We now arrive at the critical moment when Jesus selected the twelve disciples with whom he intended to perform the greatest miracle of all: the transmission to them as sinful human beings of the power of Divine Love. The next step was to send them away from himself to test and confirm the transformation that had already taken place. "He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease". The instructions for their missionary journey described in Matthew 10 are reminiscent of the rule of the Essenes. They were to be without any personal possessions, without a home of their own, and they were to address themselves only to orthodox Jews whom they found worthy. They were to rely solely upon the Spirit of the Father to guide and support them.

The disciples were warned that they would be persecuted but were to remember that this had been the lot of the prophets before them. Jesus: "came not to send peace on Earth, but a sword". The Kingdom of Heaven was so near that they would not have gone through all the cities of Israel before the great day came.

While the disciples were absent on their missionary journeys, Jesus himself continued to teach and to preach in the cities south of the lake. John the Baptist, who had been imprisoned by Herod, sent two of his own disciples all the way from Jerusalem to ask Jesus the question: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" In reply, Jesus points to his work of preaching the good news of the Kingdom, supported as it was by his acts of healing. The narrative makes it clear that John was not destined to know the real secret of Jesus' mission. "Verily I say unto you, among them that are born of women, there has not arisen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he". In other words, the Kingdom is not for the natural man born of woman, but for the supernatural man transformed through the power of Love. At this point, Jesus parts company from the

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<sup>6</sup> Editor's note. An action from the third world, alam-i imkan, into the first world, alam-i ajsam

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Essenes in his saying: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of Heaven and Earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes." The Great Teacher of Righteousness, who had prepared his people by way of 'wisdom and prudence' had not penetrated into the final mystery of Love.

When the disciples return, the second act of the drama begins. Jesus deliberately provokes the Pharisees, who cannot understand why he does not join them. They know that the Essenes condemn their policy of compromise with the Roman occupying power; which falls, of course, far short of the open collaboration offered by the Sadducees. They regard Jesus as one of themselves: a pious man learned in the scriptures and a devout adherent of the law. He begins to do things that shock them, such as allowing his disciples to pluck the corn on the Sabbath day. He then attacks them openly and makes it clear that so far from joining them, he is going to rouse the people of Galilee against them. He repudiates his mother and his family whom he had been supporting by his own labour, (Matthew 12:47-50), an action that would be quite understandable if he were returning to the Essenes, but he is not doing this either. He rejects asceticism in terms reminiscent of the Buddha after his Enlightenment.

The parables of the Kingdom begin to emphasize the priceless value of the gift that he is to confer on those who can take up their cross and follow him. The multitude flock to him in such numbers that in order to be alone with his disciples he is obliged to go right outside Jewish territory into the heathen lands of Tyre and Sidon. Here the incident of the Syrophoenecian woman of Greek extraction, whose faith allowed her daughter to be healed, emphasizes the universal character of the mission on which Jesus had been sent. It was no longer confined to the Jews. This enormous step makes the final break with the Essenes who accepted only Jews of pure descent into their brotherhood. One has only to read the translation of the Qumran documents to recognize that no Essene would have conversed with a non-Jewish woman. Far more important than their taboos was the bitter hatred towards non-Jews expressed in the 'Rules of Warfare for the Community of the Covenant' which was so important a document that fragments of seven or eight different copies were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Essenes were awaiting the great war which was to last ten years and end in triumph for the Jewish cause. The 'Kittim', thought by most authorities to be the Seleucids, were the cruel oppressors who were to be utterly wiped out. Jesus could see the folly of such dreams and no doubt the Masters of Wisdom knew it also: but they could not know precisely what a task he was preparing to accomplish.

Jesus was now alone and was entering regions where even the Masters of Wisdom could no longer follow him. He celebrated the New Dispensation with the miraculous feast that is reported twice over. Although in its outward form it reproduces the love feast of the Essenes, there is no mention of preliminary purification. The feast was not confined to the disciples, but was open to all who were so strongly drawn to Jesus that they followed him into the wilderness, Mark 8:1 and Matthew 15:32. As soon as the feast was ended the multitude was sent away and Jesus took ship

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and went north again with his closest disciples. He once again moved into pagan country: the region called Caesarea Philippi, forty miles north of the lake. Now comes the great test. He asks the disciples: "Who say ye that I am?" Peter answers: "Thou art the Christ" (Mark 8:29) that is, the Anointed One of God who was foretold by the prophets. Jesus begins to explain that so far from triumph he was to undergo humiliation (Matthew 16:23) and Peter rebukes him privately. Then comes the most significant saying: "Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men".

