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THE JEWISHNESS OF JESUS FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE

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THE task undertaken in this essay is to consider the significance for Christology of a relatively orthodox incarnational kind, of the fact that Jesus of Nazareth was a first century Jew. In other words the frame of reference taken here is the Christianity of the Christian creeds. The question asked is what the Jewishness of Jesus means for that. The task, no doubt, would have been much easier, though less interesting, had we followed the example of those who seek to demythologise the doctrine of the Incarnation, either in the interests of an eirenic global, pluralist, theology of religions, or in the interests of a purely expressivist, anti-realist, analysis of Christian faith. Even on such views as these, as represented by John Hick and Don Cupitt for example, there would be some interesting questions remaining: what still differentiates Christianity from Judaism? Why follow the Jewish prophet, Jesus, rather than some other? Does the Christian ideal necessarily retain its historical links with the Jewish ideal? But these are not the questions pursued here. It is not necessary to abandon the characteristic tenets of one's faith in order to make progress in inter-faith dialogue. Rather, what we bring to the dialogue and submit to mutual questioning are the distinctive and representative faith-stances, true to the patterns of belief and worship of the majority of our co-religionists. So the question asked here is, what is the importance for Christian self-understanding of the fact that the eternal Son or Word of God became incarnate in and as the first-century Jew, Jesus of Nazareth.

The topic will not be discussed phenomenologically. There is no standing back from Christian conviction, to consider, as it were from a neutral standpoint, what Christians in general might take to be the significance of the Jewishness of the one whom they believe to be God incarnate. The essay is conceived as a Christian theological attempt to articulate theologically that

significance. It is written from conviction that the doctrine of the Incarnation not only belongs to Christianity's essence, but is true.

Furthermore, it must be stressed that this essay belongs in the field of systematic and philosophical theology, not the study of Christian origins. Historical questions cannot, of course, be completely ignored. Any interpretation of Christian doctrine has to stand the test of historical sifting of the evidence concerning Jesus of Nazareth. It is not that incarnational Christology must be *required* by the historical evidence alone, as Maurice Wiles suggests.[1] There are other factors than historical investigation which have led Christians down the ages to speak of Jesus as God incarnate. But incarnational Christology must be at least compatible with the historical evidence, and perhaps even suggested by it. For, certainly, the plausibility of the Christianity of the creeds is lessened if the best contemporary historical criticism is held to undermine that suggestiveness or that compatibility. The detailed historical argument is left to scholars in other fields, but clearly Christian dogmatic theology will have to include some plausible historical interpretation if it is to succeed in sustaining the view that, among other things, the Christian creeds speak of God's acts, indeed God's presence in person, in history. Indeed, it is the purpose of this essay to show that Christianity's conviction of a definitive historical incarnation requires it to take with the utmost seriousness the Jewishness of Jesus.

Let us begin by stating, in summary form, what it is not unreasonable to take to be the centre of the Christianity of the creeds, the doctrine of the Incarnation. Christians believe that knowledge of God as the infinite personal and holy will behind the whole created order, knowledge long mediated by the developing faith of Israel, God's chosen vehicle of that knowledge's transmission, was once for all made concrete and specific by God's own incarnation in Jesus of Nazareth. This bare affirmation needs some qualification, of course. Christians came to hold that only in one of the modes of his eternal being did (and indeed could) God become man. It was God the Son, or the Word of God, who became man. God did not in any way

[1] M. F. Wiles, *The Remaking of Christian Doctrine*, SCM Press 1974, p. 18.

cease to be God by coming amongst us as a man. Indeed it was reflection on the Incarnation and on the relation between the incarnate one and his heavenly Father that confirmed whatever inkling there may previously have been that the one God of Israel had to be thought of as internally differentiated and related as love given and received.

Such an Incarnation, so Christians believe, did not, and could not have, come out of the blue. It was long prepared through the history of Israel and the development of her faith, so that the human vehicle of God's very presence in our midst was a first century Jew, nurtured in the faith of Israel.

