

## I. Jesus Is The Message

The Church in Great Britain accepts all too easily the millions of pounds which go each year to the making of religious broadcasts on both BBC and ITV channels. The very milieu in which these present lectures are being delivered is in itself an attempt by the Publicity Committee of the Church of Scotland to take the whole matter much more seriously. Here we are, in Aberdeen, within the most modern University Television Centre in Britain, gathered in its largest studio, surrounded by fully colourized cameras, powerful lighting and all the forbidding impedimenta of television itself. As I speak, a video-tape recording machine is making a permanent record of what I am saying so that others may share in these lectures. Our audience consists of the spokesmen and women of the Committees of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland together with divinity students and some others who have shown deep interest in communicating the Gospel through the electronic media. We are, all of us, living together in this ancient university, sharing not only these lectures, but instruction on the media imparted by professionals from press, television and radio. Morning and evening we gather in the lovely mediaeval chapel under the Crown of Christ the King, where, for nigh on five hundred years, student generations and their teachers have worshipped that King who is the Way, the Truth, the Life. A good mix, this blend of the ancient and the modern.

When, five years after graduation, I was invited back to preach in King's College Chapel, I was terrified by the thought, even as, in similar terms, the delivery of these lectures terrifies me. I sought the advice of the Principal, that most human of Vice-Chancellors, Sir William Hamilton Fyfe. How could I possibly say anything of value before such a critical university audience?

'Remember two things,' said Sir William. 'First, don't say anything in the pulpit that you do not know for a fact to be true. Secondly, don't argue with the agnostics. They're not there anyway. They're either on the golf-course or hill-walking in Deeside!' Then he added, 'The professors who are in Chapel are there to worship God and to hear a word from him to recreate them for a new week.'

It is my intention to attempt to carry out Sir William's advice, albeit thirty-five years later and after a lifetime which has underlined its basic truths.

There are few religious fields in which there is more speculation than that of religious broadcasting. Particularly by the religiously-inclined. All such know dogmatically what sort of religious programmes they want to see and hear. 'Why don't you hit them over the head with the Gospel?' demanded a former Moderator of our General Assembly as we concluded a searching series in which we had attempted to tease out the problems of the seeking agnostic. I have attended conferences on broadcasting from Auckland and Sydney to Nairobi and Frankfurt, where the profundity of the arguments has been marvellous to hear. 'In' people talking to themselves. Some saying, as Penry Jones of both the ITV and BBC has said, 'There is no such thing as Religious Television; all television is religious.' And there is a Biblical sense in which he is right. Others maintaining that religious television is terrified at the thought of communicating a direct word from God to the viewer in his home. 'The Medium is the Message!' proclaims Marshall McLuhan, while John Reith, the master-architect of all public service broadcasting, has written that religious broadcasting is probably the most ineffectual and inefficient of all broadcasting activities. There is not much literature on the subject, possibly because those who have been and are involved actively in the media are constantly under the peculiar pressures which they generate, and writing objectively or even subjectively is, for most of us, an unfulfilled promise.

In 1966 we in BBC-Scotland were invited by the World Association for Christian Broadcasting to mount a Conference in Glasgow on the theme of 'The Word of God' as reflected through television

programmes. For a week, brilliant producers from a score of television companies played back to the gathering the programmes they had brought. Their best productions, let it be said, but the number of them which were germane to the conference-theme was small indeed. The Chaplain at that Conference was the Very Reverend Dr A. C. Craig—Archie Craig, as all Scots churchmen call him. When it was over, he wrote some thought-provoking words on what he had seen. This is what he said:

‘With the authority of expert practitioners the producers discussed the grammar and syntax of the great new language of television. Each of the participating countries presented a sample programme of its best achievement in religious broadcasting. The ingenuities of presentation were captivating, the enthusiasm of the sponsors impressive, and the flavour of international competition divertingly reminiscent of the Olympic Games. One could not but be struck by the great advances obviously made in the whole field. Yet the main impression I carried away concerned these less than a certain nagging sense of incoherence in the broadcasts taken as a whole, and now and again a feeling of disappointment at the trifling religious content of some technically elaborate and grammatically impeccable presentation.’

In my opinion, this is a relevant and a penetrating comment by one of the great souls of the twentieth-century Scottish Church, the brilliance of whose mind matches the warm depths of his heart. His verdict is one I echo after twenty years of such conferences.

So you see, The Message becomes all-important and central to what we have to say on the media. But nevertheless we must pay attention, at least, to the five basic principles of communication and examine them, in turn, closely, if we are to understand fully how to get The Message across, and that with respect for both the media and those who listen and watch, and who, incidentally, tend to get left out of the discussion at the conferences!

First, and most important of all, there is The Message itself, or in our Christianity where it is clothed in flesh, The Message *Himself*, for Christ is both Message and Messenger. Our second element

of communication concerns the communicators, those who get The Message across. Thirdly, there are the means of communication, in our case radio and television. We must look at them and at their nature and study them closely. In the fourth place, the often forgotten place, there is the viewer/listener, sitting in his own home at his fireside, in as wide a variety of mental attitudes as there are people in God's world. Lastly there is the response—or lack of it—which The Message evokes, in and through the means used by the communicators. Each of these elements requires a lecture in itself, although not necessarily in the order in which I have outlined them.

