PREFACE TO THE AMERICAN EDITION

My book called *A Life of Jesus* may cause surprise for American readers when they discover an interpretation of Jesus somewhat at odds with the image they now possess.

Jesus as I depict him is a person who lived for love and still more love; and yet he was put to death, for he chose to live without violent resistance. My way of depicting Jesus is rooted in my being a Japanese novelist. I wrote this book for the benefit of Japanese readers who have no Christian tradition of their own and who know almost nothing about Jesus. What is more, I was determined to highlight the particular aspect of love in his personality precisely in order to make Jesus understandable in terms of the religious psychology of my non-Christian countrymen and thus to demonstrate that Jesus is not alien to their religious sensibilities.

The religious mentality of the Japanese is — just as it was at the time when the people accepted Buddhism — responsive to one who "suffers with us" and who "allows for our weakness," but their mentality has little tolerance for any kind of transcendent being who judges humans harshly, then punishes them. In brief, the Japanese tend to seek in their gods and buddhas a warm-hearted mother rather than a stern father. With this fact always in mind I tried not so much to depict God in the father-image that tends to characterize Christianity, but rather to depict the kind-hearted maternal aspect of God revealed to us in the personality of Jesus.

If my American readers will keep this point of view in mind as they move through *A Life of Jesus*, they will (I believe) gain deeper insight into just where the religious psychology of the Japanese and other Orientals coincides with their own, and they will better appreciate those points at which the two psychologies perhaps diverge.

The career of Jesus as it is presented in this book does not include the image of Jesus as the One who fulfills the Jewish Old Testament. On this point I agree to the dissatisfaction expressed by many theologians and clergymen. Furthermore, because I have written the book in my profession as a novelist, it contains no theological interpretations of the prophetic messages contained in the Bible. These interpretations lie beyond the design of the book in an area to which my competence does not attain.

As I assert near the end of the book itself, I do not think that my portrait of Jesus touches on every aspect of his life. To express what is holy is impossible for a novelist. I have done no more than touch the externals of the human life of Jesus. I do feel, however, that my work will not have been a waste of time, if only the image of Jesus that I (a Japanese) have touched can also strike a spark of vital appreciation of Jesus even in readers who have had no previous contact with the Christian religion.

Finally, I pray that my discussion of the execution of Jesus will not occasion the least displeasure for religious Jews. I am aware of the age-old controversies, even in academic circles, about whether it was the Jews or the Romans who killed Jesus. As an outsider I am not in a position to fix the blame on either side. The only point I desired to make is that Jesus was put to death by people whom he never ceased to love.

Shusaku Endo

Tokyo
Good Friday 1978

TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

THE name Shusaku Endo will not be familiar to most Americans. A number of his books have been published in English translation, but so far only two have appeared in the United States. Endo himself was born in Tokyo in 1923. At the age of three he was taken by his family to the city of Dairen (Manchuria). Unfortunately the parents were divorced, and the mother (to whose memory Endo has always been devoted) moved back to Japan with her two sons, to live with a sister in Kobé. Following her sister's example, she became a fervent, strict-observing Catholic, and then, with the encouragement of both aunt and mother, Endo himself was baptized. He was eleven years old.

A few years later, questionable health saved the young man from military conscription, but it did not exempt him from the rigors of civilian war labor. By 1949, however, he managed to graduate in French literature from Keio University (Tokyo); he published articles on literary criticism and theory and did editorial work for various periodicals. In 1950 Endo was presented with the opportunity to study modern French Catholic literature at the University of Lyon. He spent three years in France, not always happy, and in the end he was hospitalized. After that, he survived two more long periods of hospitalization, with drastic surgery. (Hospital scenes abound in Endo's fiction.)

Before returning from France, Endo had determined to be a novelist on his own, and he had discovered the theme that runs through his serious novels: the failure of Japanese soil to nurture the growth of Christianity. Apparently this theme is an extrapolation of the author's own interior conflict.

A Life of Jesus, this work of non-fiction, stands in a pivotal

position between the author's earlier serious novels and his later more optimistic ones. To cite only those titles which have already appeared, or will appear, in English translation, the serious works include *Silence* (a story of Christian martyrs and apostates during the ferocious Japanese persecution in the 1600's), *Yellow Man, Volcano, The Sea and Poison, Near the Dead Sea,* and a drama called *The Golden Country*. The later novels, which contain some comic episodes mingled with their pathos, include *The Wonderful Fool, The Girl I Cast Away,* and *When I Whistle.* In these latter stories the main characters are apt to be Christ figures—in that image of Jesus dear to the heart of Endo himself: innocent persons, vulnerable and ineffectual, who suffer at the hands of those whom they love, and eventually exert a mysterious spiritual influence.

Christianity has not flourished in Japan, even though the long history of this island country is a story of importing foreign ideas and ways: the Japanese writing system, Buddhist religion and Confucian ethics, industrial technology, democracy, etc. Yet always the people have maintained their distinctive Japanese character. Creatively they adapt whatever is adopted from abroad.

Christianity, however, has not been adopted. Why not? Joseph Kitagawa, a noted Christian scholar, is of this opinion:

> In sharp contrast to Confucianism and Buddhism . . . Christianity has tended to reject not only all the rival religious systems but also the values and meanings of the cultural and historical experience of the Japanese. . . . Christianity tends to make Japanese Christians *uprooted*—but not necessarily *liberated*—from their social, cultural, and spiritual traditions and surroundings. [Italics added]

Endo's theory—that Japan has not accepted God because God has been presented too frequently as an authoritative father-image—merits our consideration. The Japanese have a traditional saying to the effect that the four most dreadful things on earth are "fires, earthquakes, thunderbolts, and fathers."