Nor was the recognition of Jesus as God incarnate an obvious, easy, immediate affair. There was a long period of development from the initial reception — by some — of Jesus as the Christ, probably in response to the Resurrection, perhaps before, right up to the Council of Chalcedon in 451, during which the doctrine of the Incarnation was hammered out in conflict with a whole variety of views, most of which came to be called heresies. Nor did the process end with Chalcedon. The Christian doctrine of the Incarnation has been reflected on and developed over the centuries, meeting new objections and assimilating new knowledge in religiously creative ways. A relatively recent example of such creative religious re-thinking — to be considered below — is the kenotic theory of the Incarnation.[2]

In order to bring out the significance which the doctrine of the Incarnation has held and still holds for Christian understanding, it is worth sketching five key religious ideas for which it is of crucial importance. The first concerns revelation. Specifically Christian knowledge of God, which is of course no more than a development of Israel's knowledge of God, is given its content, not through being told more about God, but through God's very presence in our midst in human form. The epistemological force of Christian incarnational belief is well brought out by G. F. Woods in his book, *Theological Explanation*,[3] where, having argued in general for personal analogies for our talk of God — a point on which, presumably, Jews, Christians and Muslims would be happy to agree — he goes on to argue that what gives

[2] See S. W. Sykes, 'The Strange Persistence of Kenotic Christology in A. Kee and E. T. Long (eds.), *Being and Truth. Essays in Honour of John Macquarrie*, SCM Press 1986.

[3] G. F. Woods, *Theological Explanation*, Nisbet 1958.

these personal analogies their particular precision is belief in the perfect humanity of Jesus as manifesting God to us uniquely in person. What it means for this view that Jesus was a Jew will be the main theme of this essay. The present point is that, for Christians, the Incarnation is the culminating locus of divine revelation and controls their understanding of God's activity at all times and places. Much more could be said about *what* is revealed of God through the Incarnation. The relational, trinitarian, understanding of God that follows from reflection on God's gift of himself to us through Christ and the Spirit has already been mentioned.

In the second place, the Incarnation shows us God's costly, self-sacrificial love in taking upon himself responsibility for the world's evil and bearing the brunt of it himself. The power of redemptive suffering was of course already known to Judaism, as in the Servant Songs of Deutero-Isaiah;[4] but that God himself not only feels but shares the worst the world can do, and thereby manifests in person his forgiving and reconciling love, is a central tenet of Christian belief. The religious power of the fact of the crucified God has been well brought out in the book of that title by Jürgen Moltmann.[5]

In the third place lies the related point that the Incarnation furnishes us with the paradigm case of divine providence and thus gives us, so Christians hold, the key to interpret God's action in the world. More will be said about God's providence in what follows. Here it is simply stressed that the Incarnation shows conclusively that God does not act in the world by omnipotence directed in a straight line by omniscience, as John Oman put it,[6] but through a gracious personal relation. That grace is shown and encountered most particularly in the life of Jesus and in the way of the Cross.

Fourthly, it may be pointed out that the Incarnation reveals not only God's nature but human nature too. God reveals what man was meant to be — that is, what men and women were meant to be — by being it. The fact that he was a man and not a woman is quite irrelevant to this. But the fact that he was a Jew and not of another people is important, as we shall see.

[4] Isaiah, chapter 53.
[5] J. Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, SCM Press 1974.
[6] J. Oman, *Grace and Personality*, Cambridge University Press 1917.

Fifthly, reference must be made to eschatology. For, according to Christian belief, humanity is permanently taken into God, Jesus is the human face of God for ever, and in the end, in God's eternity, it is believed that all men and women will be drawn to God by him. Again, the significance of the fact that God's *permanent* human face is a Jewish face will be discussed below.

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Having sketched the content and significance of Christian incarnational belief, we now come to the main part of this essay in which the importance for this doctrine of the fact that Jesus was a Jew is explored in some detail. Our starting point is the doctrine of God's providence in history.