What is The Message—the Gospel—the Good News which we seek to get across? Let me introduce you to my friend, John; my friend of forty years ago in this university, and over the years until he recently left this world for the next.

My friend John was a wild, wild medical student. He lived life to the full, and, when in his cups, the student-body avoided his fierce-eyed, aggressive domination of every social occasion. Yet, whatever his frustrations, there was also a tremendous sense of responsibility, as his Presidency of the Union and senior rank in the OTC demonstrated. Ours was an unusual friendship for we shared little except an immense regard for each other. Indeed, as the years went by, I married him to his lovely bride, to the accompaniment, by the way, of RAF planes droning overhead to the war that Chamberlain's Munich postponed. I baptized his children, one by one. Then, as so often happens with student-friends, we drifted apart.

A few Christmases ago, a card came in from his wife, Hilda. It said, quite simply, 'Come and see us. John's been ill.' Very ill indeed, it transpired. A stroke had left him with little movement up one side. But the old spirit was there, the eyes as fierce and as rebellious as ever. We talked and chaffed, light-heartedly. Oh, he'd get by all right! One-armed men had learned to drive cars before now, an automatic gear-change was all he required. His medical practice? Well, it was now far too large anyway. He'd get an eager young assistant and simply issue the orders and take things easy for a change.

As I was leaving him, I saw a Bible by his chair. I looked at it and I looked at him. 'Don't tell me *you've* started reading the Bible in your old age!' I said, rather astonished that the religion he had always affected to despise in his younger days seemed so near now. 'Anyone can read the Bible, can't he?' was his aggressive reply. 'Surely! How are you getting on with it?' 'Terrible!' he said, 'I'm bogged down about a third of the way through the Old Testament!' I looked at him in amazement. 'For any sake, John! Start with the *New Testament*! Read a Gospel. Take St Luke's—he was a doctor, you know.' And having given the advice so lightly, I made my way home, wondering what on earth he would make of the Nativity stories, the miracles and the Resurrection.

The next time I entered his room, he was nearly out of his chair the moment Hilda announced my name. He snatched up his Bible in his good hand and tapped it awkwardly with the other. 'Here!' he said, with an expression of great urgency, 'Here! This fella Jesus knew what he was talking about!' And out of John poured the most extraordinary confession I have ever listened to. All his life, he said, he had been driven by an overwhelming ego. He had to be top dog, as he put it, in everything, from the Union and the OTC, through the Masons to the local golf club. The biggest practice, the biggest car, the biggest everything in the district. 'And look where it's got me! Into this chair, a mess of a man who'll never be the same again. Oh, yes! I've gained the whole world all right; but I've lost my soul.' Then he added, 'If only I'd read what Jesus says about human nature years ago, I wouldn't be sitting helpless here!'

Not long afterwards we buried John and the streets of the little West of Scotland town were lined by its citizens while another four hundred of them waited at the cemetery. For no matter how he rated himself in his last few months, he was truly a beloved physician, especially by the poor and needy. A late conversion, if you like, but one of the most meaningful turnings from death into life that I have ever seen.

There is an old prayer from the Gregorian Sacramentary which says:

‘Grant us, O Father, the grace to see ourselves as Thou seest us; and save us from all unwillingness to know our infirmities.’

But this is precisely what we do not want to do, for the gospel of Modern Man says that aggression and violence are the ways through which you get what you want, personally, politically and socially. It is my profound conviction that what Christ's folk in Scotland, His Kirk, His Body, living and vital set amongst men, need above all things else, is to see Jesus again, the whole Jesus. To hear him speaking to them, as he did to John. In common with many others across the world, we have become idolators, we worship a God, a Jesus especially of our own making, created in the image of our aspirations, our desires, and our dreams. ‘Who do you say I am?’ is his eternal question. It is in the answers that we are seeking to give that our idolatry is revealed. For it is no longer true that young people are apathetic towards religion and the supernatural, as they were in the days of my youth. Indeed if anyone should be depressed about the current religious situation in Britain today, it is not so much those who believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of Heaven and Earth, but rather it is the humanists and rationalists whose cold, analytical non-supernatural reasoning lies in ruins all around them. Religion will wither away, they used to proclaim, when mankind grows up and comes of age; when scientific man has so progressed that he becomes master of his environment and of himself. Scientific man has progressed enormously in the past two decades: ‘Mankind,’ as Field-Marshal Jan Smuts said in a prophetic phrase, ‘is on the march again!’ Never has there been such a mounting explosion of technology and scientific discovery both on earth and in the universe as we are witnessing all around us. Yet the more we know about man, the more baffling he becomes. Instead of obediently assenting to the scientific laws which emerge from computers which spell out the very pulses of his life, the slightest tremors of his brain, man insists on being more irrational, more violent, yes, more lost, than he has been for a score of centuries. Instead of religion and the supernatural withering away, it appears to have a greater hold upon the young—but not only the young—than ever before in living

memory. On every hand there is a seeking out of those powers, both beneficent and malign, which lie behind the serene, outward natures of things. The most popular column in many a daily paper, the one to which readers instinctively turn first, is 'What the Stars Foretell'; for astrology, that ancient science, which, let us be honest, led Wise Men to Bethlehem's Stable, once again fascinates and disturbs apparently sane and rational people. The occult draws the fearful attention of the young and some go mad and some take their lives under its sway. One of the foulest creations of the film world, which has shown far more than its share of obscenity in recent years, deals with these awful realities and packs in the young who are sick, literally, at the sight of it, who swoon, who become deeply disturbed by awful images which they cannot thrust out of their minds so that they too need an exorcist.