Paradoxically the feminine mother-love image of God appeals to the Japanese, living as they do in a social order that is even now to a vast extent under male domination, where men retain reverential affection for their mothers, who—at least ideally—forgive and suffer and sacrifice for love of their children.

This book, therefore, must be read for what it is—a personal appreciation of Jesus written by a Japanese novelist, who is himself a Christian and who speaks to his non-Christian countrymen. Endo is very Japanese when he emphasizes the maternal image of God. He is a professional novelist in the way he is highly selective about choosing episodes in the Gospel narrative, which he then structures into a dramatic presentation of Jesus' life and death. He is a true Christian believer in the final chapter of his book, the mystery of Christ's resurrection.

All literary translation implies the interpretation of an original text and the re-creation of its substance and emotional impact in another language medium. My aim has been to produce a straight translation. I have not changed the substance in any way to "adapt" the material to what I imagine might be the needs or the expectations of Occidental and Christian readers. I hope this somewhat exotic book will bring a certain freshness to an already familiar story. Those of us who have no trouble about believing in the divinity of Jesus may come to a sharper vision and warmer appreciation of Jesus our brother, a human being who shares the pain of living with each of us, forever.

The translation is mine, but in reading the Japanese text I had the invaluable assistance of Mr. Francis Masahiro Urushibata. Father Eugene LeVerdiere S.S.S. was generous in reading the manuscript and was most helpful in identifying those biblical scholars whose names lay well disguised behind the Japanese syllabary. Finally, a word of thanks to Mr. Donald Brophy of Paulist Press for his always constructive comments, and to John Carroll University for continuing support in my study of Japanese literature.

Richard A. Schuchert, S.J.

Kamakura, Japan
April 1978

1 FAREWELL TO THE DAILY LIFE OF NAZARETH



WE have never seen his face. We have never heard his voice.

We do not really know what he looked like—the man called Jesus, of whom I propose to speak. Countless pictures of Jesus have been painted from imagination in accord with a conventional formula: long hair falling to the shoulders, the trimmed beard, the lean face with high cheekbones. Most artists have followed for centuries this traditional recipe in constructing their portraits of Jesus, each of them going on from there to suffuse the facial features of Jesus with the ideals of piety peculiar to the artist's own historical milieu.

Still, in the first days of the Church the face of Jesus was never fashioned to this mold. The early Christians had a certain hesitant reserve about trying to depict the faces of holy persons. Consequently, the craftsmen of that era did not address themselves to picturing the face of Jesus in realistic fashion. They portrayed "the Lord" by means of symbols—a fish or a lamb, a shock of wheat or a tendril of grape. In the age of the catacombs Jesus appears in the

guise of a young man, fashioned in the Greek style, with the beardless face of an adolescent, quite different from the conventional modern image. After some years, however, beginning in the fifth century, the influence of Byzantine art determined the model of the face of Jesus which has persisted into our own day. By studying these portraits we can learn how mankind through its long spiritual history has come to visualize in the highest degree of purity and beauty the physiognomy of the holiest person who ever lived.

No one has actually seen the face and form of Jesus except for the people who lived with him, the people whose lives he crossed. Even the New Testament in narrating the life of Jesus gives hardly a hint concerning his physical appearance. Yet by reading the Gospels we are able to bring to our own mind's eye a lively impression of Jesus, thanks to the people who did get to know him and then were unable to forget him the rest of their lives.

Since the New Testament tells us next to nothing about the face of Jesus, we are left with no other choice but to rummage our own imaginations. According to Stauffer, the Jewish religion of that time required of any man who preached the word of God that he be "a person tall in stature and well put together." Stauffer claims that a man falling short of this description would not be warmly received but would become an object of criticism. If Stauffer's explanation is correct—and since the Gospel record nowhere indicates that people ever condemned Jesus for his external appearance—then Jesus very likely was a man of normal stature for a Jew. From there we go on to think of him as looking like other Jews of ancient Palestine, parting his dark hair in the middle and letting it fall to the shoulders, growing a full beard and mustache, with the customary beard, the customary hair style, and his clothing probably the worse for wear, as we surmise from the Gospel of Mark where Jesus allows his disciples to possess only the usual "sandals, but not a second coat." So much for the outward figure of Jesus, as far as painstaking imagination can piece it together.

The name Jesus—more precisely Jeshouah—was a common name found everywhere. According to the Jewish historian Josephus, author of the *Jewish Antiquities*, so many men bore this name that it came to lack all individuality. During his brief span of life, therefore, Jesus had nothing in his name or in his looks to

distinguish him. He was ordinary, appearing in no way different from the mass of men who had to sweat for a living.

In the Gospel of John (8:57) people seeing Jesus one time said to him that he was not yet fifty years old, whereas he was in fact only in his thirties. Their remark is open to various interpretations, one possibility being that Jesus did look older than his years. Any appearance of premature age might well have been a shadow of nameless suffering which always played across his face, or perhaps his weary eyes reflected interior pain.

Presuming as much, we then can ask: When did this uncommon glow begin to hover in his eyes? The life of every man and woman who touched his own became eventually his burden. Did the process already begin from the days when he plied his carpenter's trade in the town of Nazareth?

Nazareth of Galilee is the town where Jesus grew up. In our own day it stirs to the hubbub raised by the tourists and by the hucksters who live on their purchases. The town lies surrounded by hills bearing olive orchards and cypress trees and many umbrella-shaped pines, but a steady gaze at the hustle and bustle within the town reveals on every side the misery of human existence: barefoot beggar children, and beggars blind and crippled, and the dingy little squeezed-in shops and houses lining either side of the up-and-down streets that are filthy with slop. The Gospel of John records how people in the old days had a saying that "nothing good comes from Nazareth" (John 1:46), and in the days of Jesus the place was nothing more than a back-country town of no particular interest to the Jews, for the living standard of the people there was even lower than it is today. The dwellings of the common folks were smeared on the outside walls with whitewash, but on the inside they were dingy as any cellars, with only a single window. There still exists in Nazareth today a number of houses similar to those ancient ones, to help us imagine the sort of house in which Jesus lived.