Austin Farrer has stressed the specific implications of this doctrine. In *Saving Belief*, he dwells on the fact that God incarnate could not be a 'man-in-general'.[7] 'In fact', says Farrer, 'he was a Galilean carpenter turned free-lance rabbi'. And in *Faith and Speculation*, Farrer links this point to the doctrine of providence. The paradigm of God's providence, he says, 'is Christ's ability to play his part with a mental furniture acquired from his village rabbi'.[8]

Providence is a key notion for both Judaism and Christianity. It was Israel's faith which taught us to see reality as history, a linear process moving under God's providence towards an eschatological consummation, and it was Israel's own history that was seen as specially providential. She, out of all the nations, was God's chosen people, elected to be the special vehicle of God's self-revelation, a light to the nations. Christianity goes further in seeing Israel's history and faith as the necessary preparation for the Incarnation, the light to the nations providing the necessary context for the Light of the world. On Christianity's view, though not of course on Judaism's view, that light, focused finally in Jesus, God incarnate, ceases to be restricted to a particular, national, community as the vehicle of that light's transmission, and becomes universally accessible to men and women of every race. But what it does not lose is its rootedness in the history and faith of Israel. The Light of the

[7] A. M. Farrer, *Saving Belief*, Hodder and Stoughton 1964, p. 69.
[8] A. M. Farrer, *Faith and Speculation*, A. & C. Black 1967, p. 103.

world is for ever a first-century Galilean carpenter, turned free-lance rabbi, whose teaching and example, in life and in death, were Jewish through and through.

The Jewishness of Jesus, in other words, is not contingent, for Christian incarnational Christology. The fact that God could not become incarnate in man-in-general, but must come to us in and as a particular human being does not mean that any historical context and any race could have provided the necessary conditions for the Incarnation. On the contrary, Christianity insists that only *that* point in history and *that* people could provide the human vehicle for God's own personal presence in our midst as one of us. It had to be as a Jew that the Word was made flesh.

These reflections, of course, presuppose a serious belief in the reality of God. Moreover, they presuppose a belief in God far removed from deism. A serious belief in providence sees the whole world process and the whole of human history as a story of God's creative and providential work, shaping up a world of life and then so interacting with the human world as to fashion a particular type of religious consciousness that could express his — God's — own nature and will in human form. The interest of Christian incarnational Christology in the Jewishness of Jesus concentrates precisely on the fact that it was and is a Jew, equipped 'with a mental furniture acquired from his village rabbi' — to go back to Austin Farrer's words — who alone can and does incarnate God the Son.

It is worth pausing at this juncture to point out the folly of trying to distance Jesus overmuch from the Judaism of his day. Christian theology has often tried to stress what differentiated Jesus' teaching and understanding of his own mission from the various schools of Palestinian Judaism in the early decades of the first century. No doubt to some extent this is an inevitable and important enterprise; for the story of Jesus did lead to a new universal, incarnational, trinitarian, religion, breaking away from its parent body. But the fact remains that it was Judaism that made its offspring possible and supplied the categories for this development. Moreover Christian incarnational Christology itself, as has been pointed out, requires the rootedness of the Jesus movement in Jesus the Jew. So it is counterproductive to insist too strongly on the differences. It is particularly counter-

productive if the alleged historical reconstructions so distance Jesus from Judaism as to make Jesus historically incredible, quite apart from the regrettable tendency among Christian apologists to denigrate the Judaism of Jesus' day.

Consequently, Christian theology has an interest in the attempts, whether from the Jewish side, as with Geza Vermes,[9] or from the Christian side, as with Ed Sanders,[10] to show, with historical verisimilitude, the Jewishness of Jesus. To repeat, it is not intended here to try to adjudicate on such historical interpretations. But it is worth quoting Sanders' remarks on the implausibility of an allegedly Christian reconstruction, such as that of Ernst Käsemann, which, says Sanders, 'is basically opposed to seeing Jesus as a first-century Jew, who thought like others, spoke their language, was concerned about things which concerned them and got into trouble over first-century issues'. Sanders continues: 'It is thus bad history. Though I am no theologian, I suspect that it is bad theology'. It is indeed quite clear that Sanders is no theologian, but it is equally clear that the theology he castigates *is* bad theology. For Käsemann's theology does make Jesus an historically incredible figure, and precisely for that reason makes nonsense of the Christian understanding of God's providence, if that providence does in fact reach a climax in a genuinely historical incarnation.