This makes it perfectly clear that none of the disciples yet understood the true mission of Jesus. He called the people together with his disciples and said openly to all of them: "whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me", Mark 8:34 and Matthew 17:24. The enigmatic saying that is reported only by Matthew: "Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here which shall not taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom" appears to be a false prophecy and many attempts have been made to explain it away. The truth is very simple. Six days later, Jesus takes three of those who were standing there: James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and Peter up into a high mountain apart, Matthew 17:1.

We have now to part company with nearly every account of the Transfiguration. This stupendous event occupies nine verses in Matthew and Luke and seven in Mark's Gospel. It is not mentioned at all in the fourth Gospel; sure, evidence that its true significance had been lost by the time it was compiled. All that is recorded in the synoptic Gospels is the change in the appearance of Jesus, the apparition of Moses and Elias and the 'voice out of the cloud'. This is all the three witnesses were entitled to mention to their fellow disciples.

It was not intended that the true nature of the incident should be understood for this would have distracted attention from the final drama. Not only could the body of believers not understand, but the disciples were also at sea, as is shown by the immediately following incident of the lunatic child whom they could not cure.

The key to understanding the Transfiguration is the transmission of Divine Love. If we recognize that this, and not the redemption of mankind from sin as St. Paul supposed, was the mission undertaken by Jesus we see the event in its true perspective. The obstacle to this vision is our false conception of love as a polar force of attraction, similar to the attraction between two bodies carrying opposite electric charges, or between the poles of a magnet. Attraction implies repulsion. As unlike charges attract, like charges repel. If the love between man and God were of such a character, it would imply that man and God stood at opposite poles and could never be united without losing their love for one another. Divine Love does not derive its power from separation but from union. It is not fullness but emptiness, not Being but the Void.

The Transfiguration was an action that embraced all worlds. The three disciples belonged to the natural world, but they had already been initiated, with the rest of the twelve, into the spirit

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world. Moses and Elias unite the world of spirit and the world of creativity. Moses represents the covenant made by the giving of the Law, and especially the covenant of Love between Jahweh and his people (Deuteronomy 27-30) and brought up-to-date in the covenant of the Essenes. Elias stands for the creative power that works miracles. Jesus goes beyond all the limitations of time and space and is in direct communication with the Father, represented by the Voice from the Cloud. I believe that there was a seventh person present, but as no such suggestion appears anywhere in the scriptures, I shall not mention his name at this stage.

From this moment, the character of the narrative changes. We see a drama enacted in which each participant has a precise role to play. As the last passion approaches, the tension grows. We must here remember that the Gospels all, without exception, were edited to make them acceptable to Rome. Very little is said of the contact with the East. The Magi are never again mentioned. Even more remarkable is the absence of reference to the Essenes although we are told that at least one disciple, Simon belonged to the Zealots, committed to the liberation of Jerusalem from foreign rule. The truth is that the Romans were seriously concerned with the danger of a mass rising of the Jews under a new Messiah. The people were in a state of ferment and the Jewish authorities were above all anxious to avoid provoking reprisals from the Romans which might include the closing of the temple.

The intense emotional energy generated was a necessary element in the drama. The secret action had been completed and it was now necessary to release the force of Love by an explosion of hate. Matthew 23 purports to be an account of Jesus' deliberate provocation of the scribes and Pharisees. It is irrelevant to the narrative and to the readers of the Gospel fifty or a hundred years later, it could have little or no significance. It is inserted to illustrate the process by which the scene was set for the final drama. The Jewish leaders were sufficiently occupied with the delicate task of maintaining a balance between Herod, the nominal ruler of the country, and the Roman delegate who held the effective power. They had no wish to be involved in the extraordinary movement initiated by Jesus. They had nothing to gain from a fresh wave of revolt against the Roman army of occupation. Herod himself was a superstitious man, half inclined to believe that Jesus was John the Baptist risen from the dead. It was necessary to close the event that had been consummated on the mount of Transfiguration.

The Transfiguration was the making of the New Covenant of Love and the Revelation was that this covenant requires from man humiliation or abasement, which alone can liberate him from the egoism which keeps him prisoner of the worlds of time and death. We must remember that according to the Books of Exodus and Kings, both Moses and Elijah spoke with God and were transformed, so that they were no longer men like the rest of mankind. A similar transformation was wrought in the disciples with Jesus on the mountain. They were made aware of the presence of God and this burned up their egoism and left them completely empty. This was the very core of the mission of Jesus. Once it was accomplished what subsequently happened was the process

of opening the channel of Divine Love to the other disciples and eventually to all who were capable of receiving it.