Because his foster-father Joseph was a carpenter, Jesus also learned that trade. Jews of that time had the custom of wearing something to symbolize their line of work—a dyer, for example, would wear a piece of colored cloth, or a public scribe a quill pen. So Jesus, too, most likely wore somewhere on his person the piece of wood to indicate his being a carpenter. We use the word "car-

penter," yet the work did not consist in putting up buildings and houses, and it would be more precise to speak of Jesus as a cabinetmaker. Moreover, since most of the carpenters in Galilee were itinerant workmen, Jesus carried on his trade not in any established workshop, but rather by moving about in Nazareth and its environs according to demand. When we read in the Bible the parables related by Jesus, we gather a keen sense of how Jesus himself was acquainted with penury and the hardship of making a living, and how he knew first-hand the smelly sweat of men and women who work. His story of the woman who searched all over the house for a mislaid silver coin might very well have been based on something that happened in his own family. The woman in another parable, who put some leaven into three measures of meal, might well have been his mother Mary.

The Gospels say nothing concerning the death of his foster-father, but oral tradition holds that Joseph died when Jesus himself was nineteen years of age. On the supposition that he died while Jesus was still in Nazareth, we are led to think that Jesus then assumed responsibility for the support of his mother. It is not clear how many other children were in the family. Certain Protestant scholars, depending on Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3, claim that he had four brothers named Joseph, James, Simon, and Jude, along with several sisters. The Catholic side, however, holds that Jesus had no siblings, since the Hebrew words *ach* [brother] and *achot* [sister], the words employed by Matthew and Mark, can just as well indicate "cousins," in accord with the common usage of both these words throughout the Middle East. The Hebrew language in fact has no one word to denote specifically a cousin. In any event, until Jesus was somewhere between thirty and forty years of age he labored for his daily sustenance, living in the company of close relatives and sharing with them what was for all practical needs a single extended family.

What Jesus met every day on his workman's beat was not limited to life's grinding poverty. Miserable cripples and sick people appear one after another in the New Testament, and these misfortunate ones lived everywhere around Nazareth. The region is notable for extremes of daytime heat and nighttime cold, on account of which in ancient times many succumbed to pneumonia in that sea-

son of the year when the wind blows from the east. Outbreaks of dysentery were common, and especially in those parts adjacent to the Lake of Galilee and the River Jordan malaria also was recurrent. The descriptions in the Bible of people "possessed by an evil spirit" or being "a victim of high fever" most likely indicate people sick with malaria.

In summertime many people were bothered with eye trouble caused by the combination of flying dust and the intense ultra-violet sunlight. Victims of leprosy, too, appear in the Bible, and the lepers gathered together and shaved their heads, and were forced to live apart from any town or village. The most pitiful thing about their lot was not their being quarantined, but the way in which society abhorred the lepers for being stricken unclean as a punishment from God.

Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are they that mourn,
for they shall be comforted.

The words are those which Jesus later quietly spoke to the people on a hill in Galilee. Yet what a gap lay between the wretched realities of Nazareth and this vision of the "kingdom of heaven" which he so vividly proclaimed. God was still not about to endow the poor with heaven on earth. God was still not offering comfort to the wailing sick. Was God preserving silence toward the suffering of these forsaken people? Or then and there did some impenetrable mystery lie deep inside what appeared externally so wretched?

To me it is unthinkable that questions like these failed to stir within the heart of Jesus during his years at Nazareth. On every page of the Gospels we see an image of Jesus trying to share in all the sorrows of misfortunate men and women. One woman had suffered for years with her illness (referred to as an issue of blood), and when she merely touched his person with the tips of her trembling fingers, it was Jesus who felt the unhappiness which had been the woman's lot through half a lifetime. Weeping men and women—it is they who need consoling. Words to that effect, spoken on the mountain in Galilee, portray the basics of what Jesus sought from God. In his carpenter days at Nazareth, Jesus more than any-

one already felt the gap which lay between the nature of his prayer and the hard facts of daily living. And simply because he felt as he did, his face seemed little by little to be growing older than the faces of his cousins. From time to time a look of anguish hovered around his eyes. This itinerant workman on his rounds of Nazareth and its vicinity suffered gnawing hunger of the soul. The heart of Jesus was chronically in need.

On the shore of the Lake of Galilee, not too far from Nazareth, lay the winter resort town of Tiberias. King Herod Antipas owned a villa there, and the town's style of life was designed for the affluent set. Roman customs prevailed there, all quite alien to the likes of Jesus.

The era under discussion is the time when Palestine was a vassal territory close to the eastern frontier of the great Roman Empire. Galilee, along with a section of land to the east of the Jordan River, was controlled by King Herod Antipas, whose authority was sanctioned for the time being by the Roman emperor. Rome had a legate in Syria and a governor in Judea, both under orders to keep an eye on the tetrarchs among whom the dependent territory had been parceled out; and so long as these petty kings maintained their fealty to Rome, they were recognized in their rights to a certain autonomy and to the maintenance of their armed retainers.

The lord of Galilee, King Herod Antipas, was one of the sons of King Herod the Great, a man who had aped the manners of the emperor himself while being astute enough not to ruffle the pride and the religious sensibilities of the Jews. Antipas, his son, managed in turn to maintain his own position by being more a sycophant to the Roman emperor than even his father before him. So it was that Antipas rebuilt a certain town in Perea and named it Livias (also Julias) in honor of the wife of the Roman emperor Augustus; and when Tiberius ascended the imperial throne to succeed Augustus, he then built another town in the Roman style on the west shore of the Lake of Galilee and named it Tiberias.

