

# **The Word of God**

## **As He spoke to the Jews in the Gospel of St. John**

**An Essay by Frits Albers, Ph.B.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

“In the beginning was the Word,  
the Word was with God  
and the Word was God.  
He was with God in the beginning.  
Through Him all things came to be,  
not one thing had its being but through Him.  
In him was Life, and the Life was the Light of men.  
A Light that shines in the darkness,  
A Light that darkness could not overpower.....  
The Word was the true Light that enlightens all men,  
And He was coming into the world.  
He was in the world that had its being through Him,  
and the world did not know Him.  
He came into His own domain,  
***And His own people did not accept Him.***  
But to all who did accept Him  
He gave power to become children of God....”

**“For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and do not return without watering the earth, making it yield and giving growth to provide seed for the sower and bread for the eating, so shall it be with My Word that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty without carrying out My will and succeeding in what it was sent to do”.**

[Is. 55:10-11].

***“And His own people did not accept Him....”***  
***“But even so, He shall not return to Me empty....”***

“*From the contrast of ideas, great light shall spring forth*”. [An old French saying].

And in the life of the Son of God on earth, contrast there certainly was. Contrast between Light and darkness, between Reason and blindness, between Life and death. We shall pursue it in the narrative, the Gospel of one of the greatest story-tellers that ever lived, St. John the Apostle, the Evangelist, ‘the disciple Jesus loved ...’

The disputes of the Jews with Our Blessed Lord could only have one outcome. The fierce controversies could only lead to one climax. It was then the same matter ‘of life and death’, the same contrast, as the Holy Church now faces with Her greatest enemies of the day: the Modernists. The same darkness against the Light; the same blindness against Reason; the same suicidal collision course as it was then for the same coveted prize: *power*. Power to control. Power of will over mind.

Yes, under the direct influence of the Holy Spirit, St. John has succeeded in making this whole one-sided encounter, this hopelessly dead-end street for one of the two sides, as fascinating as he possibly could for our time and for our instruction.

We pick up the drama at its first major confrontation in chapter 5 of St. John’s Gospel. But the first wrong-footing of the Jews had already occurred in chapter 2, when Our Lord made a whip of some chords and drove everyone out of the Temple who at that moment did not make the House of God into a House of Prayer. That event must not be seen as simply a shot across the bow of the Pharisees’ man-of-war, but a direct hit which was immediately accepted by the opposition as an act of war. As the saying goes: “*The first shot had been fired*” and ,characteristically, it had not been fired by the men who, in their illusion of power, had become so complacent that they had not realised that their territory had been invaded. And equally characteristically, the action that had brought the power struggle into the open had been perfectly legitimate.

It is of great significance that St. John uses the word ‘*Pharisees*’ very sparingly, and so very judiciously. For him the main confrontation was between ‘*the Jews*’ and Our Blessed Lord. Between ‘*His own*’ as he had put it so clearly in the first lines of his Gospel, and their Maker, their Messiah and Redeemer. As will come out in all its starkness, the Jews had no intention of admitting that they were in any way in need of a Redeemer. Corrupted by the Pharisees, the ruling party, to only see and accept the letter of the Law, after having lost its spirit way back in the dim past, *the Jews* were taught to look forward to a mighty earthly ruler who would confirm the superiority of the Jewish race and nation and so wrest the kingdom once again from the Romans and restore it to God’s chosen people. Being forced to deal with Someone who so obviously had other ideas, another script and a totally different timetable – although they had to admit that there was a monumental authority behind all these – was too much for them to tolerate, let alone to accept. They either would in time come around to see things His way, or else the matter would be resolved in murder. Whichever way it went, it would make for absorbing, even fascinating reading.

## I. The Curtain Lifts

*“After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem”.*  
From now on every detail in the narrative is of the utmost importance.

*Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Hebrew called Bethzatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay a multitude of invalids, blind, lame, paralysed. One man was there, who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew that he had been lying there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is disturbed, and while I am still on the way another gets in before me”. Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your sleeping mat, and walk”. And at once the man was healed, and he took up his sleeping mat and walked.*

*Now that day happened to be the sabbath, so the Jews said to the man who was cured, “It is the sabbath, it is not lawful for you to carry your sleeping mat”. But he answered them, “The man who healed me said to me, ‘Take up your mat, and walk.’”. They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your mat, and walk’?” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd that filled the place. After a while Jesus met him in the Temple and said to him, “See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you”. The man went back and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. It was because he did things like this on the sabbath that the Jews started to persecute Jesus.*

The stage has been carefully set and the questions come pouring out:

“Was this confrontation unavoidable?” “Could the Jews have known?” “Was it reasonable to expect that they ought to have accepted it, once an explanation was given?”

Since the subsequent dispute was between God and his creatures, and God never asks the impossible, the answer to the first question is an emphatic “No!” The confrontation was unnecessary. But then, how were the Jews to know? One of the answers Christ gave to the disciples of St. John the Baptist when they came to ask Him “*Are you the one who is to come, or is it someone else we have to wait for?*” was: “*Go and tell John what you hear and see ... the lame walk ...*”. [Mt. 11:3-5, quoting Isaiah 35:6]. Now one quote of the most famous of all the prophets after Moses was enough to conjure up for any listeners the context in which the words of Isaiah were set. In this case, the context in which these words of Isaiah were enshrined was this:-

**“Look, your God is coming,  
vengeance is coming,  
the retribution of God,  
He is coming to save you”.**  
**Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,  
the ears of the deaf unsealed,  
then the lame shall leap like a deer,  
and the tongues of the dumb sing for joy.**

**For water gushes in the desert,  
streams in the wasteland,  
the scorched earth becomes a lake  
the parched land springs of water”.**

This answers the second question put above: “Could, and therefore should, the Jews have known?” Yes, they ought to have known, because God’s preparation for this all-important encounter between the Jews and their Messiah was flawless. The encounter was accurately foretold to be between ‘desert’, ‘wasteland’, ‘scorched earth’ and ‘parched land’ on the one hand, and ‘gushing water’, ‘streams’, ‘a lake’ and ‘springs of water’ on the other. Needless to say that this would call for humility on the part of the Jews and for compassion on the part of God. The compassion was in place, but was the humility?

And what about the third question asked above: “Was it reasonable to expect that they should have accepted it, once an explanation was given?” To answer this we go to another witness who quoted Isaiah. Was it not true that all the Jews even from Jerusalem had heard John the Baptist declare the next lines of Isaiah’s prophecy:-

**“And through it will run a highway undefiled,  
which shall be called the Sacred Way;  
the unclean may not travel by it  
nor fools stray along it....  
but the redeemed will walk there,  
for those Yahweh has ransomed will return”.**

No, there was no excuse for not knowing, and no excuse for exorcising the Spirit from the letters used by Isaiah. For John’s testimony was accepted by prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners. In those poor lives humility was in place....

*But Jesus answered them, “My Father goes on working and so do I”.*

In order to appreciate what follows, it is of course of the greatest importance that this opening line to the dispute has no mystery for the reader.

According to Chesterton, St. Thomas Aquinas fully understood, and therefore also put into practice, what was the rock-bottom foundation of any argument with these words:-

*“We have already noted why, in this one quarrel with Siger of Brabant, Thomas Aquinas let loose such thunders of purely moral passion. It was because the whole work of his life was being betrayed behind his back by those who had used his victories over the reactionaries ... And yet, even in this isolated apocalypse of anger, there is one phrase that may be commended for all time to men who are angry with much less cause. If there is one sentence that could be carved in marble as representing the calmest and most enduring rationality of*

*this unique intelligence, it is a sentence which came pouring out with all the rest of this molten lava. If there is one phrase that stands before history as typical of Thomas Aquinas, it is that phrase about his own argument: 'It is not based on documents of faith but on the reasons and statements of the philosophers themselves'. At the top of his fury, Thomas Aquinas understands what so many defenders of orthodoxy will not understand. It is no good to tell an atheist that he is an atheist, or to charge a denier of immortality with the infamy of denying it, or to imagine that one can force an opponent to admit he is wrong on somebody else's principles, but not on his own....We must either not argue with a man at all, or we must argue on his grounds and not ours".*

[St. Thomas Aquinas, ch. 3, p. 95: *The Aristotelian Revolution*].

And here is the Creator of St. Thomas Aquinas, getting engaged in His first dispute with adversaries even more determined to betray and destroy the whole work of His Life. And His opening gambit is on their ground, not His own. It is on facts that could be ascertained by observation and reason, and not on the principles of Faith which He knew they did not possess.

*But Jesus answered them, "My Father goes on working and so do I".*

The Jews knew Whom He was referring to. They knew that, whom they thought was His father, Joseph of Nazareth, was dead and no longer working. That Our Lord had accurately grasped that here He had based the beginning of the whole argument "on *their* principles" comes out immediately in the next line of the Gospel narrative:-

*This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because He not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal to God.*

So they knew! In the course of the argument Our Blessed Lord will accuse them of having no faith in Him, no faith in the Scriptures and no faith in Moses, so He could not depend in His disputes with the Jews on a Light they did not possess. Now watch how they do their level best to extinguish what little light they still possessed, the light that the Word of God was calling on for their own salvation. What a lesson for us, two thousand years later, in our dealings with the Modernists....

After having forced them to acknowledge against their will that here He was talking about their God and that He was making himself equal to God by calling their God his Father, He continues to build on that relationship with something they all could understand from their own everyday experience.

*Jesus said to them, "I tell you most solemnly, the Son can do nothing by himself; He can only do what he sees the Father doing; and whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise. For the Father loves the Son, and shows him all that he himself is doing; and greater works than these will he show him, that will astonish you. For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also*

*the Son gives life to whom he will. The Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He who does not honour the Son does not honour the Father who sent him”.*

If the Jews knew nothing about the Supernatural Life that the Father was about to give with and through the Son, the Jews knew enough Scripture to understand that in the Old Testament earthly life had been restored, but only by the power of God/Yahweh. So here Our Lord was still speaking on their level of understanding, but leading them to insights they could only grasp with a new Light that would unconditionally be theirs if they believed the Son when He still talked to them on their own level.