We have not yet finished with the doctrine of providence; for the other side of Farrer's insistence on the paradigmatic nature of Jesus' ability to fulfil his providential role with a mental furniture acquired from his village rabbi is recognition of the necessarily hidden and mediated character of God's providential action up to and including the Incarnation. At no point does God force his self-revelation upon us. As in creation, so in providence, God limits himself to what Kierkegaard called 'indirect communication',[11] letting his nature and will gradually become apparent to religious minds, nurtured in a particular community of faith, and acting in and through the history of that tradition without — in Farrer's words again — faking or forcing the natural human story.[12] Not surprisingly, it gets written up in

[9] G. Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, Collins 1973.
[10] E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism*, SCM Press 1985.
[11] S. Kierkegaard, *Philosophical Fragments*, chapter two.
[12] A. M. Farrer, *A Science of God?*, Geoffrey Bles 1966, p. 78.

quasi-mythical form, with many miraculous divine interventions; but we learn to apply an element of demythologisation as we school ourselves to read the story historically and to interpret the history in terms of what is essentially a non-miraculous understanding of divine providence. We discover the theological importance of indirect communication. It makes more theological and religious sense to see God's action not as overriding the human story but precisely in and through the all-too-human story. It is, in fact, a *moral* necessity to retreat from blatant interventionism in our interpretation of salvation history. We cannot seriously assert a direct divine teleology behind battles and famines. But once we have made that strategic retreat, we begin to see how much more religiously powerful is a doctrine of divine self-limitation and of mediated providential action.

At every level, creation and providence involve divine self-limitation and indirect communication. There is a natural scientific story to be told about cosmic evolution and the emergence of the various forms of life, culminating in rational personal beings such as ourselves. Thus God creates us in and through the structures of matter, which he respects as he fashions our being. There is a natural human story to be told about the history of religions and the emergence within it of a particular form of ethical monotheism in a people conscious of the holiness and grace of God, aware of the possibility of redemptive suffering in their own history and destiny, looking for the coming of God's kingdom of justice, peace and love. Thus God evokes and fashions the context of his own most special self-revelation in an incarnate life, which opens up for all mankind a new saving encounter with the God of the whole earth.

The self-limitation and indirect communication involved in a real historical incarnation has, in recent centuries, been spelled out in terms of the kenotic theory. The idea of divine kenosis, or self-emptying, has an immediate moral appeal. By humbling himself and coming amongst us as one of us, the divine Word or Son lives out a genuinely human life, experiencing what it is to be a human being, knowing grief and pain and dereliction from within. Once again God does not overwhelm us by direct intervention. The human vehicle of his personal presence,

action, and indeed passion, is a real human being. The moral force of this conception of the divine kenosis has already been mentioned in the course of our initial sketch of the significance of the doctrine of the Incarnation. But kenotic Christology is more than a morally powerful piece of anthropomorphism. It is a metaphysical necessity that if God is to come amongst us genuinely in human form, then such divine self-limitation must take place.

Kenotic Christology is not to be thought of as involving the abandonment of divine attributes nor, as David Brown, in his book, *The Divine Trinity*,[13] suggests, as an alternative to Chalcedonian two-natures doctrine. On the contrary, God remains God, and the divine Son or Word remains the divine Son or Word, in living out this particular human life and revealing the divine love by subjecting himself to genuinely human experience. But Incarnation involves kenosis for all that, since the human vehicle of the Son's incarnate life is indeed a man growing in knowledge, ignorant of many things, and a member of a particular race and family.