The inhabitants of Galilee did not look with favor on the enthusiastic Romanizing of King Herod Antipas. Quite the contrary, they watched his cultural assimilation and political servility with an eye of hostile discontent. The population of Galilee was heteroge-

neous in origin, but the people had been homogenized through their stalwart adherence to the Jewish faith. They nursed their xenophobia and maintained their scorn for the customs and the religion of Rome, which posed a threat to the purity of Judaism. From time to time their resentment of Rome broke out in plain rebellion, to the point were passion came in to generate an anti-Roman terrorist party known as the Zealots, of whom I shall speak later. Roman governors whom the emperor dispatched to Judea were ever in fear of the possibility of insurrection breaking out among the crowds of Galileans who came on pilgrimage to the temple for the religious festival of Passover.

The New Testament has nothing explicit to say about the extent to which Jesus, growing up in Nazareth, was affected by this traditional Galilean sentiment. But we can detect a scent of antagonism between Jesus and King Herod Antipas, the man who will afterward interrogate him in Jerusalem—the pervading atmosphere of hostility between true Galileans and anyone tainted by Greco-Roman manners. From the Gospels I get the impression, however vague, that in his travels from place to place Jesus always avoided the cities built by King Antipas.

The life-style of the opulent class in Tiberias was alien to Jesus, who was himself no more than a carpenter at Nazareth. He had no social contact with the world of those (including King Herod Antipas) who were so deep into Greco-Roman fashions and ways of thought. On this point Bornkamm's exposition is correct, where he says that "we can find in the thinking of Jesus no trace of any influence from the alien Hellenistic way of life."

But popular resentment in Galilee was not aimed exclusively against King Herod and the affluent class, for many Galileans were disgruntled also with the priestly caste in Jerusalem, which maintained its privileged position only by coming to terms with the empire of Rome. People suspected that priests like these were a contamination to the purity of Judaic religion. I intend to write more later about how all these sentiments of the Galileans then came to be magnetized in the person of Jesus.

From their tender years the common folk of Galilee, like Jews everywhere, were exposed to hearing read aloud by their elders that basic criterion of Jewish life and mentality which is the Law, or

Torah. When lads grew into young men, they joined their voices with the adults in the Jewish synagogues in reciting also from the prophetic books and from the psalms. Jesus in his days at Nazareth followed the life-style of the class of people to which he belonged. Together with them he experienced fully the stinking sweat, the misery, and the penury of the working class, and in the synagogue together with them he read from the various books of the Old Testament.

In brief, Jesus in his outward style was simply a young carpenter who cut no special figure in the town of Nazareth. Even his name was a commonplace one, and his life followed an uneventful routine no different from others. He was distinguishable only in his face, which appeared to be old beyond his years, and in his eyes, which at times betrayed a tinge of anguish, but only in such a way that no one else knew what lay deep hidden within his heart. . . .

In the fifteenth year of Tiberius, emperor of Rome, there appeared in the wilderness of Judea, a bleak desert lying south of the holy city of Jerusalem, the flaming figure of a prophet clothed in animal skin fastened with a leather belt. He is the man known in history as John the Baptist. Tradition says that John was born in Ain Karim, seven kilometers southwest of Jerusalem, of the priestly caste of the tribe of Levi, and that on reaching adolescence he disappeared into the wilderness.

For years on end the Jews had been waiting for "the prophet" to appear. In its root meaning the term "prophet" signifies a person entrusted with the word of God, and originally it did not denote a person who predicts the future.

It is difficult for modern readers to appreciate the religious feeling that prevailed in those days. For a long period the Jewish people lived perforce with their native land being dominated by foreigners, and their humiliation engendered in them a fierce ethnic pride. In all their national adversity and frustrations, never for a moment did they cease clinging in faith to their distinctive deity Yahweh, maintaining a profound sense of hope in the Messiah (Savior) whom Yahweh was going to send to them.

The national territory, which had never been very extensive, had been kept in subjection for more than five hundred years, first

to Persia, then to Greece, then in turn to Egypt, Parthia, and Syria, and finally to Rome. Under all these foreign hegemonies, under different forms of oppression, the nation stubbornly refused to yield an inch on two points. One point was their religion, faith in their God Yahweh. The second was their near absolute trust that Yahweh would in his good time send them a national Messiah, in the image of King David of old, a Savior to restore again for all of them the territory and the national honor of Judah. Their monotheistic faith in Yahweh had been under continual threat from neighboring nations and from the polytheistic religions of their conquerors; yet in every crisis they succeeded in preserving their faith, thanks to those prophets who defied the alien religions and to that part of the nation who obeyed the prophets. The title "prophet," as I have said, designates a person entrusted with the word of the Lord God (Yahweh), and that is the sense in which the title was applied to any leader who delivered zealous admonitions to the Jews on those occasions when they were in danger of being corrupted by the religions and the public morals of the foreigners.

The prophets interpreted the wrath of God and his vengeance, and with vehemence they urged the people to repent—the natural result being that the prophets themselves were inevitably persecuted by the establishment prevailing at the time. The prophets claimed that national honor and glory would be restored to the Jews, that the "kingdom of God" was coming. Yet in reality the kingdom of God had failed to materialize, and for more than five hundred years the Jews were forced to behold their land subjected to the barbarous Gentiles. In spite of all, however, the painful hopes and aspirations of the nation had persisted into the days of Jesus himself. An impassioned lamentation from the psalms clearly expresses this feeling of the Jews:

> Lord, where is thy steadfast love of old,
> which by thy faithfulness thou didst swear to David?
> Remember, O Lord, how thy servant is scorned;
> how I bear in my bosom the insults of the peoples.