*“I tell you most solemnly, whoever listens to My words and believes in the One who sent Me, has eternal life. Without being brought to judgement he has passed from death to Life”.*

“Whoever listens to My words...”The thomistic principle spoken of above has been strictly adhered to. Our Lord had only spoken on the level of their understanding. Since most Jews followed the few good and the many bad points held by the Pharisees who believed in the resurrection of the dead, the transition from the restoration of earthly life to the resurrection of a much higher Life after death did not require a blind jump in the dark, and so was not altogether incomprehensible to his listeners. Also, the powerful testimony of eyewitnesses was known to them from everyday experience, and here the Son of God was testifying that He was an eyewitness of everything He had seen His Father do.

St. John continues:-

*“I tell you most solemnly, the hour is coming, - in fact it is here already - when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live.”*

This is a most powerful sentence, and so it is preceded by words which almost sound like an oath: *“I tell you most solemnly”*. The Son of God tells them in a most emphatic way four things: (a) He is the Son of God; (b) the hour is here already even when they are listening; (c) the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God. *They* are hearing the voice of the Son of God so *they* are the ones who are dead in sin; and (d) they can live when they are actually *listening*. When they really *take in* what is being said.

What a most powerful message for the Modernists of our days. He *is* the Son of God. His Church is still giving out *His* message. They *are* dead in sin although they hear His voice in His Church. And why? Because they are *not* listening.... But those who *do* listen, live. “But”, they will say just like the unbelieving Jews in Our Lord’s days, “we are both alive on the same planet, the so-called ‘good’ ones and us”. But not alive in the same way! And to make sure that they have no excuse, Christ compares both modes of ‘living’: the way His Father has Life and the way they have it.

*For as the Father has life in himself, so he has granted the Son also to have life in himself, and has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment”.*

“... and has given Him authority to execute judgment ...” Judgment over who has Life that will endure after death and resurrection and who has not got that Life in himself so as the Father and the Son have it. The Pharisees believe in the resurrection at the end of time, and here the Son of God puts before them the two modes of that resurrection depending if they had that Life before they died, or not.

*“I can do nothing on my own authority; as I hear, I judge; and my judgment is just, because I seek not my own will but the will of him who sent me”.*

*“... I judge as I hear ...”*

Our Lord most certainly judges as He hears the Father. For, what He accuses the Jews of, that they do not listen to God, i.e. do not *take in* what God says, of that He cannot be accused Himself. But no doubt He is referring here also to what He taught His disciples in Mt. 7:15-20:

*“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? So, every sound tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears evil fruit. A sound tree cannot bear evil fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits”.*

Here we are told to judge. The Son of God does not allow us to judge the person, but we are most certainly taught here *to judge the tree that is inside the person by its fruits*. So the ‘tree’ is **not** the person, but is the sum-total of all the doctrines and opinions a person has amassed over the years. And the fruits of this ‘tree’ are each person’s words and actions. And we must judge the soundness of the ‘tree’ by its fruits: the words and actions. So not only does the Son of God know what is inside every person, i.e. their worth before God, but as Man, He also listens very carefully to what each person has to say, and He studies their actions, because, as the fruits of the ‘tree’ that is inside them, their words and actions reveal the soundness or otherwise of the doctrines and opinions that live inside them. Our Modernists hate this distinction between “the tree inside the person”, the sum-total of all their doctrines and opinions, and the person himself!

*“If I bear witness to myself, my testimony is not valid; there is another who bears witness to me, and I know that the testimony which he bears to me is true. You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. Not that the testimony which I receive is from man; but I say this that you may be saved. He was a burning and shining lamp and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light.”*

With this reference to John the Baptist Christ is still addressing the Jews on their own level: the question of evidence, witness and testimony. There is the testimony of St. John, human, although all were forced to acknowledge that his testimony came from God:-

*“The baptism of John, where did it come from? From heaven or from man?” And they argued with one another, “If we say, ‘From heaven,’ he will say to us, ‘Why then did you not believe him?’ But if we say, ‘From man,’ we are afraid of the people; because all hold that John was a prophet”. So they answered Jesus, ‘We do not know’” [Mt. 21:25-27].*

*“But my testimony is greater than John’s. The works my Father has given me to do, these same works of mine testify that the Father has sent me”.*

Here Our Blessed Lord puts into practice about Himself what He had taught all of us to do: to judge the ‘Tree’ that is inside Him by the works He does. The *fruits* are sound, so the ‘Tree’ is sound. Thus the *works* testify to the truth of His *words* that He came from God.

*“Besides, the Father who sent me has himself borne witness to me. His voice you have never heard, his form you have never seen; and you do not have his word abiding in you, for you do not believe him whom he has sent.”*

So how did the Father who sent His Son into the world *bear witness to Him*? Witness is borne out by *words*. So how did the Father speak to them? *Through the Scriptures*. If the listening Jews had only stopped to think, to listen properly and to take in what was being said, they would have marvelled at the foolproof way in which the Son of God conducted His argument *at their own level of understanding*! For the Jews believed that Holy Writ was truly God’s Word, even if they did not adhere to it.

**“so shall it be with My Word that goes forth from My mouth; it shall not return to Me empty without carrying out My will and succeeding in what it was sent to do”. [Isaiah].**

The words of Scripture had always been taken as being *the Word of God* and not only by the Prophets ... Yet, Our Lord judged the Jews by their actions and by their words, and thus had this to say:-

*“You search the Scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me; yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life. As for human approval, this means nothing to me. Besides I know you too well; you have no love of God in you. I have come in my Father's name, and you do not accept me. If another comes in his own name, you will accept him. How can you believe, since you look to one another for approval and are not concerned with the approval that comes from God? Do not think that I shall accuse you to the Father; it is Moses who accuses you, on whom you have set your hope. If you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote about me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?”*

“I know you only too well: you have no love of God in you”. That was a personal judgment He was entitled to make as God. “... you do not accept me ...” is a clear judgment of the ‘tree’ inside them which He was entitled to make as Man from the *fruits* it bore: their words and actions.

This is the end of the first discourse, the first controversy.

From an analysis of the Gospel account we are able to learn several things. Right from the start we notice the total absence in the divine and human mind of our Saviour of any fruitless point-scoring. Salvation is a very serious business for which the Messiah sent to us by the Father lays down strict rules which He Himself of course will never break.

Pope Leo XIII has taught us authoritatively in his first encyclical of 1879, *Aeterni Patris*, that upholding the Truth and contending forever with error is imitating the charity of Christ. Every Pope after him has underscored this golden rule in at least one of their encyclicals.

For example, what did the Pontiff write who convened the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII? Is he of a different mind than the ones before him? This is what we read in the beginning of his very first encyclical:

**“The source and root of *all* the evils which affect individuals, peoples and nations with a kind of poison is this: *ignorance of the Truth*, and not only ignorance, but at times a contempt for and a deliberate turning away from it”.**

*[Ad Petri Cathedram, 1959].*

Pope John XXIII never veered away from these convictions, nor from the way he kept referring to the Catholic Church as: “*the pillar and ground of Truth*” [1 Tim. 3:15].

These same sentiments are not only preserved, but also openly proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council. In the 1st chapter of its very first document, the one on *the Sacred Liturgy*, we can read in the opening lines the following reference to 1 Tim. 2: 4: “*God who wills that all men be saved and come to the knowledge of the Truth ...*”

Once again, the intimate link is being established between *Salvation* and *coming to the knowledge of the Truth*. This is the unbroken Catholic Tradition that, as we can see here, comes to us from the Apostles.

After that, the unbroken line in the minds of the Holy Fathers of the paramount importance of coming to the *knowledge of the Truth* in the *work of Salvation* is maintained by the post-Conciliar Pontiff, Pope Paul VI in his “*Credo of the People of God*”, and by Pope John Paul II in his first encyclical, “*Redemptor Hominis*”, 1979, in which a key truth of Faith is based on the fundamental Truth of the Incarnation of the Son of God.

But this Pontiff has given this so important charity: ‘imitating the charity of Christ’, a whole new dimension. As we all know so well, he is pre-eminently “*the Pope of Divine Mercy*”, of reconciliation, of forgiveness and cohesion.

So, where then in this 100-year stretch between 1879 and 1979 is the fundamental link in the mind of the present Holy Father, Pope John Paul II between “*imitating the charity of Christ in proclaiming the Truth and contending forever with error*” (1879 and beyond), and the God of Mercy proclaimed in *Redemptor Hominis* of 1979?

The fundamental link between these two lies in this that Christ did not only show His great charity to the Jews in proclaiming to them the Truth (Himself) and contending forever with their errors, but also showed them an even greater Love by dying for them in their unbelief: *Dives in Misericordia*, or *Rich in Mercy*, (1980). And there is no doubt in this Holy Father’s mind that this is the sentiment of the post-Conciliar Church today, and should be the sentiment of everyone of Her Catholic children born from Her Mystical Life. For in at least four places in the Sacred Documents of Vatican II, this great Council of the present time reminds all Catholics to be prepared to shed their blood for the salvation of the world. This cannot be done without a great share in the Mystical Life of Our Holy Mother the Catholic Church. Thus “imitating the charity of Christ by proclaiming the Truth and by battling forever with error” can only be done successfully by those who are equally convinced that, before God, we must “*stand in*” for our brothers and sisters in our daily prayers and sacrifices until called upon to lay down our lives for them. This will mingle the fearless proclamation of the Truth with the Divine Mercy so eagerly sought after, imposed and practiced by our present Holy Father.

It is obvious that this double aspect of Our Divine Lord’s great charity must from now on never be lost sight of when we hear Him “*uphold the Truth*” before the Jews and “*contend forever with their errors*”. He can be firm with them in making them accept the Truth which He is Himself, because He is prepared to lay down His life for His people.

## II. The Flesh of the Son of Man

[St. John: Chapter 6].