It is almost as if young and old alike are saying, defiantly, in the face of the massive computerized advance of scientific knowledge which spills over into planets other than earth: 'This is not enough! There is more to living and to the universe in which we live, than carefully worked out scientific formula—and much, much more to man himself. There is another world of the spirit behind the outward appearance of things.'

Yet a situation full of gloom for the rationalist is not exactly bright with encouragement for the Christian Church, certainly not for that small part of it which lives amidst the ruins of the Christian West. For many who seek this knowledge of the other world, are doing so quite outside her ranks. The young especially seem to be as fascinated by eastern mysticism as by the religion of Jesus. And when they do turn to study Christianity, there is little evidence of their commitment to the stern demands of a Jesus who says, 'If any man will come after me, let him leave self behind. Day after day, he must take up his cross and come with me.' Apart from an honourable but exceedingly small few, the great majority are seeking to abstract from the religion of Jesus that which appeals to their inclinations and their moods. They desire LOVE above all things else and Peace and Serenity. And often, they seek them through the false gods of drugs and alcohol and misused sex.

Here in King's College Chapel, Aberdeen, just forty years ago, there was unveiled a stained-glass window at the heart of its east end. It was created and fashioned by Douglas Strachan, prince of twentieth-century Scottish artists in glass. Its subject is 'Christus Triumphans et Regnans', Christ triumphing and reigning from the Cross. The face of Jesus is strong, young and serene. His arms are indeed stretched out to match the arms of the cross but in blessing as much as in suffering. There is a crown upon his head, for Resurrection is upon him. 'When I survey the wondrous cross,' originally wrote Isaac Watts, 'on which the *young* Prince of Glory died.' And it was the youth and the vigour of this fearless Jesus which so impressed us. Why, he was our contemporary, for instead of the pale, emaciated, bearded face of so many of the Victorian windows, this Jesus was clean-shaven, beardless like our generation. This was *our* Jesus and we felt we understood him as he would understand us.

Forty years on, no doubt the modern student-generation looks curiously upon that beardless face and feels it to be as much out of touch with them as were the Victorian stained-glass Christs to us. For even Douglas Strachan, with all his skills and insights, had made a Christ in our own image, a contemporary Christ, not a timeless and all-sufficient Christ, even if the sheer art of his creation may still speak to those who have eyes to see.

This too is the fashion of our day. Two able young men, judging the mood of their generation, despite their personal agnosticism, create the Pop Opera, *Jesus Christ Superstar* which takes in three million pounds in the process. There is much to admire in their often moving creation, particularly in lyrics and music, but it was significant that even the secular critics, when the play was first produced on the London stage, found Judas Iscariot a more impressive figure than Jesus, while also marking that the climax was the tragedy of Good Friday with no sight of the Easter story. With all the reverence and understanding that they could summon, the authors presented to us *their* Jesus, created according to *their* insights. This pattern is being repeated many times in 'Rock Operas', folk songs, and the curious world of the pop music industry whose mandarins certainly know what will sell to

their largely teenage public. *Godspell* was in some respects a more successful attempt to see Jesus through modern eyes, but still the central Christ was a cheerful, Chaplinesque clown, his short life compounded of the laughter and tears of that traditional character. Sydney Carter's rollicking folk-song, *Lord of the Dance*, makes another striking emphasis, and so it goes on. Here is evidence a-plenty of the fascination of the Jesus of History and indeed, of the imagination, of the ways in which men seek to present what they find in him and, more often than not, what they want to find in him. But he is much more than a folk-hero—*their god is too small!*

One of the odd paradoxes of our time is that, in an increasingly violent age, there is a radical section of our society which one might describe as 'aggressively compassionate'. Many of them are agnostic, some are Christian. Jesus is taken as identifying himself, not only with the needy and the underprivileged—that, after all, is the point of his Parable of the Last Judgement—not only with the undernourished and often starving two-thirds of the world's population, but also with those who fight for them with the weapons of revolt and revolution. For example, a distinguished Christian missionary affirms that if Jesus came to our world today he would come as a black guerrilla leader or freedom fighter, much in the pattern of a religious Ché Guevara. However laudable the intentions of such crystal-gazing, such an extraordinary identification seems, to me at least, to be not only far from the truth but a plain distortion of the Gospel and Incarnation of Jesus Christ. For if ever a man had an opportunity to identify himself with the freedom-fighters of his day, for leading revolt against the heavy hand of the conqueror, it was surely Jesus. Before he was properly into his 'teens, 10,000 crosses throughout Israel showed the strength and the tragedy of Jewish revolt. Many indeed, especially in the early days of his ministry, believed that he was come to lead the Freedom Movement which was to cast off the chains of the oppressor. This is simply another illustration of our idolatry. Whether radical or Communist, whether conservative in outlook, or liberal, political men and women seek to claim his authority as an enormous and indeed an unanswerable support, for their

policies. And once more, clearly this will not do; for once again their god is too small.