In the fifteenth year of the Emperor Tiberius, suddenly a rumor spread that in the desolate wilderness of Judea, by the lower reaches of the Jordan River close to the Dead Sea, the long-awaited

prophet (John) had finally appeared. Hearing the rumor, people had reason to recall a certain text familiar to them from the Book of Isaiah:

> The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness,
> "Prepare ye the way of the Lord,
> Make straight a highway for our God. . . ."

John had appeared in the wilderness, just as the text said, and the style of his preaching went like this:

> "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? . . . Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees, every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire."

The voice of John was crying that the promised kingdom of God was close at hand; therefore, repent! The message reached Jerusalem of course, but it also carried as far away as the towns in rustic Galilee, including the town of Nazareth. The cry had its unmistakable appeal for the Galileans with their stalwart belief in Jewish religion and their hatred of foreign intruders. They had witnessed the inroads made by Roman ethics and religion into their own particularistic world. Heathen shrines and other buildings in Roman style had been erected in cities like Tiberias and Julias, and their own ruler, Herod Antipas, obsequiously pursued these fashions. Even the priestly caste in charge of the temple in the holy city of Jerusalem were living in compromise with Rome. The honor of the nation was under threat from within, and their religion was starting to corrupt at its very hub. These were the feelings of the common folk of Galilee in their day-by-day existence. The warning issued by John the Baptist drew their hearts like a magnet.

Among those who traveled to the wilderness of Judea to listen to the message of the prophet were certain fishermen from the Lake of Galilee. They had heard how John carried out a special rite called baptism, which he administered to the people gathering by the River Jordan.

It was probably around January of the year 28 by the Western calendar when Jesus of Nazareth determined to leave his family and

his trade in order to join the religious community of John. We don't know the exact age of Jesus at the time. Luke 3:23 says in effect that "Jesus . . . was about thirty years old," but Luke may have employed that choice of words because being thirty years old was considered the ideal time of life by Jews in the ancient world. It is a turn of expression often used in the Old Testament—that "David was thirty years old when he was made king," or that "Ezekiel was thirty years old when called to be a prophet." I think myself that Jesus was somewhere into the decade of his thirties by the time he left Nazareth.

The Gospels give no direct evidence concerning the extent to which at the time of his leaving home he may already have been aware of the mission which lay ahead of him, yet Jesus was moved in his decision to forsake the life of Nazareth by detecting in the voice of John the Baptist something that appealed to his heart. Jesus had his own ideas about what was wanting to the Jewish religion as it was administered by the priests and the Pharisees in Jerusalem. Certainly it was spiritual hunger which brought him to decide to leave his mother and his numerous kinfolk. It is not so certain, however, that his decision won the amiable consent of the family, especially not the consent of his male cousins. In the straitened circumstances of the extended family it was no easy thing for them to lose the contribution from Jesus just when he was at the peak of his productive years. His mother Mary, or at any rate his cousins James and Joseph, Simon and Jude and the others, were not always completely in sympathy with him. Did their failure to understand Jesus have its beginnings right here? The kinsfolk also failed to see what lay beneath that shadow of pain which showed from time to time in the eyes of Jesus. Mark 3:21 and John 7:5 record explicitly how for a long time his kindred bore scant respect for him. From their point of view the shadow perhaps revealed no more than his being an irresponsible dropout from the world of reality—a man with the will to desert an established living at Nazareth and be off to the barren wilderness of Judea.

2 NEAR THE DEAD SEA



IN our own day we can see the cultivated fields and the orchards of the *kibbutzim* in land lying close to the Jordan River, along which Jesus the carpenter from Nazareth walked alone in January of A.D. 28, intent to hear the preaching of John the Baptist. Yet even today, where the cultivated land comes suddenly to an end, we enter a bleak and baffling region. As one drives a car through the brilliant sunlight, the only things to strike the eye are wave on wave of hemispherical hills, a vast expanse of cracked and wrinkled earth. This barren valley of the Jordan continues on until the rider finds himself in Jericho, one of the oldest cities in the world. Jericho is blessed with water springs and palm trees, but the road beyond the oasis enters the brownish wilderness of Judea, an expanse of rust-tone mountains bearing not a single tree, not a single blade of grass.

South through the lonely valley moved the solitary figure of Jesus the carpenter. He walked alone. He knew the nature of the wilderness of Judea, in which he chose to live. It might well be called the end of the earth. Bald mountains lay on the horizon line like so

many rusty skull pans. The wilderness stretched to the Dead Sea without a living creature save for the scant shrub or thornbush scattered here and there. The Dead Sea itself, in which swims not a single fish, lay wrapped in eternal silence, its lifeless surface reflecting a mirror image of the mountains of Moab where between one bare mountain and another the action of the elements had molded those precipitous cliffs that tower above the dry stream beds called "wadi."

Dreadful heat attacks the place in summer. Silence envelops the place at night, when not a creature stirs where the crags and the canyons lie crouched in the impervious gloom.

This wilderness of Judea for the Jews was a fearsome zone of terror, but it was also to them a fitting place for thinking about God, a place for being alone, a place for meditation. The wilderness also served as a place of hideout for outlaw rebels, and it eventually became a military stronghold fashioned by revolutionaries. The devoted members of the Essene sect built a monastery here, where for many years they carried on their rigorous ascetical life, aloof from oppression by the religious establishment in charge of the temple in Jerusalem. Some years after the death of Jesus, when the Jewish nation rose in rebellion against the Roman yoke, this wilderness became the nation's final military bastion. Furthermore, the idea was prevalent, in accord with prophetic passages in the Bible, that some day a prophet would emerge from this same wilderness to deliver an alert to the nation.