From the foregoing we saw that the Son of God revealed to the Jews His two-fold nature. In His Divine Nature as *the Son of God* He was entitled to judge any human person as it lay completely open in the sight of God. They accurately grasped His claim that He was the Son of God, because they wanted to kill Him for claiming His equality with God. This last accusation came finally out before Pilate as the sole reason why they wanted Him killed. In His human nature as *the Son of Man* he was entitled to judge the 'tree' that is in any human being by the *fruits* it produces: the words and the actions. He also demanded that this second measuring rod was applied on Himself.

Teaching as *the Son of Man*, and even in His arguments, He was careful not to go outside what He knew His hearers were capable of understanding until the point had been reached that, on the foundation He had so carefully laid, a higher doctrine was to be built. In ch. 5 of St. John's Gospel, the higher doctrine referred to here was the revelation that, in the light of the proper Faith in the Scriptures, the Jews would have to accept *that Moses wrote about Him*. He also pointed out to His adversaries *why* they would not accept that. They did possess the right faith in Moses. The wrong faith in Moses, or even the complete absence of such a necessary faith, became manifest in the *fruits* produced by the *tree* within themselves: their words and their actions in relation to the Son of Man. After which they were sent home to ponder about these fruits to see where the Truth was to be found. All this must be kept in mind when we study the second great confrontation which St. John describes for us in chapter 6 of his Gospel. The following is used by him by way of introduction.

*After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, which is the Sea of Tiberias. And a multitude followed him, because they saw the signs which he did on those who were diseased. Jesus went up on the mountain, and there sat down with his disciples. Now the Passover, the feast of the Jews, was at hand. Lifting up his eyes, then, and seeing that a multitude was coming to him, Jesus said to Philip, "How are we to buy bread, so that these people may eat?" This he said to test him, for he himself knew what he would do. Philip answered him, "Two hundred denarii would not buy enough bread for each of them to get a little." One of his disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to him, "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish; but what are they among so many?" Jesus said, "Make the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place; so the men sat down, in number about five thousand. Jesus then took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted. And when they had eaten their fill, he told his disciples, "Gather up the fragments left over, that nothing may be lost". So they gathered them up and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, left by those who had eaten. When the*

*people saw the sign which he had done, they said, "This is indeed the prophet who is to come into the world!" Perceiving then that they were about to come and take him by force to make him king, Jesus withdrew again to the mountain by himself.*

*When evening came, his disciples went down to the sea, got into a boat, and started across the sea to Capernaum. It was now dark, and Jesus had not yet come to them. The sea became rough because a strong wind was blowing. When they had rowed about three or four miles, they saw Jesus walking on the sea and drawing near to the boat. They were frightened, but he said to them, "It is I; do not be afraid." Then they were glad to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat was at the land to which they were going.*

It was this magnificent setting which St. John used to enshrine within it the narrative of the second and most famous of all the disputes Our Lord had with the Jews: the Promise of His own Body and Blood in the Blessed Sacrament.

*The next day the people who remained on the other side of the sea saw that there had been only one boat there, and that Jesus had not entered the boat with his disciples, but that his disciples had gone away by themselves. However, boats from Tiberias came near the place where they ate the bread after the Lord had given thanks. So when the people saw that Jesus was not there nor his disciples, they got into those boats and crossed over to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, "Rabbi, when did you come here?"*

*Jesus answered them, "I tell you most solemnly, you seek me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. Do not labour for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you; for on him God the Father has set his seal."*

"... not because you saw signs ..."

It is almost unbelievable that the observation made here by the Son of God is so accurate. A bit further on in this narrative the Jews will unwittingly underline the veracity of this divine observation. They had been fed by a stupendous miracle the day before, but the uniqueness of it had escaped them entirely.

The next words of Our Blessed Lord, "...eternal life..." and "...for on Him God the Father has set His seal" are a clear indication what Our Lord expected the Jews should have learned and made their own from the previous discussion He had conducted with them. For in that discussion the profound distinction between *natural life* here on earth, and *eternal life* after death had been unfolded before them in all its clarity. And the second Truth mentioned here, *that God had set His seal on the Son of Man* should have been accepted by them from their faith in the authority of Moses and the prophets. That they did not accept it means that, after the first confrontation, they should have gone to the trouble to seriously investigate the quality of their belief in Moses and the prophets.

So, after the altogether unexpected miracle of the Son of Man feeding their *natural life* here on earth, they should have been completely open for the acceptance of His other power: to feed their *eternal life* already here on earth with food that endures.

*Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?"*

This is a straight-out request, a sure basis for further information, which elicits from the Son of God a straight-out reply:-

*Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."*

This is the same answer that He had given them before. Would it sink in this time?

*So they said to him, "Then what sign will you give, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness as it is written, 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"*

No, it had not sunk in!

The day before they had seen a "*work performed by Him*" which was on a par with what had happened to "*our fathers...*": they had eaten bread in abundance in a lonely place, bread that came from ... where? And in complete disregard of this most spectacular miracle His listeners have the audacity to ask for a *sign*, a sign that, on their own suggestion, they would consider to be equal to the feeding with manna in the desert in the time of Moses ... Is it truly a fact of history that it did not occur to anyone at the time that the sign they asked for had already been given by the mercy of God?

No wonder Our Lord had to start again from scratch.... He did take them up on their own suggestion:-

*Jesus then said to them, "I tell you most solemnly, It was not Moses who gave you bread from heaven; it is my Father who gives you the bread from heaven, the true bread. For the bread of God is that which comes down from heaven, and gives life to the world."*

Once again, the everlasting 'trinity' of the Jewish revelation:

1. The true interpretation of Moses.
2. Natural life as a basis and a mere prefiguration within that Jewish revelation of:
3. Eternal Life.

After the acceptance of the true interpretation of Moses, of transient life on earth as a preparation for the eternal life with God, the connection between *feeding natural life*:, (manna in the desert, multiplication of five loaves in a lonely place) as a prefiguration in the Jewish tradition of *feeding supernatural life* is not hard to make. If natural life comes from God the Creator, the *feeding* of that life must also be accepted as being part of God's

Providence. And since eternal life with God is to be accepted within the tradition of the chosen people of God, then the *feeding* of that Life is even more part of God's Providence. And here was One claiming to be from God, claiming to be the true interpretation of Moses as proof of which He had performed a stupendous miracle of *feeding natural life*. It was on that basis, on a criterion they had stipulated themselves, that He now claimed the right to be very carefully listened to.

*They said to him, "Lord, give us this bread always". Jesus said to them:-*

*"I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. All that the Father gives me will come to me; and him who comes to me I will not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will, but the will of him who sent me. And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my Father, that every one who sees the Son and believes in him should have eternal life; and I will raise him up on the last day".*

It is to be noted again that Our Lord has not veered off by even one tittle, one little stroke from Moses and the Prophets, but is building on the solid foundation known to every Jew in the land, the bedrock on which the tradition of the Jewish phenomenon had been carefully built and handed over. A tradition whose spirituality had been magnificently brought out in all its glory by the Maccabees in their war against the Seleucid kings, notably Antiochus Epiphanes and Nicanor less than a mere 150 years earlier.

In other words He is repeating over and over again what His listeners could have known from a careful reading of the Scriptures, that every detail foretold in the past had come to life in their very presence here and now. It is the accumulation of all those details that points inexorably to Him as to their only fulfilment. And to this had to be added the latest testimony equally foretold by Scripture: the testimony of John the Baptist. It was becoming more and more obvious that the wilful closing of the eyes of the Jewish leaders against the overabundance of Light all around them, that eventually turned the Jewish nation against Him in its final rejection of Him before Pilate, bringing with it the subsequent destruction of their capital city and its temple.

*The Jews then complained amongst each other about him, because he had said, "I am the bread that came down from heaven". They said, "Surely, this is Jesus, the son of Joseph. We know his father and mother. How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"*

Jesus answered them,

*“Stop complaining among yourselves. No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘And they shall all be taught by God.’ Every one who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me. Not that any one has seen the Father except him who is from God; he has seen the Father. I tell you most solemnly, everyone who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down from heaven, that a man may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever; and the bread that I shall give is my flesh for the life of the world.”*

So there it was. If everything Moses and the Prophets had said and written down was about Him, what else was there to do but to accept Him and His message? As St. Peter will shortly put it so succinctly: *“Lord, who shall we go to?”*. What is the alternative? If He is within Scripture for every Jew to check out, the alternative must lie outside Scripture. As He Himself would say to His two disciples on the road to Emmaus: *“Was it not written ...”* Was it really so impossible to know?

**“Man ate of the bread of the angels; he sent them food in abundance. He caused the east wind to blow in the heavens, and by his power he led out the south wind; he rained flesh upon them like dust, winged birds like the sand of the seas; he let them fall in the midst of their camp, all around their tents. And they ate and were well filled, for he gave them what they craved. But before they had sated their craving, while the food was still in their mouths, the anger of God rose against them and he slew the strongest of them, and laid low the picked men of Israel. In spite of all this they still sinned; despite his wonders they did not believe. So he made their days vanish like a breath, and their years in terror. When he slew them, they sought for him; they repented and sought God earnestly. They remembered that God was their rock, the Most High God their redeemer. But they flattered him with their mouths; they lied to him with their tongues. Their heart was not steadfast toward him; they were not true to his covenant. Yet he, being compassionate, forgave their iniquity, and did not destroy them; he restrained his anger often, and did not stir up all his wrath. He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and comes not again. How often they rebelled against him in the wilderness and grieved him in the desert! They tested him again and again, and provoked the Holy One of Israel. They did not keep in mind his power, or the day when he redeemed them from the foe; when he wrought his signs in Egypt, and his miracles in the fields of Zoan”. [Ps 78:25-43].**

Is the present generation, this time finding itself in the presence of the Holy One of Israel going to repeat the sins of their fathers now that the True Bread of Angels has come down from Heaven and is being offered to them? Does nothing of the past penetrate their present conscience? Yet Scripture has not been silent in other places on the continuation of these facts and these thoughts.

**They asked for food, and he brought quails, and gave them bread from heaven in abundance. He opened the rock, and water gushed forth; it flowed through the desert like a river.**

[Ps. 105:40-41].