The fiercest in-fighting of all, as the protagonists seek to claim his authority, is, of course, amongst the theologians and the Biblical scholars. They seek to present, in support of their theories, often arrived at as a result of immense erudition wedded to lifelong research, every kind of Jesus, from a magical Figure of Power, to a weak and faltering 'man for others', powerless in a secular society. A vast, continuing argument goes on amongst them about what we can believe concerning Jesus of Nazareth; about what he said and did; equally about what he did not say and did not do; about the miraculous—or its total absence—from Bethlehem to the Mount of Olives. No other life in the history of man has been the subject of such wide-ranging research, speculation, and, indeed, imagination. Accordingly, as a result of their scholarship, their theories, their personal experience (or lack of it), not to mention their psychological and sociological outlook, a score of differing and confusing Christs are offered from the bookshelves of Theology. Admittedly the effects of all this are to be seen in what the Pulpit preaches rather than in what the Pew believes, for the common man still holds to the straight-forward Jesus of the Gospel narrative and tends to call down a plague on all their theological houses. During the years which followed the demythologizing debate amongst the scholars and the subsequent 'Honest to God' discussion, we observed, in BBC-Scotland, a strong reluctance on the part of our minister-broadcasters to preach about the Person or Life and Works of Jesus. In a confusing world, there was an equally strong and positive reaction from the ordinary listener and viewer when anyone had the courage so to preach.

The truth is that in Scotland we have worshipped overmuch at the shrine of the theologian, especially if he be a genuine intellectual into the bargain. There are saintly theologians with both feet firmly placed upon the rock of Christ's foundation, but somehow or other nothing daunts the average Scottish minister more than that he be considered inadequate in his theological utterances, not up with the best thinking, whatever stage that may have reached. Probably more than any other single factor, it is this attitude which

gets in the way of his communication to that mythical character, the man in the pew, who nowadays is more likely to be the woman in the pew.

Recently, when taking a service in a well-filled Glasgow kirk, I noticed that there were no children present. So I decided not to give a Children's Address, that peculiar invention beloved by parents and older people and generally hated by ministers except that small number of them who find splendid, extrovert, expression through its medium. Then, as I was on the point of telling the congregation why I proposed to omit the Children's Address, I noticed a couple of guilty-looking late-comers. So I related my hesitations to the congregation and then proceeded with the word for the children. After the service, an elder came to the vestry. 'I'm glad you spoke to the children,' he said. 'You see' (here tapping his chest) 'I'm a child. Many a Sunday I understand the children's piece far better than the minister's carefully worked-out sermon.' And he was a headmaster by profession. Ministers all over Scotland, and, indeed, the world, will tell you ruefully of how they have sweated blood over some sermon of profound and important theological significance, yet after their epic work it was the throw-away Children's Address which drew the comments from the faithful. So they dismiss their flock as being theologically illiterate. Of course they are just that! It is the best part of a hundred years since Scots were raised on the Shorter Catechism. There has been little if any, systematic theological teaching anywhere in the land, in school, in pulpit, in Sunday School, for as long as most of us can remember.

The tragedy is that the six years the average minister spends in the university and college atmosphere condition him towards the theological/intellectual approach, while something dangerously like academic snobbery inhibits him from launching forth in straightforward, simple terms. Sound theology is a profound and necessary subject, the proper foundation for both preaching and pastoral work. But not enough time is spent, so it would seem to me, in breaking it down into non-technical and human language such as, for example, Jesus uses in his teaching. The Parable of the Prodigal Son is simply and movingly expressed. Those who

hear it or read it are in no doubt about what it is saying, whether they occupy a Chair of Moral Philosophy or simply sweep up the classroom after the students are gone. Such is the ideal communication of profound truth. Churchmen, whether in the classroom or the pulpit, should work a lot harder at it.

In these days of the specialist, the methods of recruitment for teachers in the theological faculties seem to encourage obscurantism. Such are the pressures of competition, that the able, young theologian must spend years of academic study if he is to reach the necessary standards. So we find him leaving college with Firsts both in Arts and Divinity, proceeding to a Doctorate, preferably in Germany. After ten long years of such preparation, he wins the coveted Theological Lectureship hands down over his equally brilliant contemporary who also took Firsts in Arts and Divinity but who has spent the last five years sweating it out amongst the joys, the sorrows, the problems, the frustrations and the deep rewards of the parish ministry, at the same time, incidentally, trying very hard indeed to keep up with the developing theological trends of the decade. The MA, BD, PhD, wins the job; but unless he happens to be a very human being, the parish minister would become the better teacher of Christ's men and women.