Three days of travel, it seems, would bring Jesus to the town of Jericho—close to the lowest point on the face of the earth, 840 feet below sea level—the city to which some 3,200 years ago the Jews eventually found their way in searching for the land of Canaan after their exodus from Egypt. According to the Book of Joshua, the Jews attacked the town and slaughtered the population brutally, putting everyone to the sword with no distinction being made for young and old or men and women. Then the Jews rebuilt the city and settled there, for the place had springs of water and groves of palm trees, in contrast to the inhospitable desert of Judea immediately behind them.

Most likely Jesus entered Jericho, from where he could see with his own eyes, not far away, the crowds of people assembled at

the bank of the Jordan River, all of them waiting to be baptized by the prophet, and where Jesus himself at length joined the crowd to gaze at the austere figure of John and listen to his words. Then Jesus too was baptized at the hand of the prophet.

This special rite called baptism was not an established rite in what can be styled the main current of Judaism—not among the Sadducees, who derived from the social class of the priestly nobility, nor among the Pharisees, whose roots were more plebian. The ones who did practice baptism, particularly as their own peculiar form of initiation, were the devotees of the Essene sect, the group who led an eremitical life here in the wilderness of Judea after having been shooed away by the mainstream sects.

Who precisely were the Essenes? The New Testament bears no mention of this segment of Judaism. The Essenes were, as I said, an exclusivist group opposed to the Sadducees and the Pharisees, who were in turn engrossed in protecting their own vested interests in both the temple itself and in a deliberative governing assembly called the Sanhedrin. The Essenes, driven off by the establishment, pursued their life of prayer and stringent mortification here at the end of the earth, on the shore of the Dead Sea, where with a vengeance they kept watch for the coming of their own Savior Messiah.

The New Testament, for whatever reason, devotes not a single line to the Essene sect, but thanks to Josephus, the Jewish historian of the Roman period, all succeeding generations have been aware of its having existed.

> On the west side of the Dead Sea . . . lives the sect of the Essenes. Being in quarantine, they are the strangest people in the world. They have no women, they keep no money, their staple food consists of dates.

Our present detailed knowledge of the Essenes comes from the dramatic discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls in 1947. In that year a shepherd boy belonging to a Bedouin group in the area was searching for a sheep gone astray from the flock, when he happened to set foot inside a cave on one of the mountainous crags near the shore of the Dead Sea in the wilderness of Judea. By sheer chance the lad stumbled upon some pottery jars, inside of which were discovered a number of manuscripts made by the Essenes. Archeologists, by

excavating, discovered then in the same neighborhood the ruins of a "monastery" or community center. The excavated site is commonly referred to now as the Qumran Monastery. From these discoveries has come our knowledge concerning the sect of the Essenes, their way of life, their organization, and the religious teachings within the Qumran community.

Scholars began at once to speculate about a possible connection between the Essenes and the religious community of John, the man from whom Jesus received baptism. The scholars urged a number of points common to John the Baptist and the Qumran community of the Essenes: the same geographical sphere of activity, the same mysticism of the desert, the same asceticism, the same predictions regarding God's judgment, and especially (by conjecture) that John had adopted his rite of baptism from the Essenes, since the Qumran community also used baptism for their initiation rite. Of course, it is too much to leap from these considerations to any positive assertion about whether John the Baptist himself was a member of the Essenes. We cannot deny, however, a heavy Essenian coloring in the character of John.

Scholars next conceived of a connection between the Essenes and Jesus himself. The Dead Sea Scrolls include writings about a leader of the Qumran group known as the Teacher of Righteousness. This Teacher of Righteousness was both founder and director of the community, and he was persecuted and put to death by the Jewish religious establishment. The representative persecutor is referred to as the Lion of Fury, and the scrolls go on to relate how the Teacher of Righteousness was sentenced to be crucified by the priest called the Lion of Fury—all reminiscent of Jesus. It is even claimed that the Qumran devotees developed an idea that their founder (again like Jesus) would rise from the dead. (There are scholars indeed who reject this account of the founder's execution and the point about resurrection.) Because of the amazing parallel between the two stories there are certain scholars like Dupont-Sommer, daring enough to proclaim that the Teacher of Righteousness and the Christ are one and the same person.

There are points of similarity also between this particular religious community and the primitive Christian community. First of all, the Qumran community spoke of themselves as "the poor," and as

"the New Covenant," appellations identical with what the early Christian community called itself. Second, both communities resembled each other in promulgating a system of common life in which the members donated all they possessed to the group as a whole. In the Qumran community, however, the common ownership of all property was of obligation, whereas with the primitive Christian Church the donation was always purely voluntary. Third, both groups made baptism the badge of their believing members, although the baptism of the Qumran community should be understood as being merely a ritual ablution which does not include the essential meaning of being born to a new life, as the term is understood in Christianity. In other words, the Essene practice of repeating one's baptism every year stands at odds with the Christian practice of receiving baptism only once, and that for life. (We also find scholars who advance a theory that Jesus and his disciples observed the Passover and other religious festivals according to the calendar followed by the Qumran community.)

At present, of course, we do not side with those whose speculations have leaped to identifying Jesus himself with the leader of Qumran (the Teacher of Righteousness), nor do we claim that Jesus' group can be identified in any way with the Qumran community. Still it is only natural for problems like the following to occur to the minds of people privileged to read the Dead Sea Scrolls now in translation: Did Jesus, at the time of which we are speaking, have direct contact of any kind with the Qumran community in the wilderness of Judea? On the supposition that Jesus did have some personal contact with the Essenes, why does the Bible avoid any mention of it?

In any event, did Jesus by going to the desert find there anything to slake the dryness of heart and assuage the starvation of spirit which were with him at Nazareth? Sometime in February of the year 28 he was baptized by John in the River Jordan, as the Gospels say. The baptism practiced by the people attached to John was no mere external rite of initiation into a community as the baptism practiced at Qumran was. John's baptism was an act of penitence, symbolizing purification of soul, in accord with the words in the Old Testament Book of Ezekiel: "I will sprinkle clean water

upon you, and you shall be clean from all your uncleanness, and from all your idols."