**It was I who knew you in the wilderness, in the land of drought; ... but once satisfied their hearts grew proud; and so they came to forget me.**

[Hos. 13:5-6].

**For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his flock. O that today you would listen to his voice! Harden not your hearts, as at Meribah, as on the day at Massah in the wilderness, when your fathers tested me, and put me to the test, though they had seen my works. For forty years I loathed that generation and said, "They are a people who err in heart, and they do not regard my ways." Therefore I swore in my anger that they should not enter my rest.**

[Ps. 95:7-11].

*“O that today you would listen to His voice....”*

That “today” is now! The Jews themselves had brought up the fact of “the manna in the desert”, and Our Lord took up the cue and elaborated on it. Scripture is full of references to this miraculous food and the circumstances surrounding it.

**And the Lord said: “Because this people draw near me only in words and honour me only with lip-service, while their hearts are far from me, and their fear of me is a religion of human origin, therefore, behold, I will again do marvellous things with this people, wonderful and marvellous; and the wisdom of their wise men shall come to nought, and the discernment of their intelligent men shall be shrouded”. Woe to those who hide from Yahweh to conceal their plans, who scheme in the dark, and who say, “Who sees us? Who knows us?”**

[Is. 29:13-15].

It had all been foretold, faithlessness and Faithfulness, sins and Compassion, self-will and Forbearance. Marvellous deeds wrought by God in the presence of hardness of heart, of human fickleness and even betrayal. What was it going to be here?

*The Jews then started arguing among themselves, saying, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?”*

*Arguing ...*

Resistance, opposition, unbelief ... No, it was not going to be any different from what had been done in the past.

*amongst themselves ...*

Who could shed light on this but the Holy One of Israel in their midst, the Son of God right in front of them? Why ignore Him and turn to others just as blind as they were themselves?

*So Jesus said to them,*

**“I tell you most solemnly, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you; he who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood lives in me, and I live in him. As the living Father sent me, and I draw life from the Father, so he who eats me will draw life from me. This is the bread which came down from heaven, not like the bread our ancestors ate. They are dead; he who eats this bread will live for ever.”**

And over the last two thousand years billions of Catholics have believed these words and have worthily eaten the Flesh of the Son of God in Holy Communion and have drawn Life from Him.

*He taught this doctrine in the synagogue at Capernaum.  
Many of his disciples, when they heard it, said, “This is intolerable language;  
how could anyone accept it?”*

*Jesus was aware that his followers were complaining about it and said,*

*“Does this upset you?*

*Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?*

*It is the spirit that gives life, the flesh has nothing to offer.*

*The words I have spoken to you are spirit and life.*

*But there are some of you that do not believe.”*

*For Jesus knew from the outset those who did not believe, and who it was that would betray him. And he said, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted him by the Father.”*

*After this many of his disciples left him and stopped going with him.*

*Jesus said to the twelve, “Do you also wish to go away?”*

*Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words  
of eternal life. We believe, and now we know, that you are the Holy One of God.”*

*Jesus answered them, “Did I not choose you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil”.*

*He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he was the man, one of the twelve,  
who was to betray him.*

Yes, there it was indeed ... The promise of the stupendous gift of this extraordinary Man was going to be His signature under His own death warrant. As the first line in the next chapter tells us:

*“After this Jesus stayed in Galilee; he could not go about in Judea, because the Jews were out to kill him”. [John 7:1].*

As we all know, they would eventually succeed, but not before the Son of Man had given to His Church and to the world *“His Flesh to eat and His Blood to drink”*.

### III. The Origin of the Christ.

(St. John: Chapter 7).

The foregoing has made us aware of Our Lord's approach to any confrontation with the Jews of His days. We admire His utter patience and charity. He never once veered away from the golden rule: either to argue from their own ground and not from someone else's point of view, or else not to argue at all. The Scriptures were fully open to the Jews and were often brought up by His adversaries themselves. Although Our Lord knew that the Jewish leadership did not believe in Moses and had no faith in the Prophets, arguing from these precious Books was *not* "arguing from someone else's point of view", but from their own unbelief. And since all Scripture was about Him, He did what once His great Apostle of the Gentiles, St. Paul, would write down:

*"All Scripture is inspired by God and can profitably be used for teaching, for refuting error, for guiding people's lives and teaching them to be holy".*

(2 Tim. 3:16):

He taught His listeners about Himself. And we marvel at the way He was never cornered, how He was never on the defensive, but also how He never attacked in those fiery confrontations. He knew what those who were listening to Him should know and could have known. They ought to have known from their own history, so meticulously written down, how their forefathers had been in the habit of murdering the prophets sent to them by God, and that this long history of antagonism should have cautioned His hearers against indulging in any hasty judgement, even rejection, in case they were in the presence of *The Prophet*, their long-awaited Messiah. His whole approach to His generation was one of common sense in preparation for the reception of a free and inestimable gift: the gift of Faith, Faith in Him, Faith in His Father, faith in their own destiny... And we know of only one man in the inner circle of the Jewish leadership, Nicodemus, who was open to this common sense approach as a condition for acceptance.

Common sense ... We saw how it failed to materialise in the previous dispute. Will it be any better in the next one? [Ch. 7].

*After this Jesus stayed in Galilee; he could not go about in Judea, because the Jews were out to kill him. As the Jewish feast of Tabernacles drew near his brothers said to him, "Leave here and go to Judea, that your disciples may see the works you are doing. For no man works in secret if he seeks to be known openly. If you do these things, show yourself to the world." For even his brothers did not believe in him. Jesus said to them,*

*"My time has not yet come, but your time is always here. The world cannot hate you, but it hates me because I testify of it that its works are evil. Go to the feast yourselves; I am not going up to this feast, for my time has not yet fully come".*

*Having said that, he remained in Galilee. But after his brothers had gone up to the feast, then he also went up, not publicly but quite privately without drawing attention to himself.*

This short exchange between Our Lord and His kinsmen is of some importance as it forces us to find an explanation of why He told them that He was not going up to Jerusalem to the approaching festival while knowing fully well that He would be going. Under normal circumstances, most people would see this as a contradiction of the truth and so condemn it out of hand as a lie. But here we are not ‘under normal circumstances’ as the One who made the statement would one day declare of Himself: “I am the....Truth” [John 14:6], and so, being *the* Truth, He could never utter a lie nor could He ever be accused of having told one. The explanation lies in the profound difference between what is normally referred to as a *contradiction* and a *paradox*. A *paradox* is not a *contradiction* but something that has only got the *appearance* of a contradiction, and so is merely an apparent contradiction hiding in the deep recesses of its cloak a profound truth.

What Our Blessed Lord really was conveying to His brothers was the message: “I am not going to Jerusalem and to the festival the way you are going, nor the way you want Me to go”. “I am not going to Jerusalem as a sideshow, as a kind of super-magician, in order to draw the eyes of the world to Myself”. What He *did say* was only the part of the sentence underlined above. The remainder of the message was finished privately in His mind, the part that held the profound truth of the paradox. The part He said in His mind, that is, the not-underlined part of the complete sentence above, is aptly called a *mental reservation*. The truth is there, but reserved in His mind for very special reasons.

The most important reason for the use of a mental reservation is that the full truth would not be grasped, would be injured and impaired, and in its damaged way would be spread around to great injury of other recipients of such a mangled and devastated ‘truth’. It was obvious that the ‘brothers’ would not understand His mental reservation if it had been made known to them. The very fact that they had urged Him to go to Jerusalem as a kind of ‘super-magician’, as a kind of ‘side-show’, reveals that these thoughts were uppermost in their minds, blotting out all light, and blocking all reason, for the acceptance of a rejection of their approach. Basking in His glory they would tell anyone who cared to listen to them that the reason for His coming to Jerusalem was for something spectacular. As the Gospel narrative already soberly tells us, the people were already on the look-out for Him in plenty of expectation. The false rumours of His ‘brothers’ would drive this expectation to fever pitch.

Our Lord gave us another example of a *mental reservation*, this time at the height of His sacred passion before Pilate. On the governor’s question “*Are you the king of the Jews?*”, Jesus replied: “*It is you who say it*”, [Mt. 27:11]; “*These are your own words*”, [Mk. 15:2]; “*It is you who say it*”, [Lk. 23:3]; “*Do you ask this of your own accord, or have others spoken to you about me?*”, [Jo. 18:34]. In other words, Jesus made it clear “I am not a king as those outside there are putting it to you”. After that He waited to give Pilate a chance to show to Him that he knew the difference. Pilate, “*realising that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed Jesus over*” [Lk. 15:10], replied to Jesus’ question: “*Am I a Jew?* In other words he asked Jesus: “*Do you associate me with that rabble out there?*”. “*You must realise that I do not believe that you are a king as they are making you out. I would have heard of that!*” That was enough for Jesus to know that the full truth of His Kingship would not be garbled by Pilate, and He said: “*Yes, I am a King*”.

To highlight the sense of His first mental reservation dealt with above, the story in chapter 8 of St. John's Gospel then goes on:

*The Jews were looking for him at the feast, and saying, "Where is he?" And there was much whispering about him among the people. While some said, "He is a good man", others said, "No, he is leading the people astray".*

They looked for Him as if He was the main attraction to provide a diversion on their 'holiday' around which the crowds would gather in anticipation of some spectacular entertainment. No wonder Our Blessed Lord refused to go up to Jerusalem to fuel this type of expectation, just as before Pilate He refused to fuel the false kingship of which He was being accused by the chief priests. Only in St. John's Gospel was the true identity of His Kingship revealed after Pilate had dissociated himself from the caricature of that Kingship as held up by the Jewish priesthood inflamed by jealousy.

*"No, he is leading the people astray...."*

It is obvious that this was a hasty and baseless accusation without any foundation in fact. It shows how even the ordinary Jews were frozen in the wasteland of their apostasy from Moses and the Prophets in their stagnation that all that was needed to belong to the chosen race was to be numbered among the children of Abraham. When Christ appealed to their true identity and destiny and to Abraham's spiritual fatherhood: the privilege to give the Messiah to the world, they were caught in their erroneous conviction that he was leading the people astray, away from their familiar surroundings, their comforting make-believe.