Abasement and humiliation are spontaneous when finite man finds himself in the immediate presence of the Unfathomable Truth. But it is also necessary to live through humiliation here in this world in order to be established in Love. The Gospel story, from the Transfiguration on, is concerned with humiliation.

The first to be humiliated were the sons of Zebedee. They ask Jesus to grant that they may sit on his right and left hand in his glory, and are rebuked for their lack of understanding, Mark 10:35-42. In Matthew's Gospel they are represented as bringing their mother to ask for this privilege. The Gospel adds that: "when the ten heard it they began to be much displeased with James and John". Only those who have been in similar situations can know the bitterness of being despised and rejected by one's closest friends on account of a real or fancied ambition to occupy the highest place. James and John were so completely discredited that we hear little of them again. The incident is not reported by Luke, who puts in its place a dispute among all the disciples as to the place they would occupy in the Kingdom. It seems that James and John deliberately allowed themselves to be disgraced, in order to eradicate the last traces of egoism that haunted them from the vision of the mount of Transfiguration. In the Acts of the Apostles, John is shown as humbly following Peter, who performs the miracles of healing and boldly addresses the Sanhedrin.<sup>7</sup>

The second humiliation is that of Peter. The story of Peter's denial appears in all four Gospels and clearly made a profound impression on the disciples. Because of the tremendous achievements of Peter, we are inclined to treat the threefold denial as a momentary aberration or as evidence that the disciples did not receive the Holy Ghost until after the resurrection. The truth is that the denying of his Master was a betrayal that could have had as disastrous consequences as the betrayal of Judas. If Peter had boldly entered and taken Jesus' part before the High Priest, it might have been impossible to convict him. We must have a picture of the weakness of the Jewish authorities in complete subjection to the Roman legate, to realize how much might have turned upon Peter's loyalty.

How could Peter have done it? This question has tormented every reader of the Gospel. It can be answered only if we understand the need for total humiliation in those who had been initiated into the Power of Love. Peter had to descend to the hardest perfidy in order to extinguish in him the subjective and personal attachment to Jesus that was inseparable from his own self-love. In order to become the perfected instrument of Divine Love, Peter had to accept the humiliating

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<sup>7</sup> I should make it clear that I believe both St. Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles were written in ignorance of the real character of Christ's mission. They are regarded by scholars as literary rather than historical works. Even so, the subordinate role of James and John is in striking contrast to their earlier pre-eminence.

experience of seeing the falsity of his imagined love of Jesus exposed to himself and the world. I do not mean by this that Peter was play-acting. He could not help denying Jesus because his egoism had not yet expired.

The true significance of the Last Supper was the transmission to the disciples of the power that had descended upon Jesus at the Transfiguration. All the humiliation suffered by those directly involved was necessary to neutralize the negative forces released by the action. Jesus had plainly said: "He that exalteth himself shall be abased and he that abaseth himself shall be exalted."

We must picture the scene in Jerusalem on the eve of the Passover. The Roman army was not overwhelmingly strong in the city and was on the alert to crush by a drastic move - possibly wholesale massacre - any sign of a popular uprising. The multitude saw in Jesus a new Maccabaeus<sup>8</sup> armed with miraculous powers and was ready to follow him in a desperate venture. The Jewish authorities above all wanted to avoid open conflict with the Romans. Herod was alarmed at the threat to his hereditary role as 'King of the Jews'. Rumours and counter-rumours were everywhere. Roman patrols were all over the city and no one knew where they might strike.

In this strained atmosphere, the Jews were celebrating the Passover in memory of the night when the first-born of Egypt were slain by the angel of the Lord. The scene with Jesus and his disciples was far removed from such memories. They were looking into the future and making the final preparations for the entry of Divine Love into the human nature. This was done by a transfusion of substance. This action was possible because three of those present had already been transformed on the mount of Transfiguration. The Gospel of St. John refers to the washing of feet, John 13:4-17. This version contains memories of the ceremony but leaves out any reference to the sharing of bread and wine. Jesus says: "a new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another even as I have loved you" (ibid vv 31-35). This makes no sense unless it is part of a special action connected with the transmission of the power to love as Jesus loved.

We now come to a very hard task: that of understanding the betrayal of Judas. The humiliation of Judas was total. Unlike Peter he has never been pardoned in the eyes of Christendom. Many people have seen that we are before an impossible story. If Judas was really a traitor and yet Jesus chose him to be one of the twelve, either Jesus was a poor judge of men or else he allowed Judas to fall into the cruelest trap and this would be to impute lack of compassion to the Lord of Love. There was no need for Jesus to be betrayed: he could have spared Judas by allowing himself to be discovered. None of the usual explanations make sense. Some like to think of Judas as a misguided busybody who thought he knew better than Jesus and would force him to show his power and bring in the Kingdom. This again is to belittle Jesus and make nonsense of the terrible sequence of events.