In connection with kenotic Christology, too, it is important to stress the Jewishness of Jesus. For the genuine humanity of the incarnate Lord did not only have to be particular, limited and historically and culturally conditioned, as all humanity is. It had to be thus limited in the specifically Jewish way in which Jesus' humanity was limited. For only a Jew, with a Jew's inheritance, a Jew's faith and understanding and a Jew's hope, could be God incarnate. That faith alone could sustain the very image of God's being. It was, so Christians believe, for that purpose that God, in his providence, fashioned the Jewish way of being human and the Jewish way of being religious.

Of course Jesus did not know that he was God incarnate. St John's meditations on the great mystery of the Incarnation cannot be read back literally on to the lips of Jesus. No real human being could know that he was God incarnate. So, if God, in the person of his Son, was to become incarnate in and as a real human being, it must have been in and as a man who did not know that he was God incarnate. Only the utter and transparent openness to God and dependence on God that Jewish faith made

[13] D. Brown, *The Divine Trinity*, Duckworth 1985.

possible for a man could mirror and be, humanly, God's 'very self and essence all divine', this side of the divide between Creator and creature. Recognition of his divinity could only come later and somewhat arduously in and through another all-too-human story, by which God providentially evoked and fashioned the faith of the Church.

High Christology of the kind defended here must be very careful to avoid the heresy of docetism. But it is crude and primitive thought which denies to Jesus a human mind or a human personality. On the contrary it is not just Jesus' *human* mind and personality that manifest God to us salvifically; it is Jesus' *Jewish* mind and personality that manifest God to us salvifically. The only truth to be discerned in the old doctrines of *anhypostasia* and *enhypostasia* is that Jesus of Nazareth, in the perspective of incarnational Christology, is not an independent purely human individual, co-opted or adopted by God for a particular function. In the providence of God his human, Jewish, person, spirit, or subject is through and through the vehicle of God the Son's incarnate life. There is a personal identity there, unique and pivotal to all God-man relations in the history of creation. But that does not mean, as has often been affirmed in classical Christology, that Jesus was not a human person. He most certainly was. Indeed he was a first-century Jew. But that human person, that first-century Jew, was, so Christians believe, God incarnate. The ultimate subject of his words and deeds was God the Son; but God the Son spoke and acted not only in but as the Galilean carpenter, turned free-lance rabbi.

Kenotic Christology, in its turn-of-the-century English rather than its nineteenth-century German phase, was rightly concerned with the consciousness of Jesus — its limitations and its growth, with Jesus' ignorances and misconceptions, as well as his insight, depth, and moral and religious creativity. The doctrine of kenosis may be seen, among other things, as a way of reconciling, theologically, a high doctrine of the Incarnation with the quest for historical verisimilitude necessitated by the rise of the historical-critical method and its application to the Gospels. But insufficient attention was paid at the time to the Jewishness of Jesus' consciousness. The tendency was to stress what differentiated him from Judaism. Only now, with the greater interest that has been shown in recent decades, by both Christian

and Jewish scholars, in Jesus within the context of Judaism, are we in a position to evaluate theologically the importance of Jesus' Jewish consciousness for a doctrine of divine self-presentation and revelation in and through a historically believable natural human religious story. And at the same time Christian theology is enabled better to recognise the providential indispensability of precisely that form of religious consciousness — the Jewish — as the vehicle of God's incarnate presence.

Another Christian theological motif illuminated by concentration on the Jewishness of Jesus is that of the uniqueness and unrepeatability of the Incarnation. A striking feature of Thomas V. Morris' book, *The Logic of God Incarnate,*[14] is its defence not only of the coherence of the doctrine of the Incarnation but also of the theoretical possibility of multiple incarnations. If the divine mind of God the Son could contain the human mind of Jesus without being contained by it, so, in theory, could other minds, terrestrial or extra-terrestrial. Each could in theory express in finite human form the person who God is. Morris does not hold that there have been multiple incarnations, only that there could be. But I am afraid that his admission of the theoretical possibility shows that he has not grasped the full significance of the Christian doctrine of the Incarnation. For it is not simply the channelling of the divine mind through *a* human mind that constitutes incarnation. The divine Person of God the Son is channelled through and expressed in *the whole personality of Jesus, the first-century Palestinian Jew.* Everything that went into the making of his Jewish consciousness — the whole history of Israel — is essential to the providential formation of that unique incarnate life. I have argued elsewhere the more general point that two or more human beings could not *be* God incarnate, without splitting God's personal identity.[15] This point is now reinforced by recognition of the embeddedness of Jesus' personality in the whole religious inheritance of his people. Jewishness was constitutive of the human person he was and is. This makes God's human face — to use again this evocative phrase — necessarily and for ever a Jewish face and indeed this particular Jewish face. The idea of multiple incarnations, then,