*Yet for fear of the Jews no one spoke openly of him. About the middle of the feast Jesus went up into the temple and taught. The Jews were astonished about this saying, "How is it that this man has learning, when he has never studied?" So Jesus answered them, "My teaching is not my own, but comes from the one who sent me. And if anyone is prepared to do his will, he shall know whether my teaching is from God or if I am speaking on my own authority. He who speaks on his own authority seeks his own glory; but he who seeks the glory of him who sent him is true, and in him there is no falsehood. Did not Moses give you the law? Yet none of you keeps the law. Why do you seek to kill me?"*

Here Our Lord makes clear the difference between going up to a Jewish feast to do the Father's Will and to go up to do one's own will as contained in the accusation levelled at them in these words: "*Yet none of you keeps the law*". Moses gave you the law on God's authority, not his own. And you would honour the messenger and so the One who sent him, if you had listened to him and had kept the law. So, by not listening to Moses and by not keeping the law, you are dishonouring God and have turned a festival in His honour into a holiday to please yourselves. "*Why do you seek to kill Me?*" Killing Me is not in the law, but is found in the widespread practice of your fathers who killed the Prophets sent to you by God.

*The people answered, "You are possessed! Who is seeking to kill you?" Jesus answered them, "I did one deed, and you all marvel at it. Moses gave you circumcision (not that it is from Moses, but from the fathers), and you circumcise a man upon the sabbath. If on the sabbath a man receives circumcision, so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me because on the sabbath I made a man's whole body well? Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment".*

The cure Jesus refers to here is the one described in chapter 5 of St. John's Gospel, the cure of the paralytic man on His previous visit to Jerusalem, a cure therefore still fresh in His hearers' memory and not beyond their comprehension. How quickly they forget ...

This little episode sheds an unexpected light on how entrenched the ordinary Jews were in their hollowed-out conviction that, in their apostasy from Moses and the Prophets, they were pleasing to God as His people. And in this entrenched position they were much rather prepared to follow 'the authorities' who would reinforce their pitiful existence than to accept a Messiah who was sent by God to redeem them from such leaders. The next few lines in St. John's Gospel make this abundantly clear:-

*Meanwhile some of the people in Jerusalem were saying, "Is not this the man whom they seek to kill? And here he is, speaking openly, and they say nothing to him! Can it be that the authorities really know that this is the Christ? Yet we know where this man comes from; and when the Christ appears, no one will know where he comes from".*

And with a sigh of relief we can hear them sink back on the cushions of their make-believe; their hope that 'the authorities' would be proven right and that this upsetting Man would turn out to be an impostor.

Here we have come across the most accurate description of the identical state in which so many of our present-day 'catholics' find themselves ensnared. They cherish the same fervent hope that their Modernist leaders are correct in leaving them comfortably in their make-believe that the caricature of the 'catholic church' they hold up is the new, post-conciliar 'church' and that the true Catholic Church has died and was buried with the Second Vatican Council. This latest caricature is identical with the world and all its unbelief and vices, with all its pursuit of everything from which Our Lord and Saviour came to redeem us. What follows is Our Blessed Lord's answer to these modernist 'catholics' as it was to the unbelieving Jews 2000 years ago ...

This comparison between our Modernist 'catholics' and the unbelieving Jews of Our Lord's time will grow in intensity during the remainder of St. John's narrative of the Jewish disputes with the Son of God, the Messiah, until it culminates in His sacred Passion and Death of which the destruction of the Catholic Church will be the exact replay.

*So Jesus proclaimed, as he taught in the temple, "You know me, and you know where I come from? But I have not come of my own accord; he who sent me is true, and him you do not know. I know him, for I come from him, and he sent me". So they sought to arrest him; but no one laid hands on him, because his hour had not yet come. Yet many of the people believed in him; they said, "When the Christ appears, will he do more signs than this man has done?"*

*"So they sought to arrest him ..."*

Nothing He says penetrates. Arrest Him. Get rid of Him. Make Him disappear. How different is all this from our own situation? "Get rid of the Pope. Let him abdicate! Give us a pope of our own image and likeness, one who will give us a 'church' of our own making, teaching the doctrines of our own making. A 'church' who will leave us at peace with the world ..."

*Hearing that rumours like this about him were spreading among the people, the chief priests and Pharisees sent officers to arrest him. Jesus then said,*

*“I shall be with you a little while longer and then I go to him who sent me.*

*You will seek me and you will not find me; where I am you cannot come”.*

*The Jews then said to one another, “Where is he going that we shall not find him? Does he intend to go to the Dispersion among the Greeks and teach the Greeks? What does he mean when he says ‘You will look for me and you will not find me’, and ‘Where I am you cannot come’?”*

What a pooling of ignorance! Asking one another what He means ...! Just as the Modernists of our own days exclusively ask one another what the Catholic Church means with Her teaching instead of consulting Tradition. And if they do find a ‘suitable’ answer amongst themselves, one that fits in with their New Age ‘church’, they accept that teaching in preference to that of the Catholic Church.

As for the Jewish ignorance of ‘not knowing where He was going’, this clearly shows up that their professed ‘knowledge of where He came from’ was an untruth. Not knowing Who it was to whom He was returning utterly precludes knowing where He came from ...

*On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood there and proclaimed,*

*“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.*

*As Scripture says, he who believes in me, ‘out of his heart shall flow fountains of living water’.”*

*This he said about the Spirit, which those who believed in him were to receive; for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.*

From the effect this teaching had on some of His hearers:-

*When they heard these words, some of the people said, “This is really the prophet.”*

*Others said, “This is the Christ”,*

we must confidently conclude that Our Lord spoke these words as an antidote for their ignorance. For they knew enough to know that “the Christ” and “the Prophet” was sent by God and so would return to God. The fact that they did not know where He was actually born did not excuse them from knowing where He was *not* born: He was *not* born in Nazareth, a Galilean town. He returned there (from Egypt) at about seven years of age. Yet some wilfully persisted in this erroneous assumption of His place of birth:-

*But some said, “Is the Christ to come from Galilee?*

*Has not the Scripture said that the Christ is descended from David, and comes from Bethlehem, the village where David was?”*

*So there was a division among the people over him.*

That Christ was actually born in Bethlehem, the city of David, was heralded by the shepherds, and some Jewish chronicler could have made a note of that occurrence for future reference. Also, when the Magi arrived in Jerusalem from the East and enquired where the newborn King of the Jews was to be found, the sacred Evangelist clearly stated that “*the whole of Jerusalem*” was perturbed with king Herod. The chief priests and scribes were consulted and their verdict was that the Christ was to be born in Bethlehem in Judea.

Thus “*the whole of Jerusalem*” knew that Herod not only sent the Wise Men to Bethlehem to enquire about the newborn King, but also his soldiers for the random massacre of all the male children two years and under. This means that it was premeditated ill-will that these momentous happenings were suppressed from being recorded in the official annals of the Jewish history, although the event was predicted in the Old Testament: The Lord says this: “A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping. Rachel is weeping for her children; she refuses to be comforted for her children, because they are not” (Jer. 31:15). (See Mt. 2: 1-18).

*Some of them wanted to arrest him, but no one laid hands on him.*

*The officers then went back to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, “Why did you not bring him?”*

*The officers answered, “No man ever spoke like this man!”*

*The Pharisees answered them, “Are you led astray also?*

*Have any of the authorities or of the Pharisees believed in him?*

*But this crowd, who do not know the law, are accursed”.*

*Nicodemus, who had gone to him before, and who was one of them, said to them,*

*“Does our law judge a man without first giving him a hearing and learning what he does?”*

*They replied, “Are you from Galilee too? Search and you will see that no prophet is to rise from Galilee.”*

We’ll leave that as it is, saying with Our Lord: “*These are your own words*”. But the wilful suppression of what was common knowledge in “*the whole of Jerusalem*” some thirty years before is no foundation for what is being officially asserted here: that this Christ could not be *the* Christ because He appeared to come from Galilee.

*They went each to his own house.*

## **Summary of St John’s Chapter 7**

*“He came amongst His own, but His own did not accept Him ...” (Jo. 1: 11).*

Here, in chapter seven, we see the truth of these words painted before us in all their ugly starkness. We see how at every twist and turn of these darkened minds another objection is being grasped to prevent acceptance of what had perturbed “*the whole of Jerusalem*” not all that long ago: the birth of the newborn King of the Jews. He had done things of which the more simple and straightforward people had said: “*When the Christ comes, will he give more signs than this man?*”. He had said things of which even the members of the temple guard had been forced to confess: “*No man ever spoke like him*”. He had appeared so innocent and correct that a believer amongst the Jewish hierarchy, Nicodemus, had spontaneously thrown at them: “*Surely, the law does not allow us to pass judgement on a man without giving him a hearing and discovering what he is about?*”. It was all to no avail. The whole matter could only be resolved in those dark minds by one thing: He had to be done away with as quickly as possible.

#### **IV. Faith in Christ: A Matter of Testimony and Glory.**

(St. John: Chapter 8).

Faith in Christ does not come from the world. It is not given by the human senses. It is not a gift from any created source. It cannot be turned on and off at will. *“It is a Light that no darkness can ever overpower”* (Jo. 1: 5). Before it demons and human accusers fall silent. Thus, before the height of Christ’s full and final revelation of His Divine origin in this chapter eight of St. John’s Gospel, this accomplished story teller introduces an incident known as ‘the case of the adulterous woman’.

*But Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.*

*Early in the morning he came again to the temple; all the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst they said to him, “Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. Now in the law Moses commanded us to stone such. What do you say about her?” This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, “Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her”. And once more he bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. But when they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the eldest, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. Jesus looked up and said to her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?” She said, “No one, Lord”. And Jesus said, “Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again” (Jo. 8: 1: 11).*

*“From His fulness we have all received”* wrote St. John in his first chapter, *“grace upon grace”* (Jo. 1: 16). And here is one of those myriads of incidents in which this divine revelation had been made manifest in a potentially hopeless situation.