The cold, dispassionate growth of 'Secular Christianity', of the 'God is Dead' movement (now, it would appear, largely deceased itself), even of the 'man for others' protagonists, has given rise, over the years, to a loss of nerve on the part of many well-educated ministers who have always respected the mental and academic gifts, with a corresponding reaction away towards a more dynamic form of Christianity by others from the evangelistic and charismatic schools of thought and belief. It is difficult to assess where truth lies; each generation, indeed each thinking Christian, must seek it out for himself. Or rather, in Christian terms, each of us must expose ourselves to the *total* Jesus of the Gospels, as did my friend John. This is the way to Christ's truth. In any case, we should always beware of the solutions of the intellectuals, or at least examine them most carefully, for the Gospel narrative reveals that Jesus was constantly in confrontation with the intellectuals of his day, from the very beginning of his ministry,

insisting that the *whole* man must be devoted to God—mind, yes; but heart and soul equally.

Yet, 'Canst thou by searching find out God?' This is the question the whole Bible poses and not simply the daunting one put to Job in the midst of his miseries. For the Bible, and that Christian Faith which is at its heart, both show us a Religion of Revelation. We do not, at the end of our search, 'find Jesus'; he finds us. He reveals himself to us at the point of our deepest need, indeed of our deepest despair, as he did to my friend John.

This is what is ultimately important for us; this was the discovery which he made when he exposed himself to the truth about Jesus, as contained in the Gospel narrative. In the authority of Christ's words and deeds, he saw for the first time, his own human condition and his need for forgiveness and new life. This is the costliest of all the discoveries about Jesus. But it is the only one in which there is the Life and Health and Joy of which our Faith so abundantly speaks and sings.

It is our tragedy within the Church, that when the world of men around us seems to be full of seekers-after-religious-truth, or modern men in deep and awful need, we seem to have little to say to them. Oh! yes, we have our Christianity all right to which we vaguely point them, but it is chiefly a 'Churchianity' which they have already rejected. We have no dynamic at the centre of our lives. We mouth and sing all those extraordinary Christian truths about new life and resurrection and the power of the Holy Spirit; sometimes indeed in an inspired moment, we may glimpse them. But there is little sign of the Christian Church in our land being possessed by a shattering, dynamic spirit which makes all men look at her with wonder and say, either, 'God is in the midst of them' or 'They are drunk with new wine'. We have hidden our Jesus behind layer upon layer of conventionalism and ecclesiasticalism. My friend John, like many of our contemporaries, had no time for the kirk, but all the time in the world for Jesus. Like him, we must take a completely fresh look at Jesus as if we had never seen him before. What is even more important, we must see him *whole*, we must see the *total* Jesus. We must stop seeing him as the hero of this small Bible incident, the healer of that sick

man, or the teller of that other human story. For we fragment him, we too make him too small. This Jesus of our New Testament lessons in Church, of our sermon texts and our wise sayings is merely tantalizing in his smallness. Above everything else he lacks what one might call an overriding *cosmic* authority.

If we turn, like John, to a Gospel, and read it through, not in a fragmented way, but whole, seeking to see this total Jesus, what emerges for us? Incidentally we badly need some scholar of modern insight to provide us with an accurate *harmony* of the whole Gospel narrative, set out fully, in chronological order, so that one can see this whole picture at a reading, instead of skipping here to Mark and there to Luke, and so on. We dwell too much on single Gospel stories or passages. These are what normally constitute the 'Second Lesson' in most Churches, and subsequently the theme of the sermon. If a preacher uses the full teaching of the Christian Year, he will at least cover the total Gospel narrative (and its doctrines) once a year. But the impression conveyed to the pew Sunday by Sunday is a fragmented one to which we have referred. The 'Whole Jesus' is a more impressive and indeed powerful figure in every way.

When we give our minds to the full Gospel story, several characteristics emerge which are overwhelming in their impact. Right at the beginning of Jesus' ministry his *Authority* emerges and continues until Ascension Day. When he preaches his first sermon in that most difficult of all places, his local church at Nazareth, he reads the marvellous passage from Isaiah about the good news for the poor, release for captives and prisoners, the recovery of sight for the blind, victims broken by life and cruel men going free, and then adds with a supreme confidence: 'Today, in your very hearing, this text has come true.' In many a subsequent sermon, he tells his hearers that, while such-and-such was their age-long custom, or this-and-this were the teachings of their devout and learned instructors, nevertheless, 'But *I* say unto you!' Thus he overrides the authority of their traditions and their teachers without the slightest hesitation. Equally he exercises an individual authority when he goes to hard-working fishermen, in the very act of their labours, and says, simply: 'Follow me!' This they

do, leaving fish, nets, boats, livelihood and home. Even more remarkable is the response of Matthew, the tax-gatherer Quisling, to the same imperious bidding.