[14] T. V. Morris, *The Logic of God Incarnate,* Cornell University Press 1986.

[15] In 'The Uniqueness of the Incarnation', now reprinted in B. L. Hebblethwaite, *The Incarnation. Collected Essays in Christology,* Cambridge University Press 1987, pp. 49-52.

falls foul of three things: first, the very concept of personal identity; second, the specific cultural formation of a particular person; and, third, the permanence of personal identity through all eternity.

It is important to spell out here this notion of cultural relatedness in the formation of a human person. It may have seemed that this discussion has concentrated too narrowly on Jesus as an individual. His Jewishness may have been stressed, but clearly, on the view defended here, it is this particular man who is the incarnate Son of God. There can be no going back on that idea, since personal being is indeed focused in individuals and we are rightly suspicious of the notion of corporate personality, except as a metaphor. But, for all that, a whole set of interpersonal relationships goes into the making of a human person. Jesus of Nazareth was no exception, and, if he was and is God incarnate, then his people's history, his Jewish culture, and his actual relations with Mary and Joseph, the village rabbi, and the disciples went into the making of the human person God incarnate is. Those who suppose that God might appear on earth from time to time as a whole series of individuals have simply not thought through what being a human individual involves, nor have they thought through what kind of human religious consciousness can alone carry and express the divine nature.

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Before we turn to consider a major objection to the kind of kenotic theory of the Incarnation that requires rather than belies a historically realistic portrayal of the Jewishness of Jesus, let us attempt to sum up the view advanced so far. We have deliberately set out to explore the significance of the Jewishness of Jesus from the standpoint of Christian credal orthodoxy and in particular from that of incarnational Christology. We began by giving a brief account of the doctrine of the Incarnation and of why it is held to be so central and important in Christianity. Five points were stressed — the revelatory significance of the Incarnation; the way it shows God taking upon himself and bearing the brunt of the world's evil; its crucial exemplification of the manner of God's providence; its disclosure of what a human being was meant to be; and finally its eschatological

significance as the permanent and final focus of God-man relations. Turning to the theme of providence, we pointed out how a real incarnation required the special providential preparation, within the history of religions, of a community and a faith capable of both constituting the matrix and providing the particular human vehicle for God's incarnate presence in our midst. It was suggested that it was the peculiar features of Judaism that performed these functions and that therefore the Jewishness of Jesus was of the essence of the divine-human person that he was. It was also suggested that the embeddedness of the incarnate one in this particular context reinforced our intuition of the inevitable uniqueness of the Incarnation, already apparent from reflection on the nature of personal identity.

Now throughout this presentation, the indirect and mediated nature of the operation of divine providence in preparing and bringing about the Incarnation has been emphasised. At no point need we resort to literal belief in miraculous intervention. In the person of Jesus, as in the history of Israel, God certainly intervenes, but he works in and through the historical and the human, without faking or forcing the natural human story. On this view, the Jewishness of Jesus is not contingent nor is it transcended. On the contrary it is precisely Jesus the Jew who is the human face of God. Kenotic Christology, it was suggested, positively requires us to stress both the historical verisimilitude of Jesus' life and teaching within the Judaism of his time and the specifically Jewish character of his message, his self-understanding, and his action.