Since the main sin of the accusers was one of character assassination, we may confidently assume that Our Blessed Lord extended the dispensing of His fulness of grace to the accusers of the woman by writing on the ground the names of the accusers and the women with whom they had had an adulterous affair. To show that, although their sins were secret and went apparently unpunished, they were still known to God.... Meaning that, if in their brazen audacity they would have carried out their implied threat of stoning the woman, Our Lord could have called them aside to prove that they too ought to be stoned. So, when they saw the danger in which they found themselves, they made the wise decision of leaving the scene of this kangaroo court.

“Known only to God!” How did this man from Galilee know what had happened in secret in Jerusalem in so many dark hours of so many equally dark nights? The logical answer was of course that He was what He claimed to be: *the* Prophet. Was there any more to it? Old Testament prophets had shown that they knew about secret sins through a

revelation by Almighty God. It had proved to be dangerous knowledge, for they had been killed for possessing it, while the sinners had escaped being stoned. The inference of these facts of Jewish history was clear ...

When Jesus spoke to the people again he said:-

*“I am the light of the world; he who follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life”.*

Here was their answer: a Light had come into the world that no darkness of sin could dim, let alone extinguish. If they thought that a life of sin was to be pursued for personal happiness and satisfaction, then they were grievously mistaken, for here they were offered its antidote.

What could they say to this in rebuttal? They could try to reject the claim on the grounds that it was not made by someone else on His behalf, but was made by Himself on His own behalf.

*The Pharisees then said to him in reply, “You are bearing witness to yourself; your testimony is not true”. Jesus answered,*

*“Even if I do bear witness to myself, my testimony is true, for I know where I have come from and where I am going, but you do not know where I come from or where I am going. You judge according to the flesh, I judge no one. Yet even if I do judge, my judgment is true, for I am not alone, as the one who sent me is with me. In your law it is written that the testimony of two witnesses is valid; I may be testifying on my own behalf but the Father who sent me is my witness too”.*

No matter how far the Jews in the past may have gone astray, it was still common knowledge that their Prophets were sent by God and spoke on His behalf. Because the Jews knew that God stood by His prophets and sealed their message, they wanted to kill those He had sent to them. So Our Lord had said nothing they did not know already. In desperation they then fell back on the most lame-duck question of them all:-

*They asked him, “Where is your Father?” Jesus answered,*

*“You know neither me nor my Father; if you knew me, you would know my Father also”.*

From time immemorial Jewish genealogies and family trees had been meticulously kept. If a son was known to anyone, his father would be known also. No one had ever asked a prophet: “Where is your father?” And truly, here was Someone of Whom they knew what Nicodemus had said on their behalf: *“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who comes from God; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him”.*

*These words he spoke in the treasury, as he taught in the temple; but no one arrested him, because his hour had not yet come.*

St. John, with his deep understanding of Our Lord's mind, repeats this sentence "*for His hour had not yet come*" several times in his Gospel. He is driving home a great truth here. Not only does he reveal that the creating God is completely in charge of His own creation, but he also stresses that He is in total charge of every detail of that creation without the least infringement of personal liberty. We can only understand this if we admit that at the moment of creation in time God had before Him the almost infinite possibilities of human histories, the almost infinite varieties in which His intelligent creatures could act. And that, in creating, He put the stamp of His choice and of His approval on **this** creation, on **this** history, **our** history, guiding the inexhaustible possibilities in which His creatures would act in this history to **His** final end, and **their** final destination. For those of good will, this is a consoling truth, but – as will come out next – for those of ill-will and determined unbelief, **His** end and **their** destination are equally inevitable ...

*Again he said to them,  
"I go away, and you will seek me, and you will die in your sin;  
where I am going, you cannot come".*

Three things are being said here by Our Lord:-

- "*I go away....*" He knew the evil of their sin and guilt and the final outcome, the final destination, to which it would inevitably lead Him. But He would also say: "*I am the Good Shepherd. I lay down My life for My sheep. No one will take it from Me*". And this twist, from all eternity ordained by the creating Father, was totally incomprehensible to His adversaries.
- "*and you will seek me*". "I shall be with you a little longer, and then I go to him who sent me; you will seek me and you will not find me; where I am you cannot come".

This word is more difficult to understand. If they killed Him why would they go looking for Him? And when? One thing is made clear by these words: they would not be looking for Him with a sincere heart, because then they would find Him and be with Him where He would be going. Maybe the explanation is found in the next part of Our Blessed Lord's warning:-

- "*you will die in your sin*". Their final destiny ... The inevitable destination of their part in God's choice of **this** creation, **this** history ...

Their looking for Him would not be sincere but would be instigated by their determination to prevent Faith in Him to grow in those who would seek Him with a sincere heart. Before the futility of looking for Him in their unbelief, death would have overtaken them. Dying in their sin would for ever make it impossible to come where He is going. It is a warning for all time....

*Then the Jews said to one another, "Will he kill himself, since he says, 'Where I am going, you cannot come'?"*

The hopelessness of their case ...

Once again the pooling of their collective ignorance, asking one another what *He* could mean. The common practice of our present-day Modernists.

*He said to them,  
“You are from below,  
I am from above;  
you are of this world,  
I am not of this world.  
I told you already that you will die in your sins.  
Yes, you will die in your sins  
unless you believe that I am he”.*

What is from below cannot raise itself to the One Who is from above. What is of this world cannot by its own power come to the level of Him Who is not of this world. They who do not believe that Christ is the Messiah sent by God cannot change the course of the history on which the creating God has put His stamp. Cannot, by their own power, change the destiny of unbelief. Are powerless to convert everlasting defeat into everlasting victory ...

*So they said to him, “Who are you?”*

How insincere and highly charged this seemingly simple question is here must come out, if we compare it with what was asked of Christ, when He stood bound and bleeding before the Jewish Sanhedrin on the night of His Passion not all that long after this dispute:-

*“If you are the Christ, tell us”.*  
*But he said to them,  
“If I tell you, you will not believe;  
and if I ask you, you will not answer.  
But from now on the Son of Man shall be seated at the right hand of the power of God”.*  
*And they all said, “Are you the Son of God, then?”*  
*And he said to them, “You say that I am”.*  
*And they said, “What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips”.*

(Lk. 22: 67-71).

St. Matthew added to this:-

*“You have just heard the blasphemy.  
What is your opinion?”.*  
*They answered: “He deserves to die”.*

(Mt. 26: 66).

“He deserves to die....” To this must be added the following:-

*“We have a law” the Jews replied, “and according to that law he ought to die,  
because He claims to be the Son of God”.*

(Jo. 19: 7).

There is no doubt, then, about the reason why the Jews wanted Christ to die and about the malice that lay behind their seemingly simple question in St. John's Gospel, chapter 8: "*Who are you?*"

*Jesus said to them,  
"What I have told you: the Beginning".*

Here we must take the sharpest possible issue with the Jerusalem bible. Both the original Greek in which St. John's Gospel was first written and St. Jerome's Latin translation, the Vulgate, of the whole bible in which this Greek text too has been rendered in Latin, have the sentence in the sense that is used above. Of all the English translations only the Douay version is faithful to the original meaning. All the other ones nullify the omnipotent impact of Christ's words here, where He declares His equality with God, by translating His assertion: "*I am the Beginning*" with the emasculated rendering: "What I told you from the outset".

*"What I have told you: the Beginning".*

The Jerusalem bible has a footnote attached to their translation: "*What I have told you from the outset*", in which the authors declare: "The Vulgate translation '(I am) the Beginning who speak to you' is grammatically impossible". But that is *not* the only translation. Let us see how impossible the correct translation is: "*What I have told you, the Beginning*"!

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega"*, says the Lord God, "*who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty*" (Rev. 1: 8).

This is Jesus speaking here just as at one time He was speaking to the Jews. "I am the Alpha, the beginning, and the Omega, the end, of all there is. Only God can be both at once in His eternity, even if His Son appears as the Son of Man in time.

And he said to me, "*It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end*"....."*He who conquers shall have this heritage, and I will be his God and he shall be my son*" (Rev. 21: 6, 7).

*"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end"*.  
(Rev. 22: 13).

These are the only three places in the whole of the bible where the words *Alpha* and *Omega* occur. The speaker is Christ and the meaning of His words is crystal clear:-

"....says the Lord **God**...." "*...the Almighty*".  
"....and **I** will be his **God**...."

So, when Jesus said to the Jews in answer to their question “*Who are you?*” that He was “*the Beginning*”, He declared His Godhead. He explained what He meant when He said “*I am from above*”. “*I am not of this world*”, and what the final consequences will be *when you die in your sin*. The episode before the Sanhedrin as retold above testifies to the fact that they knew His claim. But they were never interested in His answer, neither here nor at His trial. They only wanted to condemn Him from His own words.

After testifying to Our Lord’s declaration before the Jews that He is *the beginning*, St. John then continues his description of the acrimony to which the Jewish opposition to Our Lord is rapidly degenerating as follows:

*“I have much to say about you and much to judge; but he who sent me is true, and I declare to the world what I have heard from him”*.

*“...He who sent Me...and ...from Him...”*

These words clearly indicate that Christ is speaking here of another Person different from Himself, but Who, like He Himself, “*is the Beginning*”, “*is from above*”, “*is not of this world*”, and Who, like He Himself, is the final Judge, the final Authority “*when you die in your sin*”. Here then we have the real distinction between two divine Persons, the Father and the Son, united in the same Godhead. And I repeat here that even now, at this eleventh hour, they could have known and believed what Christ was saying, going by the words Nicodemus had said on their behalf:-

*“Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher who comes from God; for no one could perform the signs that you do unless God were with him”*.

So, if this teacher says to them that He is *the Beginning*, that He is *from above*, that He is *not of this world*, that, in fact, He is God, they should have accepted that on the works He was doing ...