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<sup>8</sup> Judas Maccabaeus, the freedom fighter who brought Jewish independence from Greek cultural dominance in 167-165 BC. Jewish independence lasted for a further century, to 63 BC.



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It happens that the truth is unmistakably indicated in the Gospels and especially the fourth. Jesus tells his disciples that one of them is to betray him and they all begin to question among themselves which of them it was to be. This shows that the betrayal was an agonizing duty that someone had to perform, but most of them did not understand. "Jesus says: 'He it is to whom I shall give a sop<sup>9</sup> when I have dipped it.' And when he had dipped the piece of bread, he gave it to Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon. And after the piece of bread, Satan entered into him. Then Jesus said to him: 'What you have to do: do at once.' Now no man at the table knew for what intent he said this to him." John 13:26-28.

We cannot understand this unless we remember first that the betrayal and crucifixion of Jesus were not necessary for the forgiveness of sins. Jesus had declared, when he cured the man sick of the palsy, that they should know that the "Son of Man hath power upon Earth to forgive sins", Matthew 9:6. The arrest and condemnation of Jesus could happen at any moment that he permitted himself to be found. It follows that both the betrayal and the crucifixion have another and profounder reason. The highest possible reason for any action in this world is to allow Divine Love to penetrate. Love cannot enter where there are egoism, hate and envy. These are represented by Satan.

It was necessary for the transmission of Love to the disciples that Satan should be expelled. This was the task undertaken by Judas. John's Gospel states it in plain terms. Jesus gave Judas the piece of bread and "after the sop, Satan entered into him". He had to leave the room at once so that no Satanic action should occur.

Why should Judas be charged with this most odious task? He was close to Jesus. Unlike the remaining disciples who were Galileans, Judas was a Judaeon and more highly cultured than the rest. He was probably an Essene initiate who had joined Jesus because he recognized that the Essenes, for all their self-discipline and obedience, were still trapped in pride of race and hatred of the oppressor.<sup>10</sup> Judas was more fully aware than any of the disciples of the magnitude of the step that was to be taken. This is why I believe that he was the seventh present at the Transfiguration. His name was suppressed when he had carried out his mission and accepted the entire blame for the betrayal of Jesus. I was led to this conclusion by conversations I had with Mr. Gurdjieff in 1949 shortly before he died. He said, in the presence of many of his pupils, that Judas was of all the disciples the closest to Jesus and the only one who knew all his secrets. He insisted upon my replying without equivocation to the question he put to me: "Do you believe

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<sup>9</sup> The Greek word psomion is the diminutive of psomos - bread. It is used currently in modern Greek to mean bread.

<sup>10</sup> The saying: "Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's" would shock not only the Essenes, but even the Pharisees, who paid tribute only under duress. This is why, for a time, the Sadducees thought he might side with them in their policy of 'collaboration' with the Roman power.

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that what I say about Judas is the truth?" I could only answer at that time, that there was no other explanation that made sense.

It was only very recently that the whole truth became apparent to me. Judas was the one into whom Divine Love had most completely entered, and therefore he was the one whose abasement and humiliation had to be the most complete. He alone was strong enough to allow Satan to take possession of him without losing his own soul. The words: "Satan entered into him" are among the most terrifying in the four Gospels. When we pause to reflect, we can see that Judas was himself the lamb of God that took away the sins of the world.

I have never been able to accept that Jesus, who was sinless, could take sins upon himself. Anyone who aims at perfection knows that suffering comes from our own sins, not the sins of others. We must know that we ourselves are sinners in order to have true compassion for others. By making himself the greatest sinner of all, Judas could undergo the greatest humiliation; not only in the eyes of others, but in his own also. When the dreadful thing had been done and Satan left him, he could not be sure if the betrayal was his own act or the consequence of taking on the 'sins of the world'. When he hanged himself, it was not play-acting but the inevitable consequence of having allowed Satan to enter him; even though he did so consciously and even at the command of Jesus himself.

The humiliation of Judas was complete and irredeemable in this world. He has remained in the eyes of Christendom the very symbol of wickedness. But the Gospel gives us the assurance that he was one of the initiates. He was the first of the disciples to receive the sacramental bread from the hands of Jesus. He could see for himself the miracle that was being enacted. And yet he could continue to doubt and to condemn himself for the part he had played in it. Is this not the true psychology of a saint?