Jesus, after being baptized, continued for a time to live with the group, as many others were doing.

Never once did John the prophet ever claim that he himself was the Savior, the Messiah, whom some people took him to be. "I am not the Messiah," he always maintained. "In the words of the prophet Isaiah, 'I am a voice crying aloud in the wilderness, make straight the way of the Lord.' . . . But among you, though you do not know him, stands the one who is to come after me. I am not good enough to unfasten his shoes" (John 1:23-27). All through Old Testament times people had clung to the legend that before the Messiah was to appear, first would come a precursor. John beyond doubt had chosen the role of precursor.

Jesus for the rest of his life retained a feeling of affectionate respect for the fiery prophet dressed in animal skin. Renan's *Vie de Jesus* is a book that is now passe, but Renan was correct where he says that "Jesus, in spite of his own profound originality, submitted to instruction from John, at least for several weeks." As long as Jesus remained with the group, he hardly asserted himself, unobtrusively content to be in the prophet's shadow. Jesus afterward used certain turns of expression taken verbatim from the usage of John, as we see by comparing Matthew 3:7 with 12:34 and again with 23:33. Something like this might be enough to explain why certain disciples of John, after Jesus became active in his own ministry, seemed to consider the new movement to be nothing but a spin-off from theirs. Aware of how Jesus had been their master's favorite disciple, for a long time they considered him one of their own. Eventually this attitude led to a certain discord between themselves and the group that formed around Jesus.

As long as Jesus remained with the group around John the Baptist, he scarcely attracted much attention. Yet his being unassertive was not necessarily the same as agreeing to every aspect of John's community. In my own opinion the shadow of sadness in his eyes did not clear away during the time he spent in docile fellowship with John's disciples.

Jesus, however, was in total sympathy with the voice of John the Baptist when it castigated the Jewish religious establishment—

the Sadducees and the Pharisees in the holy city of Jerusalem, who had control of the temple and the Sanhedrin. The Sadducees, who sprang from the priestly aristocracy, were exploiting to the full the privileges accruing to their administering the temple, and they had lost all rapport with the common people simply by their dogged way of clinging to these hereditary religious functions. They barely managed to retain their position of privilege by their having arranged a working compromise with the Roman governor of Judea.

The Pharisees, in contrast, were in far closer rapport with the common people, yet they had a tendency to absorb themselves in often fruitless casuistry regarding the Law of Torah.

It is no wonder that the voice of John the Baptist denouncing the Jewish establishment was enough to draw the sympathy of Jesus, growing up as he had in Galilee. But the image of God that John embraced was a father-image—the image of wrath, and judgment, and punishment. It was the image of a grim, censorious deity, as he does appear under various circumstances in the Old Testament—a deity destroying whole cities for not submitting to him, or falling into a terrible rage at the sins of his own people, like a despotic father, punishing without mercy the perfidy of all human beings. John the Baptist, wearing camel's skin fastened at the waist with a leather strap, gave notice in advance concerning the wrath of this stern father-image of God: "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits that befit repentance." Such was God in the Old Testament, raging and punishing, against the backdrop of doomsday and the final judgment.

Is this the true image of God? Maybe Jesus asked himself this very question while staying with the group around John the Baptist. He had known first-hand the lives of ordinary folk in the poverty and squalor of his little town of Nazareth. He had known the stinking sweat of earning his daily bread. He understood well the inevitable frailty of human beings caught in the grind of life. He had witnessed the woes of the sick and the lame. He had some intuition that what these downtrodden people needed, in contrast to the priests and to the doctors of the Law, was something more heartening than a God of wrath, of judgment, and of punishment.

Most likely his image of God had not yet attained sharp focus even within his own heart. But at nighttime in the wilderness of

Judea, as he gazed on the twinkling stars, he could feel the idea welling up from the depths of his spirit. An image of God which differed from the image cherished by John.

> Blessed are the poor in spirit,
> for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
> Blessed are they that mourn,
> for they shall be comforted.

His heart was like a maternal womb to engender an image of God which more closely resembles a gentle mother, the image of God which he would disclose to the people on a mountain by the Lake of Galilee at a later time.

For the moment, Jesus said nothing about it. Keeping his own counsel, he followed the way of John's community and entered upon a retreat of forty days devoted to prayer and fasting in the hills close by the River Jordan. Here belongs the New Testament story of how Jesus turned away the devil's temptations. "Thereupon the Spirit sent him away into the wilderness, and there he remained for forty days tempted by Satan. . . ." (Mark 1:12-13).

Today there is a limestone-like elevation called *Mont de la Quarantaine*, which oral tradition identifies as the place of the temptation. In the words of Henri Daniel-Rops, "The Judean desert is one of the most desolate of places, where eagles soar and jackals howl. A place bereft of any feel for human life, barren landscape with nothing in it to delight the heart."

Anyone visiting the locale will quickly identify the spot. It lies not far from the excavated Qumran monastery of the Essenes. The visitor will readily agree with the words of Father Jean Daniélou: "Matthew writes that Jesus was led by the Spirit to the desert to be tempted there. Yet we have seen that the desert . . . would appear to designate the solitude of the Essenes in the setting in which we find ourselves. Moreover, the traditional locus of the temptation is on the very cliff, slightly north of Qumran, where the scrolls have been discovered."

If Daniélou's hypothesis is correct, we can find the place in the wilderness where Jesus carried on his private retreat nowhere else but in the Qumran monastery of the Essenes. Then we can spec-

ulate further that the biblical story of Jesus' being tempted by the devil was composed from the kernel of some event which occurred inside the Qumran monastery.