Thus, in his profound knowledge that the unbelieving Jews did not accept Our Lord’s revelation of the Blessed Trinity, St. John then says:-

*They did not understand that he spoke to them of the Father.*

But they *did* understand that He spoke to them about their God. Hence their fury when Christ insisted that they should accept His equality with God, and that they should accept *that He had much to judge about them* ... For in chapter 5 of his Gospel (as we have seen), St. John had already testified to their true understanding of what Our Lord was saying:-

*This was why the Jews sought all the more to kill him, because He not only broke the sabbath but also called God his Father, making himself equal to God.*

So they knew what He was saying.

So Jesus said,

*“When you have lifted up the Son of Man, then you will know that I am he, and that I do nothing on my own authority but speak thus as the Father taught me. And he who sent me is with me; he has not left me alone, for I always do what is pleasing to him.”*

*“When you have lifted up the Son of Man then you will know that I am He ...”*

When did the Jews finally come to the realisation that Christ is *He*? That He is their long-awaited Messiah, the focal point of all the Old Testament prophecies? When, *lifted up* on His cross, He intoned for them Psalm 22. This is of such great importance, that we will print out Psalm 22 here for our readers. For Jewish listeners one only had to intone a Psalm in order to fully bring to mind its contents:-

*My God, my God, why have You deserted me?  
Why are You so far from helping me, so far from the words of my groaning?  
O my God, I cry by day, but You do not answer; and by night, but find no rest.  
Yet You are the Holy One, enthroned on the praises of Israel.  
In You our fathers put their trust;  
they trusted, and You rescued them.  
they called to You for help, and they were saved;  
in You they trusted, and were not disappointed.*

*But I am a worm, and no man; scorned by men, and despised by the people.  
All who see me mock me; they jeer at me, they wag their heads;  
“He committed his cause to the Lord; let him deliver him,  
let Yahweh rescue him, if he is his friend.”*

*Yet You are the one who took me from the womb;  
It was You who entrusted me to my mother's breasts.  
placed on your lap from my birth,  
and since my mother bore me You have been my God.  
Be not far from me, for trouble is near  
and I have no one to help me.*

*A herd of bulls surround me,  
strong bulls of Bashan close in on me;  
their mouths are wide open to me,  
like ravening and roaring lions.  
I am poured out like water,  
and all my bones are disjointed;  
my heart is like wax, melting in my breast;  
my strength is dried up like a potsherd,  
my tongue cleaves to my jaws;*

*You have laid me in the dust of death.  
A pack of dogs surround me;  
a company of evildoers encircles me;  
they have pierced my hands and feet,  
I can count all my bones,  
when they stare and gloat over me.  
They divide my garments among them,  
and they cast lots for my tunic.*

*But You, O Lord, be not far off!  
You, my help, hasten to my aid!  
Rescue my soul from the sword,  
my life from the power of the dog!  
Save me from the mouth of the lion,  
my afflicted soul from the horns of the wild bulls!*

*Then shall I proclaim your name to my brothers;  
Praise You in full assembly.  
You who fear the Lord, praise him!  
All you sons of Jacob, glorify him,  
all you sons of Israel stand in awe of him!*

*For he has not despised or disdained the afflicted in his affliction;  
has not hidden his face from him,  
but has answered him when he called.*

*From You comes my praise in the Great Assembly;  
my vows I will honour in the presence of those who fear him.  
The poor will eat and be satisfied;  
those who seek the Lord shall praise him.  
May your hearts live for ever!*

*All the ends of the earth will remember  
and come back to the Lord;  
all the families of the nations will bow down before him.  
For Yahweh reigns, the ruler of nations.  
Before him all the proud of the earth will bow down;  
before him bow all who go down to the dust.  
My soul will live for him, my children will serve him;  
men will proclaim the Lord to generations still to come,  
his righteousness to a people yet unborn.  
All of this is his work.*

No wonder, then, after Our Lord had guided those who stood around His crucifixion through king David's graphic description of this event in Psalm 22, that St. Luke could write a few years later in the Acts of the Apostles:-

*"... and a large group of priests made their submission to the Faith".  
(Acts 6: 7).*

Yes, after they had lifted up the Son of Man, then they knew that He was "*He*", and that He would be "*He*" for ever and ever, and that it would be better to accept His Gift of Faith and submit to Him, than to die in their sin of unbelief.

St. John then continued from where we left off:-

*As he said this, many believed in him.*

To the Jews who believed in him Jesus said:-

*"If you make my word your home  
you will indeed be my disciples,  
you will know the truth,  
and the truth will make you free".*

*"... and the Truth will make you free".*

Here we see Our Lord quietly embarking on a new development in this dispute. He fore-knew how the Jews would react to this new 'twist' in this whole divine drama, but He was not only addressing the Jews here, but all "*who would in time make His words their home*". Like our Modernists, the listening Jews would give to these words an entirely horizontal meaning; a meaning only *of this earth*.

*They answered him,  
"We are descendants of Abraham, and have never been in bondage to any one.  
How is it that you say, 'You will be made free'?"*

Now comes the 'twist' referred to above. They had it coming:-

*Jesus answered them,  
"Truly, truly, I say to you, every one who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not continue in the house for ever; the son continues for ever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you seek to kill me, because my word finds no place in you. I speak of what I have seen with my Father, and you do what you have heard from your father."*

From 'sin' to the 'father of sin'. Sin does not come from God, their true Father.

*They answered him,  
"Abraham is our father".  
Jesus said to them,  
"If you were Abraham's children, you would do what Abraham did, but now you seek to kill me, a man who has told you the truth which I heard from God; this is not what Abraham did. You do what your father did."*

They said to him,

"We were not born of fornication; we have one Father, even God."

Jesus said to them,

*"If God were your Father, you would love me, for I proceeded and came forth from God; I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and has nothing to do with the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies. But, because I tell the truth, you do not believe me. Which of you convicts me of sin? If I tell the truth, why do you not believe me? He who is of God hears the words of God; the reason why you do not hear them is that you are not of God".*

*"Which of you convicts Me of sin?"*

They could not! If they could, He would be like them. Here was something that they could verify immediately. If they had found a sin in Him, now was not only the time to bring this out: it would have come out! Since it was not brought up there and then, we can see the emptiness of their next rejoinder, the hopelessness and impossibility of their entrenched position:-

*The Jews answered him,  
"Are we not right in saying that you are a Samaritan and have a demon?".  
Jesus answered,  
"I have not a demon; but I honour my Father, and you dishonour me. Yet I do not seek my own glory; there is One who seeks it and he will be the judge. Truly, truly, I say to you, if any one keeps my word, he will never see death".*

There is no escape from this inexorable Logic. The Truth known from the foundation of the world but almost unrecognisable through the distortion of sin. The patience of Our Blessed Lord with sinners. He came down from the Father to make it all clear again against every attempt to keep the discussion on a purely horizontal level divorced from any vertical meaning. How truly are our Modernists and feminists represented here!

*The Jews said to him,  
“Now we know that you have a demon. Abraham died, as did the prophets; and you say, ‘If any one keeps my word, he will never taste death’ Are you greater than our father Abraham, who died? And the prophets died! Who do you claim to be?”*

For Jews professing to believe in the resurrection to a life after death, this is indeed a very crude way of comparing death in this life with death in the next. For people who did and even could know the difference, the words of Our Lord did not contain any mystery. Life after death had always been held up and kept alive for the chosen race by the prophets sent by God. So here His Son was not demanding a leap in the dark into totally unknown territory. He treated the whole subject as a matter of fact.

*Jesus answered,  
“If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me, of whom you say that he is your God. But you do not know him; I know him. If I said, I do not know him, I should be a liar like you; but I do know him and I keep his word. Your father Abraham rejoiced that he was to see my day; he saw it and was glad.”*

What can anyone add to this? They are now confronted with the inevitable conclusion that their father Abraham was on *His* side, not *theirs*. The call of father Abraham and God’s selection of the Jewish race born from him was to bring this Redeemer, this Messiah, sent by the Father, into the world, their world, in order to restore the relationship with God.

*The Jews then said to him,  
“You are not yet fifty years old, and you have seen Abraham?”  
Jesus said to them,  
“I tell you most solemnly, before Abraham ever was, **I am**”.  
So they took up stones to throw at him; but Jesus withdrew, and left the temple.*

**“I am ...”**

That was the divine Name by which God revealed Himself to Moses in the desert from the burning bush. It was the Name by which Yahweh identified Himself, the Name by which He wished to be known to the Jewish people when He ordered Moses to tell the people Who had sent him:

*Then Moses said to God, “If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you’ and they ask me ‘What is his name?’ what shall I say to them?” God said to Moses, “I AM WHO AM”. And he said, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’.” God also said to Moses, “Say this to the people of Israel, ‘The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you’. This is my name for ever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations”. (Ex. 3: 13-15).*

## Recapitulation of St John's Chapter 8

The Son of God, the testimonies, the witnesses, the evidence, the glory all speaking for Him are placed here in direct contrast against the brood of Satan, the children of their father the devil, with their testimonies, witnesses and evidence in defence of a most profound darkness of mind without a shred of glory.

From a sublime yet simple beginning that Christ is the Light of the world, the impenetrable darkness of the Jewish leaders and their adherents was bound to come out. It showed up, as it did before, in their obstinate penchant of taking everything exclusively in a horizontal sense, the value of this world, with its pseudo-power and surrogate happiness. And once brought to light, the severe warning of '*dying in their sin*' was sounded by Christ. One could almost hear them say with Pilate at this stage: "Sin? What is sin?" in their next question: "*Who are you?*" And with a totally unexpected 'twist' of the Divine Mind, the whole question of whose side Abraham was on was sprung upon them with this remark of Our Lord: "The truth (Truth) will set you free". And with this the supreme question of "*their sin*" and "*being in the slavery of sin*" and "whose side Abraham was on" became developed in such an inexorable way, that the 'spiritually illegitimate children of Abraham' picked up stones to throw at the One who was the Creator of Abraham and whose day Abraham had been privileged to see to his great delight.