A major objection to this highly Kierkegaardian stress on indirect communication and the divine incognito in such a kenotic theory of the Incarnation is this: how can the divinity of Christ be held to be *revealed* if it is at the same time held to be *hidden* within the humanly credible story of Jesus the Jew? This is the most acute example of a more general difficulty with the concept of non-miraculous special providence which we have taken from the writings of Austin Farrer and attempted to develop. If the hand of God working in and through the natural human story, without any faking or forcing, is, as Farrer claims, 'perfectly hidden', how can the story be recognised as providential and thus revelatory of God's nature and will? In fact Farrer had a very definite answer to this very understandable

question. The hidden hand of God is detectable retrospectively in the light of its *effect*. This is true throughout the whole creative process. The hidden hand of God behind cosmic and biological evolution is recognised in the light of what has emerged from cosmic and biological evolution — a world of life and of rational and personal beings. The hidden hand of God behind the history of religions — here we are extending the argument, since Farrer did not turn his attention to this problem — is recognised in the light of what it has produced, the plurality of life-enhancing faiths. The hidden hand of God behind the history of Israel is recognised in the light of the special relationship with God which it created, expressed, as it was, in the covenant faith, the sense of vocation, the ethical and spiritual profundity, including the idea of redemptive suffering, and the eschatological hope. The hidden hand of God behind the life stories of particular individuals, prophets and saints and many lesser figures too, is recognised in what God makes of people's lives in and through the contingencies and vagaries of circumstance. Many people have looked back over a sequence of apparently meaningless events and discerned a providential pattern in what has emerged from them.

When we turn back to the Incarnation, a similar claim may be made. The providential intelligibility of all that went into the making of Jesus Christ is seen in its effect and first of all in the remarkable moral and religious quality of Jesus' teaching and example. Much stress is rightly being placed on its Jewishness. Only Judaism could have nurtured the free-lance rabbi and charismatic healer of the Gospel narratives. What Jesus made of his Jewish inheritance, however, is undoubtedly more than just a striking synthesis. It was something new and creative, strongly suggestive of special providence at work. But, although Jesus' teaching and action and example are suggestive of God's providence, they could not by themselves have given rise to Christian incarnational belief. Certainly it is possible to interpret the Incarnation as the climax of God's providential action. The Incarnation itself can be thought of as the high point of God's indirect communication, as, without breaking the structures of his creation and indeed precisely by fashioning a natural human home for his incarnate presence, God, in the person of his Son, presents himself within those very structures in human form.

But the Jewish prophet, Jesus of Nazareth, notwithstanding all the wonder of his teaching and example, would never have been recognised as God the Son incarnate, without an event which did indeed break natural continuities, which did indeed transcend the historical, and disclose retrospectively, and then only after much reflection and experience, the divine nature of that Jewish prophet's person. In the case of Jesus, when we attempt to assess the providential significance of his life in the light of its effect, we encounter something that cannot be assimilated to the notion of providence. What brought about the Christian movement, including its growing discernment of the divinity of Christ, was not just the story of the life and teaching and death of the Jewish prophet, Jesus, but the Resurrection.

The New Testament narratives concerning the Resurrection of Jesus are notoriously difficult to handle historically. The ancient historian, Michael Grant, can only point to the stubborn evidence of the tomb's being found empty and to the previously disillusioned disciples' belief that they had seen the risen Christ alive after his death.[16] The Jewish historian, Geza Vermes, in reporting this astonishing development, agrees that probably the tomb *was* found empty, and holds that early Christian belief in the Resurrection was just one among several interpretations of this disconcerting fact.[17] The more or less agnostic Protestant historian, Ed Sanders, while recognising the unique effect of the resurrection experiences of the disciples, confesses that he has no special explanation or rationalisation of them.[18] The Christian theologian, Maurice Wiles, bending over backwards in his attempt to give a historically plausible account of the resurrection experiences that does not require the postulation of special providence, let alone a new creative act of God, can only resort to the psychologically implausible, reductionist view that the appearances were visions expressive of the disciples' new-found conviction — itself unexplained — that Jesus was, after all, vindicated by God.[19]

From the standpoint of a relatively orthodox Christian theology, the historians' inability to render the Resurrection