When thousands haunt him by seaside or mountainside, seeking healing for their sick and hope for themselves, it is this innate authority that draws them. From the start of his ministry to its bitter end and beyond, in the heat of all his confrontations with the authorities of Church and State, he debates with them, not even as their equal, but from the superior position of one who knows his arguments are not speculation but truth. Even in the trials which brought him to Calvary, it is his accusers and judges who themselves appear to be on trial. And the last astonishing verdict on him is that of a hardened Roman soldier who had commanded the execution squad.

Just the same, I doubt if even these massive displays of authority were what laid hold upon my friend John. It was Jesus saying, as he does in the Beatitudes, 'You're a truly happy man if you've no pride or arrogance; if you don't stand upon your dignity nor insist on your rights. It's the merciful person who strives with every nerve to make peace in this world that finds peace.' The Jesus who confronted John was the Jesus who caused the Samaritan woman to say to her friends: 'Come and see a man who has told me everything I ever did.' It is this uncomfortable authority of Jesus which sees right through the shams we build up to protect ourselves from the world and its tensions. For this authority cuts us down to size and promotes the Peter-like reaction of 'Depart from me for I am a sinful man, O Lord!' In his presence we suddenly become aware of our weaknesses and imperfections. We *know* we are not good enough; and we equally know that it is these imperfections which surround our lives with their depressions and unhappiness.

We cannot dismiss Christ's authority in all these spheres, this authority which made the common man seek him out to listen and to be healed, without falsifying the Gospel narrative. So much the worse if we are seeking to make Jesus, God, in our own image, according to our own aspirations and desires; for that quest simply blinds us to the truth about ourselves.

At the point at which we come under the judgement of Christ's authority, the harshness of our dis-ease is made at least more bearable by his *Compassion*. Indeed his Authority, his Judgement and his Compassion are inextricably mixed up together. The rich young man's refusal to take up his challenge saddens him, for he loved him, with all his attractiveness and potential. Time and time again, in the face of fierce opposition, his compassion prompts him to heal a wide variety of sufferers in the synagogue, on the Sabbath Day. When crowds of people follow him, despite his attempts to avoid them as he sought rest from his unremitting labours, he at once 'welcomes them all'. Indeed he is distressed on their account because they appear to be helpless and bewildered, in the classic phrase, 'sheep without a shepherd'. Whether with an individual blind man, or paralytic or leper, whether with a vast horde of ordinary, troublesome folk, carrying their sick relatives and friends, Jesus' reaction is always the same. He helps them and heals them.

Thus his compassion always issues forth in action, his deeds matching his words. A high proportion of the Gospel narrative is concerned with his *healing*, his making of men new in their bodies, as in their minds and their spirits too. This dimension of healing we cannot explain away nor rationalize without doing serious injury to the 'Total Jesus' of the Gospels. In our day there has been a revived interest in Divine Healing right across the world, particularly in those emerging countries where a dynamic form of Pentecostalism is the dominating form of Evangelism. Here in Scotland, although in the last decade Pentecostalism is evidently increasing both in the Established Church and among the smaller sectarians, the emphasis has come from two quite different directions.

Firstly, just after World War II, the saintly Cameron Peddie of the Gorbals drew around him a group of ministers who came to practise healing as part of their Ordination Vows, some of them continuing in that tradition to this day. But, once more, it was the 'Total Christ' who laid hold on Peddie. When he attained the twenty-fifth anniversary of his Ordination, he read, like my friend John, right through the Gospels to see, as he told

me, 'how I matched up'. He concluded he had been a faithful preacher, pastor and teacher, according to his lights. But he had never attempted to heal. Yet as he saw it, Christ had laid this upon him. So for two, long years he prayed daily and at length that he might be given this gift—and one day it came. Peddie's remarkable success in this controversial sphere was largely due, I believe, to his own saintliness; there were no blockages in the channel of communication between himself and his Master; the power flowed through him, much as it had done in Jesus' day.

In Iona, under George MacLeod's leadership, Divine Healing was recaptured in the normal life and work of the Iona Community and on from there to their parishes on the mainland. Again the emphasis was on the Whole Jesus. This time, however, while the leader of worship would lay hands upon the sick or needy, he was strongly supported by the worshipping community around him. Indeed one of the most impressive services of this nature I have ever witnessed was carried out in an Iona parish, entirely by lay men and women in the heart of their Christian community.

The *fearlessness* of Jesus has already been evident in both his authority and in his compassionate healing. He takes on the might of both the religious and the academic establishment of Israel, single-handed. Whether in some synagogue, healing on the Sabbath Day, or in open confrontation within the very portals of establishment, the temple itself, he states his case and does his deeds without the slightest deferring to ecclesiastical authorities. There are, admittedly, one or two occasions when he avoids confrontation because 'My time is not yet come', but they in no way detract from his single-minded as well as single-handed attacks upon the religious leaders of his people. He unleashes his fury upon them because he believes they are keeping the Grace of God from ordinary men and women in their need, because their obscurantism and their legalism has built up an enormous barrier that shuts out God. Some of his attacks make incredible reading when we remember that he was a lone, untutored carpenter from a hill village taking on the might of scholarship, tradition, and, if we are honest, a deal of so-called pious living too.