For the whole of the human race it was a most consoling day on which, out of the evil of this display of unbelief, was drawn by God the tremendous good that Jews and Gentiles were here confronted by the same Reality that spoke to Moses from the burning bush. Over all those separating centuries the chosen race had lived in the understanding that the Redeemer, the Messiah, would be so close to God that it really could be said that God had come to the rescue of His people. But not even with the greatest flight of fancy was it possible to ascertain that the Messiah would be God. That the "*suffering servant*" of Isaiah would be God Himself. And here it was revealed that the One Who spoke to Moses from the burning bush was the same One Who now spoke to them here and now. Who spoke about His fate *that they would lift Him up* to indicate by what death He would give glory to the Father.

However, the tremendous grace of believing in Him was not wasted on all the Jews.

## V. The Question of Being Blind

(St. John: Chapter 9).

The climax of the Jewish disputes with Our Lord has been reached with the stunning revelation that Abraham was *not* on the side of those disputing with the One talking to the Jews now, and that the One talking to the Jews now is the same *I Am* Who had talked to Moses from the burning bush. The coming Messiah was not only very close to God: He *was* God. From now on the disputes become sporadic, almost disjointed and no longer sustained. The battle lines had been drawn, the war to the death had been declared, the outcome was predictable.

But one important question still had to be settled: *the origin of the blindness of the Jewish leadership*. By way of introduction St. John once again regales us on a magnificent setting surrounding the healing by Our Lord of the man born blind.

*As he went along, he saw a man who had been blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "Neither he nor his parents sinned," Jesus answered, "he was born blind so that the works of God might be displayed in him. As long as the day lasts, I must carry out the works of the one who sent me; darkness will soon be here in which no one can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" As he said this, he spat on the ground and made a paste of the spittle and anointed the man's eyes with the paste, saying to him, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (which means Sent). So he went and washed and came back seeing. The neighbours and those who had seen him before as a beggar, said, "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" Some said, "It is he"; others said, "No, but he is like him." He said, "I am the man". They said to him, "Then how were your eyes opened?" He answered, "The man called Jesus made a paste and anointed my eyes and said to me, 'Go to Siloam and wash'; so I went and washed and received my sight". They said to him, "Where is he?" He said, "I do not know." They brought to the Pharisees the man who had formerly been blind. Now it was a sabbath day when Jesus made the paste and opened his eyes. The Pharisees again asked him how he had received his sight. And he said to them, "He put a paste on my eyes, and I washed, and I see". Some of the Pharisees said, "This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath". But others said, "How can a man who is a sinner do such signs?" There was a division among them.*

*So they again said to the blind man, "What do you say about him, since he has opened your eyes?" He said, "He is a prophet". The Jews did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight, without first sending for his parents to ask them, "Is this your son, who you say was born blind? How then*

*does he now see?" His parents answered, "We know that this is our son, and that he was born blind; but how he now sees we do not know, nor do we know who opened his eyes. Ask him; he is of age, he will speak for himself". His parents said this because they feared the Jews, for the Jews had already agreed to expel from the synagogue any one who should acknowledge Jesus as the Christ. This was why his parents said, "He is of age, ask him".*

*So for the second time they called the man who had been blind, and said to him, "Give glory to God. From our part we know that this man is a sinner". The man answered, "Whether he is a sinner, I do not know; one thing I do know, I was blind, but now I can see." They said to him, "What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?" He answered them, "I have told you already, and you would not listen. Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?" At this they hurled abuse at him: "You can be his disciple, but we are disciples of Moses. We know that God has spoken to Moses, but as for this man, we do not know where he comes from." The man answered, "Now this is an astonishing thing! He opened my eyes yet you do not know where he comes from. We know that God does not listen to sinners, but if any one is a worshipper of God and does his will, God listens to him. Never since the world began has it been heard that any one opened the eyes of a man born blind. If this man were not from God, he could do nothing". They answered him, "You were a sinner through and through since you were born, and you are trying to teach us?" And they threw him out. Jesus heard that they had driven him away, and having found him he said, "Do you believe in the Son of Man?" He answered, "And who is he, sir, that I may believe in him?" Jesus said to him, "You are looking at him, he is speaking to you". He said, "Lord, I believe"; and he worshiped him. Jesus said, "It is for judgment that I have come into this world, so that those without sight may see, and that those who see may become blind." Some of the Pharisees near him heard this, and they said to him, "We are not blind, surely?" Jesus said to them, "Blind? If you were you would not be guilty; but now that you say, 'We see', your guilt remains".*

The first thing to be noted is that, in this extract of St. John's Gospel, the answers to the Jewish harassments are being supplied by a young man with a very astute and incisive mind. Young, because his troubled parents said of him that he was 'of age' which is usually not said of a grown-up man. We can imagine that, with his eager brain, this young man had implored his parents to read to him the great stories of the Old Testament and how, in the isolation of his blindness, he had meditated on the great feats of the Holy Prophets and of all the others who formed "that great cloud of witnesses", too numerous to enumerate, whom St. Paul eventually would include in his Letter to the Hebrews. One story in particular had stuck in his mind, the story of that imposing Syrian general, Naaman, whom the great prophet Elisha had cured from his leprosy. In fact, it is hard for us not to be drawn

to the core element of these two occurrences, one in the Old, the other in the New Testament.

One day there appeared at the door of Elisha's humble dwelling this mighty Syrian general by the name of Naaman to seek a cure for his leprosy. That he was an upright man comes out clearly in the story from the love and affection his servants had for him. But here is one such case where an irresistible force met up with an immovable object. With all his imposing pomp, the general expected that the renowned prophet would come out and cure him there and then from his complaint. But Elisha knew that the great man was called to a higher cure as well, and for that humility, trust and obedience are essential. So he did not come out to meet his new arrival but sent word to him to go and wash himself seven times in the Jordan and he would be cured. Hearing this, the mighty general got into a rage and was prepared to call the whole deal off and return to his own country.

But now see how the blessing of having devoted and loyal servants manifested itself the second time. From the way they address him, (they call him 'father'), we get an impression of their love for this upright man, and from the way he responded to their urgent wish to see him cured, we see how the grace of God is now working in this soul.

*But his servants came near and said to him, "My father, if the prophet had commanded you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? All the more reason then, when he tells you, 'Wash, and be clean'?" So he went down and immersed himself seven times in the Jordan, according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. Then he returned to the man of God, he and all his company, and he came in and stood before him; and he said, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel". [2 Kings, 5:13-15].*

Jesus knew how keen and eager was the mind of this young man, how the lessons of the Old Testament had not been wasted on him, and, like Naaman, how close he was to faith in the Kingdom of God. So, in parallel to Elisha's command, he told him: "*Go and wash in the Pool of Siloam*". And for the first time after that he saw the faces of his father and mother, distraught by fear because of what the Jews had done to them. And in the rare display of courage that followed then, he eventually met up with Jesus, and like Naaman became the recipient of a much greater healing, the one we receive when we are *sent* to be washed in the waters of Baptism ...

But there is a second parallel to be considered between this Gospel account in the New Testament and the cure of Naaman in the Old. In the earlier case we see a renegade coming up to corrupt the perfectly innocent interplay between the natural understanding of the newly converted Naaman and the supernatural insights of his gift of Faith in the One True God. Naaman had accepted his bodily healing from the power of the True God alone, a lesson strongly reinforced in the mind of Naaman by the absolute refusal of the prophet to accept any reward for what he had not wrought. In the Gospel story we see an identical corruption worming its way into the same innocent interplay between the natural and the

supernatural in the heart and soul of this newly converted young man, but now the Son of God Himself takes over.

Gehazi, Elisha's servant, was dissatisfied with the frugality, the humility and other-worldliness of the prophet's life compared with the riches, the power and the authority wielded by the army commander in his. He wanted some of what appealed to him so strongly in one world without giving the impression of having left the other. To facilitate the quest for what 'the world' has to offer, he painted a false picture of his master before the Syrian general, thereby running the diabolical risk of destroying in the mind of the newly-converted Naaman the pure form of true religion.

*Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said, "See, my master has spared this Naaman the Syrian, in not accepting from his hand what he brought. As the Lord lives, I will run after him, and get something from him." So Gehazi followed Naaman. And when Naaman saw some one running after him, he alighted from the chariot to meet him, and said, "Is all well?" And he said, "All is well. My master has sent me to say, 'There have just now come to me from the hill country of Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets; pray, give them a talent of silver and two festal garments'." And Naaman said, "Be pleased to accept two talents." And he urged him, and tied up two talents of silver in two bags, with two festal garments, and laid them upon two of his servants; and they carried them before Gehazi. And when he came to the hill, he took them from their hand, and put them in the house; and he sent the men away, and they departed. He went in, and stood before his master, and Elisha said to him, "Where have you been, Gehazi?" And he said, "Your servant went nowhere." But he said to him, "Did I not go with you in spirit when the man turned from his chariot to meet you? Now that you have taken the money, you can buy gardens and olive groves, sheep and oxen, male and female slaves. But Naaman's leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever" And Gehazi left his presence a leper, white as snow ...*

It was a good thing that Elisha followed his corrupted servant to guard Naaman's Faith. Maybe Naaman was even privileged to see him, shaking his head, thereby indicating that this traitor was speaking on his own behalf.

And here in the New Testament there was that other whiteness, the one that comes as the beauty of freshly-fallen snow of supernatural grace in a soul that has just professed its Faith in the Son of God. And the young man was privileged that the Son of Man had followed him and was present in his final confrontation with the Jews.

*"It is for judgement that I have come into this world,  
so that those without sight may see, and those with sight turn blind".*

The profound significance of these words springs to light if the following line is taken into consideration:-

*Hearing this some Pharisees who were present said to him, “We are not blind, surely”?* Jesus replied:-

*“Blind? If you were you would not be guilty, but since you say ‘We see’, your guilt remains”.*

And as was the case in Gehazi’s days, they left His presence with the blindness of the young man clinging as a supernatural leprosy to the eyes of their souls and to the souls of their descendants for the next 2000 years. And that is the way their modern counterparts in hypocrisy: the Modernists, teilhardians, feminists and all ‘New Age Catholics’, all those who want power in both worlds, have left the presence of His Church ...

**The End**