[16] M. Grant, *Jesus*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1977, chapter ten.
[17] *Op. cit.* pp. 37-40.
[18] *Op. cit.* p. 320.
[19] M. F. Wiles, *God's Action in the World*, SCM Press 1986, pp. 90-93.

intelligible comes as no surprise. And, sympathetic as he may and should be to the portrayal of the life and work and teaching of Jesus in historically credible terms, the Christian theologian really has no interest in rationalising or demythologising the Resurrection. For it is the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead that creates the possibility of finding in the on any view remarkable story of Jesus the incarnational significance summarised in the Christian creeds, the moral and religious force of which was spelled out at the beginning of this essay. It creates, too, the possibility for the Christian to 'encounter' Jesus as a living Lord in prayer and sacrament. These are what was hinted at earlier when it was said that more than historical factors have led Christians down the ages to speak of Jesus as God incarnate.

We must now consider another objection that may be pressed from the Christian side against what may appear to be the rather complicated, kenotic-incarnational, theology defended here. Indeed the theology is even more complicated than has been suggested, since the full trinitarian implications of the theology of God which incarnational Christology requires have not been spelled out. But surely, even the Christian objector may say, all these theological complications do not have to be imposed upon the wilting shoulders of the faithful. What inspires the faithful is not the kind of theology or Christology offered here, but rather the Gospel story told in simple form age after age. This is what moves people. And its power to move people is only obscured by the kind of theology expounded in this essay. One of the great attractions of the current vogue of 'narrative theology' is its refusal to get detached from the biblical stories as the primary vehicles of faith.

The reply to this objection is that there is indeed a valid insight in the recognition of narrative as the raw-material of theology. For if the incarnational theology is right, then God incarnate on earth was an itinerant rabbi or prophet, the story of whose words and deeds puts us in touch with God incarnate as he was during his earthly sojourn. Moreover, it is the human story of the God-man that expresses the divinity to us. Once again we come back to the Jewishness of Jesus and to the fact stressed all along that it is Jesus the Jew, in his Jewish context, who reveals God to us most intimately just because he — that Jew — is God with us, Emmanuel. Moreover if asked to say *what* the Jewishness of

Jesus consists in, one does not try to abstract certain typically Jewish characteristics, one simply tells the Gospel story.

But the theology is required as well, if we are to be able to interpret that human, Jewish, story as God's own story of incarnation. In the so-called Christian centuries this requirement was latent. For one thing, in the Gospels themselves, the story is already theologically saturated, and, for Christians in the Church, the credal framework was universally taught and presupposed. Actually this had a rather bad effect in overlaying the historical Jesus with more or less docetic, unhistorical, constructions. The revelatory force of the humanity — the Jewish humanity — of Jesus was lost behind the time-honoured theological projections. The rise of historical criticism has enabled us to recover, to some degree, the authentic human figure of Jesus the Jew. But while this helped to recover the heart of revelation — the actual figure whose story brings God home to us in person — the fact that it was God's own story easily gets lost if the theology is jettisoned. Without the theological framework, it will cease to be apparent why this Jew from nearly two thousand years ago, remarkable though he was, is still determinative of our understanding of God and of our relation to God now and for all eternity. In other words, what we need in Christian theology is a high Christology which does not distort the human — Jewish — vehicle of God's self-revelation through incarnation. That is the purpose of a kenotic Christology which sees the point of the divine incognito and of the indirect communication of God's 'very self and essence all divine' — to use Cardinal Newman's words once again — in and as a Galilean carpenter turned free-lance rabbi. I have suggested that such a theological framework is both made possible and required by the Resurrection of Jesus from the dead, experience of which opened the eyes of the disciples, and opens the eyes of all who encounter the risen Lord, to the real identity of this Jewish prophet. So, while Christian incarnational Christology requires the historical, thoroughly human, Jesus as the revelatory and salvific locus of Christian faith, the historical, thoroughly human Jesus by himself, uninterpreted by the resurrection faith of the Church, cannot be thought capable of sustaining Christianity. It is only *qua* God incarnate that that remarkable Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, is

of universal significance and can be seen to be of universal significance.

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