

The Man Born To Be King

December 30, 2006

Rev. Nathaniel R. Elliot, Jr

The Gospel of John is unmistakably different in style, in content, in tone and, presumably, in intent from those of Mark, Luke and Matthew. Lumped together these three are called *Synoptic Gospels* because they so closely parallel each other. Rather than a series of proverbs and sayings about the Kingdom as these do, John offers symbolic, poetic language in discourses, which develop further the relationship of Jesus to the Father.

While in the Synoptics, the understanding of Jesus as Messiah comes as a climax, in John it is not only presumed, but celebrated from the very first verse: ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the word WAS God.***

Though John, like the other Gospels, relates events in Jesus' life, he travels far beyond their narrative approach to offer metaphysical interpretation. He particularly stresses the fact that all events in the life

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of our Lord, as well as happening in Judea, happen in the soul; whereas the Synoptics make it clear that all events that happen in the soul *happened* in Judea.

This points up the dilemma that many people experience in accepting the enfleshment of God. That God should be born in the Spirit was permissible, not that he should be born in the flesh. The mystical union, yes, the physical resurrection, no. That God should choose the limitation of human flesh for an earthly life span is a challenge to us. *No one has ever seen God*, John wrote. *The only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, HE has made him known* (Jn. 1:18)

There was in the 20th Century, a remarkable English writer named Dorothy L. Sayers, who, regrettably perhaps, is better known for her delightful murder mysteries than for her substantial and significant spiritual writings. In “**The Man Born To Be King**”,

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her play cycle on the life of Christ, which approaches so many implications of the Incarnation, she wrote *If Christ is not true God equally with the Father, there is no essential difference between Christianity and pagan polytheism. Jesus is unique, unique among gods and men. There have been incarnate gods a-plenty, and slain and resurrected gods not a few; but He is the only God who has a date in history. And plenty of founders of religion have had dates, but only **this one** of them was personally God.*

She goes on to say *There is no more astonishing collocation, or arrangement of phrases than that which, in the Nicene Creed, sets these two statements flatly side by side: **Very God of Very God, He suffered under Pontius Pilate.** All over the world, thousands of times a day, Christians recite the name of a rather undistinguished Roman Proconsul, not in denunciation, but merely because that name fixes*

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within a few years the date of the death of God.

Dorothy Sayers makes some strong arguments.

Because of this subordination of heaven to earth, different as it may be, the Fourth Gospel does not provide a refuge for spiritualizers. Because of Christ, none of us can opt for a *spiritual* life somehow set apart from the facts of our earthly lives, just as no division, finally, can be made between the spiritual facts and the material facts of the Incarnation. John's glorious affirmations never diminish or make irrelevant the actual events on Judean soil. Rather, they reveal the fact that there are cosmic dimensions to even the most seemingly ordinary of human encounters.

It is a profound truth that God relies on **our** eyes, **our** ears and **our** hands to touch the world with the Divine. This process hardly ended when God became flesh in Christ and lived among us. In this light, it seems

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strange to realize, no matter how sophisticated, that some people today are resistant to the idea that God became a man with our flesh. Many there are who still think of human flesh in low terms. But we must get over that, if it's a problem, and realize that God has affirmed our human flesh by taking it into the Divine in the Incarnation.

Presumably, there was no other way than the risk God took, that things bound on earth would be bound in heaven. Does it not follow then, that there is no other way to save the world than the bringing together of believers who will affirm with John the Evangelist, that what happened on the byways of Judea is also intended to occur within our individual souls? This is, after all, what is meant to be. May the Holy Spirit so lead us. Always.

AMEN.