If this is the deep, esoteric, significance of Judas' betrayal we must also take account of the visible event. All Jerusalem was in a state of excitement. Jesus had aroused the wildest expectations by his onslaught on the money changers in the temple. The Romans were on edge because they feared an uprising led by the Zealots, who had separated from the Essenes because they would not wait for the 'great and dreadful day of the Lord' foretold by Malachi, Malachi 4:5. On all sides Jesus was under suspicion, and he and the disciples were in imminent danger of arrest by the Romans, whereas the drama required that the Jewish authorities should also be involved. Judas would ensure that the Sanhedrin would act before the Romans, He knew that the Sadducees were willing to sacrifice Jesus. In the words of Caiaphas: "It is expedient that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not." John 11 :50. Since it suited the Romans to deflect the anger of the people - which they had good reason to fear - from

themselves and the Jewish authorities, Judas' action enabled the drama to proceed according to Destiny.<sup>11</sup>

We now come to the act known as the Last Supper. All authorities agree that it was an initiation by which the disciples were enabled to transmit the blessing. The Pauline idea of a 'redemptive sacrifice' distorted the significance of the agape, or Act of Love, as it was certainly understood by the first disciples, and continued to be understood by the Judaeian church. The Last Supper was not on the same Divine Plane as the Transfiguration. There was no 'Voice out of the Clouds', nor the appearance of other sacred beings. The giving of bread and wine is not mentioned at all in the fourth Gospel. In the three synoptic Gospels, it is repeated in much the same words in seven to nine verses. It is hard to believe that this action had the central importance that is attributed to it by most Christian churches today. It is so like the miraculous feeding of the four and seven thousand that it seems to be rather a connection with the second phase of Jesus' teaching than the consummation of his mission. Furthermore, the liturgic action is clearly derived from the Zoroastrian tradition through the Essenes. It was given its present form and importance in Cappadocia at a time when the Magi had an important centre there. In short, I think that the sharing of bread and wine - the Eucharistic Feast - was not the central act of the Last Supper. The long homily in St. John's Gospel, John 13-17, gives us the clue. The central theme here is Divine Love. "A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love to one another". John 13:34-5. These two verses appear out of context because in the next verse Peter takes up from verse 33 ignoring what his Master has just said.

We have here the vestige of a very strong tradition that something essentially new took place. Why a new commandment? Because something new had just happened. They had been endowed with the Power of Love and therefore they were set apart from ordinary men and women, whose egoism made them incapable of participating in the Divine Love. Soon after, Jesus adds the famous saying: "Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friend" (John 15:13). The disciples are no longer "of this world", John 15:19. They have been initiated into the world where Love is the only law.

The communion of substance by which the transformation was effected was repeated in the act of sharing the bread and wine. The disciples had entered the Kingdom of Heaven and were beyond life and death. They had shared the spiritual body of Christ, and now they knew who He was.

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<sup>11</sup> I have put this in because it is the explanation given by Gurdjieff (c.f. *Beelzebub's Tales* p. 740-2). I think it is valid, but not the crux of the matter. This is why Gurdjieff said that I would someday have to give the true explanation.

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But the price was still not fully paid. The humiliation of Judas was to be followed and consummated by the ultimate humiliation of the rejection of the Son of Man, his crucifixion and abandonment. Peter had to complete his own humiliation. His egoism was finally extirpated as he saw his proud boast that he would die with Jesus rather than deny him trampled in the dust as the cock crew.

Once the full tragedy of despair and humiliation was complete, the resurrection became possible. The 'resurrection body' is perceptible only to those who are able to love. From time to time, saints have visions of Jesus in his resurrection body, but they cannot approach him, as could the disciples who had been transformed into the resurrection world. This is where Paul fell into error. His vision of Jesus was not the same as the awareness of immediate presence that was possible for the disciples who had been initiated at the Last Supper. Paul saw himself as redeemed and assumed that Christ was crucified to redeem mankind. This is of course true, but not in the sense of Pauline Christianity which makes redemption necessary to restore man to his pre-existing sinless state in readiness for some future action that would usher in the Kingdom of Heaven. The disciples, with Peter at their head, knew that the Kingdom had already been entered; but they did not yet understand that it was a Universal Kingdom open to all people of all times. This was partly revealed to Peter in the vision in Joppa which sent him to Caesaria to baptise the Centurion Cornelius. It is significant that in describing the Resurrection, Peter said God showed Jesus: "Not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen by God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he arose from the dead". Acts 10:41.

In short, the Essenes and the Pharisees followed the way of Gnosis and power, whereas the first Christians went by the way of Love and humiliation. We might even venture to say that the God of the Old Testament was the Demiurge, whereas Jesus looked beyond to the source of Divine Love. We shall have to see in later chapters which of the paths was taken by the Masters of Wisdom.