To repeat, the biblical authors of course do not mention even the existence of the Essene sect or the Qumran community. One reason might be that the authors of the Gospels prudently chose to omit the whole matter because this same Qumran monastery during the Jewish War, which broke out subsequently to the death of Jesus, had been used as a hiding place by the anti-Roman activists belonging to the Zealot party.

The Qumran community connected with the Essenic movement was (again to repeat) a secret society which had been banished from the holy city of Jerusalem and expelled from the mainstream of Jewish religion. The Essene votaries who pursued their way of life in this monastery looked on the establishment back in Jerusalem as men who had surrendered the essential nature of Judaism by their compromise with Rome. The votaries of Qumran were content to lie low, for the time being, yet all their dreams were of the day when under God's protection they would return to Jerusalem and there bring about the restoration of true Judaism. They had developed highly emotional messianic hopes of their own.

The Dead Sea Scrolls, discovered in 1947, include two manuscripts known as *The War Scroll* and *The Scroll of the War of the Sons of Light Against the Sons of Darkness*, both of which reveal how the sect was longing for the day to come when by force of arms they would win their right to leadership and then would wait for the world to submit en masse to the Jewish nation. The inmates of Qumran were pacifist in their personal lives, yet to the very end they aspired to the reality of an earthly "kingdom of God."

To base our judgment on what is written in the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Essenes were in fundamental opposition to the way of thinking in Jesus. First of all, the messianic savior of the Qumran sect was to be an earthly leader; second, they had no thought about saving sinners, nothing to match the thought of Jesus; and third, the Scrolls do speak of brotherly love toward other members of the sect but they say not a word about love toward anyone beyond their tight-knit group, in contrast to this one point which Jesus never ceased to inculcate.

Obviously there do exist a few superficial coincidences between the thought processes of the votaries in the Qumran monastery and the members of the later primitive Christian Church. But what is indicated by their disagreement on this one basic issue?

My own thinking goes like this: While Jesus did his spiritual exercises in solitude not far from the Qumran monastery, the monks pressed him to an ideological showdown. It might even be that the votaries of Qumran tried to recruit him for one of their own. Perhaps this youth with the aching glow in his eye drew personal attention from the religious superior and his assistants at the monastery.

If we follow the story in the Bible, the temptation that the devil presented to Jesus in the wilderness comes down to this: Pursue earthly salvation for the people, and in return I promise to give you the fullness of power on earth—all of which, couched in other words, was precisely what the Essenes in the Qumran monastery were pursuing for their own future.

The spiritual antagonism between Jesus and the Qumran community began from that moment. The picture of Jesus shaking his head to deny the blandishments of the Qumran community comes out dramatically in the biblical scene of Jesus being tempted by the devil. The leaders of the monastery urged him: "If you are the son of God. . . . " This passage shows their genuine feeling about how an earthly kingdom ("bread") was far more practical than talk about any other kind of salvation ("stone"). And then for the first time they unveiled to Jesus their ultimate concern. saying: "All this dominion will I give to you, and the glory that goes with it." Such was the dream they dreamed in Qumran, a dream of the power and the glory to be theirs when they would someday wrest control of the temple in Jerusalem from the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Such were the blandishments to which Jesus promptly shook his head in firm refusal. He found himself incapable of falling in with their way of thinking.

So much for the first painful testing of Jesus. But thanks to the ordeal, he came to discover little by little what it was that he was seeking, and to become accordingly more aware of his own identity. In shaking his head to their inducements, he came to recognize the way which he himself would have to follow.

So ended the forty days of prayer and fasting. When he left the Qumran monastery to return to the bank of the Jordan River and to

his association with John the Baptist, the external appearance of Jesus gave little sign of any change, but within himself he had undergone a definitive change.

He had learned what was wanting to the wilderness of Judea and to the men who resorted there—the wilderness of Judea, the brown wasteland of no living creatures save here and there a scanty shrub or thornbush; the barren hills like so many rusty human skulls on the horizon line; the stagnant face of the Dead Sea. What the wilderness failed to give to the men who dwelt there was tenderheartedness. What was wanting to the desert was love. The Qumran group and John's group both preached repentance and the wrath of God. They said nothing concerning love. In gazing at the macabre Dead Sea and the wilderness of Judea, Jesus no doubt recalled the loveliness of springtime back in Galilee. No doubt he also recalled the wretched conditions of life for the people whom he knew there. Does God exist, he asked himself, only to be angry with and to punish lives like theirs? Is it not the very nature of God to pour out his love on these pitiable people? The inhospitable Dead Sea and the barren mountains provided for the Qumran group and for John's group nothing but the image of an outraged deity for them to fear. But Jesus took the opposite view, laying claim to an image of the God of love who comes himself to experience the sorrows of humankind.

Jesus spoke yet to no one about his thinking. A text in the Gospel of John, more than any text in the Synoptic Gospels, clearly shows why, saying that "Jesus for his part would not trust himself to them"—not even to the Baptist's followers (John 2:34).

3 PERILOUS BEGINNINGS



BACK in Jerusalem the Judaic establishment had good reason not to close its eyes to the extraordinary goings-on in the wilderness of Judea. When the Sadducees and Pharisees, priests and scribes, beheld John's baptismal movement drawing the hearts of the people, they were almost panicky in coming to realize that its momentum could no longer be ignored. What they feared more than anything was the threat of an ugly anti-Roman rebellion breaking out in Judea. If any seditious rioting should occur, Pilate, the governor of Judea, would immediately suppress it, but at the same time, in fixing responsibility, he might very well revoke for them those rights invested in the Jewish Sanhedrin, which Rome had recognized exclusively in favor of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. This more than anything else is precisely what alarmed them.

Their fears were not unreasonable. Anti-Roman sentiment was identical with the Jewish spirit of independence, and for the crowds who gathered around John the Baptist the sentiment came also to an easy blend with their religious fervor. I shall be treating this point