His attacks and his vehemence both have within them clues to

the ultimate nature of his communication as well as its reception by people in need. In the most devastating of them all, he likens the godly leaders of his society to unmarked graves over which men walk without knowing the corruption which festers under their feet. To follow throughout the Gospels this strand of his attack against iniquity in high places is to understand the increasing fierceness and unrelenting vigour of the counter-attack which it inspired amongst his target-men. In human terms, it would have been astonishing if they had not reacted in this way. For it became an increasing conviction with them all, scribes, Pharisees, priestly class, that this young heretic was a danger to the Faith of their Fathers, and the sooner they destroyed him the better. They were quite right about that, at least about the threat to the Faith of their Fathers as they interpreted it. In some ways the astonishing thing is that Jesus lasted so long. Three years was an extraordinary period in which to allow him to carry on with his sedition. The wonder is that he wasn't found, long before that, with a knife in his back or his skull smashed in on some lonely road.

The high-point of the drama of confrontation is, of course, worked out in the last week of his life, that week which we call Holy Week. We see it all there. From his Palm Sunday Entry onwards, his Authority is always there but quite different in quality from the authority of those who finally laid him upon the Cross. Yet at the end of the week, after priestly men of power and the ultimate secular power of Rome itself through Pontius Pilate have worked their wills upon him, it becomes clear as crystal that *he* had been the Judge of them all; that his authority, not of this world, was of the kind that death can never destroy because it has the ultimate validity of the hearts of men. The centurion who executed him so painfully and so slowly, gave the one true verdict which every honest man must utter.

This sense of *Judgement* is woven through a great deal of his teachings. Some of it so apocalyptic in tone and content, that many teachers and preachers are glad to forget that it is there. But once more it is a vital part of the Total Christ. It is too easy to say that of course it applies to his own people, the Jews, at that point in time, and in the devastating years of disaster to his people

within half a century of his death. For amongst the warnings of wars and rumours of wars, of awesome portents in the sky, of stricken fig-trees and foolish virgins, there is that terrifying Parable of the Last Judgement in which Jesus identifies himself with the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the prisoner and the sick. 'I am in these afflicted and suffering ones,' he says to us all. 'If you turn aside from them, you turn aside from me. And so you will go away into eternal punishment.' In an age when Christians believed more literally in the words of Scripture than we do, those words drove many a troubled Christian conscience down into the most wretched of slums, amongst the foulest of diseases, and far beyond the seas to starving and imprisoned men, women and children. The only reward they were seeking was that, somehow, they could come to believe that they were doing these services, like Mother Theresa of Calcutta in our day, to the Lord Jesus himself.

Thus to the personal judgement which fell upon my friend John, there is added this judgement which is almost of a cosmic nature. At the heart of the universe the ultimate secret way of living is the way of self-giving love, whether the objects of that love respond or use it for mockery and derision. It is here, says Jesus, that you must find your true self. You want to be like me, to follow me? Then you must leave self behind. Day after day you must take up the cross *and come with me!* Whoever cares for his own safety is lost; but if a man will let himself be lost for my sake, that man is safe.'

Once, years ago, when on a BBC Management Course, we were allowed to have special guests to dinner. They came from a wide range of occupations, from the Army to the Arts. They spoke to us, and, after the meal, we sat with them and talked about life generally and their lives in particular. One was the famous musician, Yehudi Menuhin. It was one of those stupid questions which produced the most profound reply from Yehudi. 'I don't suppose you have to practise your scales on the fiddle any more!' said one of our more bull-headed types. Our guest threw back his head and roared with laughter. 'Practise!' he said. 'Of course I must practise! Like Paderewski of old, if I stop for a day, I know. If I stop for a week, my friends know. Always, every

day, I must practise—four, five, six hours a day; sometimes longer before some great concert.’ That moving answer seemed to me to be a brilliant example of taking up a cross day after day; of throwing overboard one’s own safety, one’s natural desires in devoted self-discipline in order that gifts and talents might be perfected and kept that way, that a multitude of mankind might be served with joy and with the enrichment of that music which speaks right into the heart of man.

‘Make me a captive, Lord,’ wrote the blind Matheson, ‘and then I shall be free.’ The Menuhins of this world, the Olympic athletes too in another sphere, all those who totally dedicate themselves to a cause, experience this freedom, this release which is the only *fulfilled* way in which to live. So at the heart of Jesus’ invitation there lies a universal truth which people of great dedication are always discovering. Many a man and woman can point to the miracle of their conversion, their turning from the way of their natural loves and hates, into the way of self-giving, first to Jesus and then to all men, as the beginning of true happiness, that blessed state of which the Beatitudes all speak.

There is a clear-cut, shattering contrast here between the way in which western man approaches his pursuit of happiness and the way which Jesus advocates. The good life in our society has increasingly become the life in which we are surrounded from the cradle to the grave, in sickness and in health, with whatever makes living easier for us, with whatever cushions us against any kind of adversity. And in the attainment of these benefits, all manner of men and women, from coal miners and bus drivers to nurses, teachers and consultants, will engage in continuous and often bitter warfare against the authorities in whose hands lie the granting of bigger and better materialistic benefits. Sadly, too, to the exclusion of the welfare of those whom their vocation or profession serves.

Jesus says, almost naïvely in terms of the way in which modern man looks at his daily living, happiness has little to do with possessions in the material sense. ‘A man’s life,’ he insists, ‘consisteth not in the abundance of the things he possesses’, or more pointedly, as the NEB has it, ‘Be on your guard against greed of every kind,

for even when a man has more than enough, his wealth does not give him life'. Time and time again, Jesus warns against what he calls 'the deceitfulness of riches' and the attitude of mind which accompanies the quest for wealth. That is not where true happiness lies, he insists. When he gives us, in the Beatitudes, the picture of the truly happy man, he is in fact showing us himself, the way in which he lived and the way in which he asks us to live.

The truly happy man is without pride, he says. (Not for nothing did the mediaeval Church put this attitude of mind and heart at the top of the list of Seven Deadly Sins.) The truly happy man is without arrogance, for he depends, not upon his own strength, but upon that of his Father-God. He isn't aggressive, he does not stand upon his rights and privileges, and yet he hungers and thirsts after the 'good life' and the justice and truth which it implies. By a paradox, in his happiness, he 'mourns', he is weighted down by a sense of the evil in the world, yet knows the way through wickedness to victory over it. He harbours no grudges and is merciful at heart, straining every nerve for that peace which belongs to the children of God. His thinking and his speaking, as well as his actions, are 'pure', full of continuous innocence and goodness towards all, so that he sees God in every man and woman. He remains unshakably happy when the natural man turns against his quality of living which is an offence to him, and sees in these hatreds of himself and his goodness the mark of his discipleship. He is salt to preserve all that is good in the human race; his living is a light for all men to see. Yet their eyes lift above his life so that they come to understand the truth about their God and Father.

No man can, or wants to, do these things, to live in this way, until he has become 'like a little child' in the simplicity of his faith and trust in the Heavenly Father. Yet this is the ultimate surrender of self, the denying of self, the leaving of self behind, upon which Jesus insists amongst those who will go with him. This is being 'born from above', 'turned round about', 'converted', having a totally new attitude of mind and heart.

Through this gateway of self-surrender we must all pass if we are to 'come with him'. For some the insight will come in a moment of time, with a day and an hour on it. For others, of

whom I am one, as are the majority of Christians, the process takes years of living and of struggle, until one day we discover to our intense joy, that we are indeed walking with him. The ultimate insight comes to us when we have indeed taken firm hold on all our pride, personal, intellectual, social, whatever form it takes, and become like little children. This is what makes a man Christ's man; this is what caused Jesus to exult in a spontaneous outburst of thanksgiving when he cried to his Father, 'I thank thee, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, for hiding these things from the learned and the wise, and revealing them to the simple. Yes, Father, such was thy choice.'

The heart of the Good News of Jesus is that he came to set men free from whatever enslaves them; that God's rule is already here for whoever will accept it; that there is serene, power-filled living for all who 'leave self behind and come with me'. At the heart of this experience, there is the cross of self-denial, of the crucifying of so much of our natural instincts for gain, for power, for living the commonly accepted rat-race of self-aggrandisement. Mankind found this new way of living so abhorrent that its best and most respectable representatives turned increasingly against Jesus until he was taken, tried, and quite illegally executed in excruciating agony on the Cross. That Cross remains, in many respects, a great mystery. Yet when we know the potential for evil that is in us all; when we see the fallen nature of our beings across the world of hatred and war and violence, the Cross becomes understandable in its tragedy. When we see again the challengingly pure nature of pure goodness, incarnated in Christ, the Cross equally becomes inevitable as the climax of that conflict of good and evil which runs through the whole Bible and out beyond its pages throughout all history.

Christians believe that Jesus, as men crucified him, broke the powers of evil and the last enemy of death itself, through the passion and suffering of that Cross. That from his dying, came the power of new life, his new life. That new life, as he promised, is always available to the two or three folk who gather and work in his Name. Only with the two or three, or the two hundred or three hundred, do we really fulfil our destiny; never alone. For

Christ's Church is made up of people and people together, not individuals. His Church continues his work upon earth. She becomes His Body, His Living Being amongst men and women, seeking to heal them, to help them, to save the very kind of people he served in the days of his flesh. They, as he said, must sweeten society; they must become a light for it. They are His Message, His Word, Himself amongst men—by their living as much as by their speaking.

That being so, there is no release for them ever from his commission to show forth the Good News of Man's Salvation, of the possibility of his 'being set free' from all that enslaves him; no release until every creature has heard The Message.

I wonder what would happen, if, throughout Scotland, the whole Church decided, in the midst of all the crises which beset her, to see Jesus whole, like my friend John. If, in every congregation in the land, we all pledged ourselves to spend the whole of next year reading the Gospel narrative, not in bits and pieces, but regularly and continuously, in pulpit and in pew. Determined to see him totally; willing to let him speak to us. For I believe it is only in simple, straightforward ways like this, that he will ever be able to revive his Kirk in our land.