

The Will
to
Believe

FRANK ARUNDELL

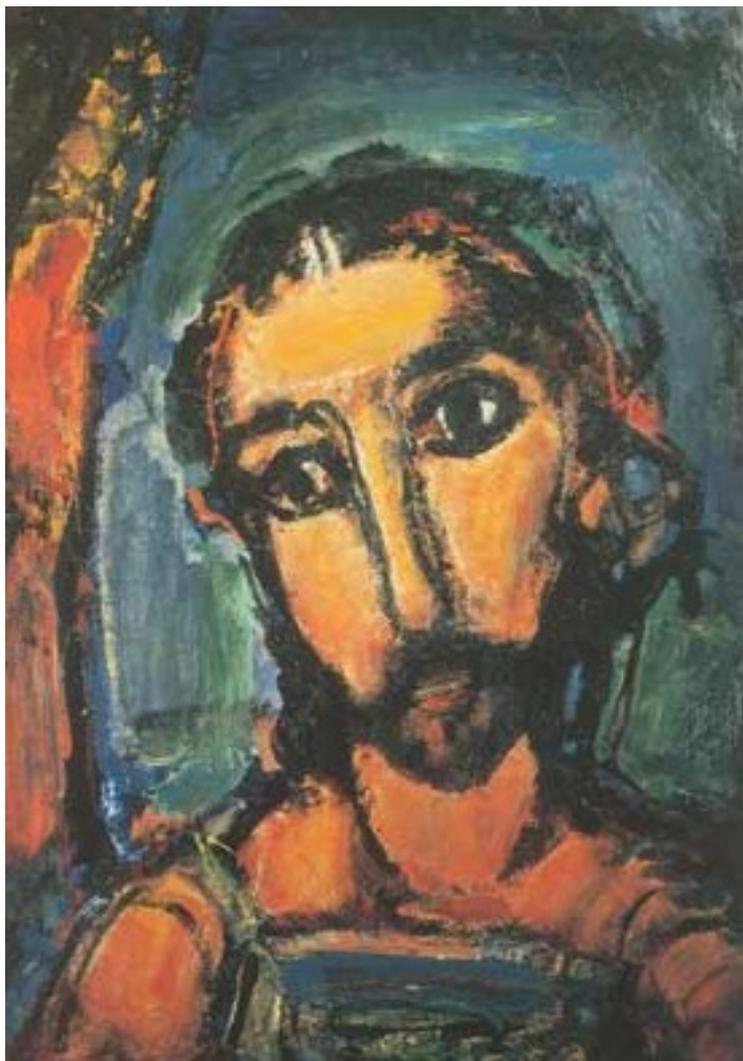
The Will to Believe

And leaving Nazareth he went and lived in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

From that time Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

(Matthew 4:13 77)

Cover: The Fourth Century Synagogue at Capernaum, Israel.
Photo by F. V. Arundell III, 2009



My only objective is to paint a Christ so moving that those who see him will be converted.

“Head of Christ”, Georges Rouault, 1939

FOREWORD

It would be difficult to put the stories of the gospels in an order of importance. They all individually reach out and strike a different chord in each of us for somewhat different reasons.

The parables that Jesus used on his public mission have immeasurable depth and meaning. No matter how diligently scholars work to prove Christ's words and deeds true or not true, or redacted for the purposes of the writers, the Gospels have been passed down to us through the "People of God." We hear the Word of God from those who came before us and are obliged to keep it. The Spirit communicates the Word to the "heartstrings," making the texts agreeable and contemporaneous for each of us. The Church, as the guardian of the "deposit of faith" is always on the lookout, apostolically, for gross misinterpretations of the texts so that some of the stories are not taken literally, such as plucking out of one's eyes, cutting off a hand, or bearing snakes, etc. However, it is also very important to understand that the Word of God cannot be taken as wholly symbolic either. Truth cannot be watered down whether presented metaphorically or literally. Authoritative interpretation is always available if error is to be avoided and new understandings are wonderful and welcome, coming from the minds of qualified theologians under the aegis of the Magisterium and the successor of St. Peter – in concert. The Gospel is always new! Religion, particularly Christianity, is not, nor has it ever been an exclusive or "private matter" anytime in history.

Right from the very start, for some reason, non-believers have been at work trying to discredit the sources and authority of

Holy Scripture, and foster the idea that the texts can mean what ever one wants them to mean, since they are neither history, holy, nor inspired. The concept of holiness itself is doubted. During his public ministry, the Savior's source of authority was brought into question by those who said they knew from whence it had come. They contended that it emanated from evil powers, while he was, in fact, proving before their eyes, that he and the Father are One both with his words and with his accompanying supernatural works. These are works which no one else is able to repeat except in his name and only by his authority. The will of the Father was brought to us in Christ Jesus, "On earth as it is in heaven." As he put it:

"But to what shall I compare this generation? It is like children sitting in the market places, who call out to the other children, and say, 'We played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking, and they say, 'He has a demon!' The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Behold, a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is vindicated by her deeds."

(Matt 11)

The Kingdom of God was established with his promises of a heavenly home for those "who hear the Word of God and keep it." The means for this was made inexorably clear in the circumstances of the story presented here. It is not only a story about a strained personal encounter with the Lord, but an extraordinary case in point of how what appeared to be a symbolic statement was not at all inferential, but spiritually and realistically exact in its final outcome. How is it possible to believe a man who said:

“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life?”
John 6: 54)

This seemingly preposterous and scandalous statement subsequently became the core of the Catholic faith and will continue to be until “the end of the age.”

Feast of Christ the King, 2011

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Often, what seems reasonable does not always turn out to be desirable, and what is desirable may not always be for good reason. The power of reason comes naturally to us. We use our best reasoning, come to the edge of decision and many times still sense a certain reticence to act. We can and often do throw our weight behind a decision with a tucked away idea that if it doesn't "work out" we can always back track, change our minds; perhaps our rationalization was wrong. Who would blame us if our initial reasoning was faulty? We often make up new reasons for failed actions and go on.

However, problems can arise when we decide to reason our way out of previous reasoning. How many broken promises and broken hearts are tied to this kind of post ratiocination? It's here where our new reasons get very creative, and amazing excuses bloom. Largely, it seems easier to rationalize our way out of a previous decision than to reason our way in. It's impossible to think of every contingency, every possibility, before going "all in" so to speak. We all tend to be a bit skeptical when coming to conclusions, particularly important ones; human reasoning is a bit like living in a land of hope. Who can be absolutely certain of anything? We're even more skeptical about people who say they have the right answers and ask us to trust their reasoning, their conclusions.

We've all known people who could be classified as professional skeptics. Their credo is that all beliefs are, and will remain, uncertain. One thing is certain to them though, it is the

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belief which they hold. Skepticism is a good thing when it does not deny that some beliefs could be absolutely true. The honest skeptic has to be a lifelong scholar looking to come to rest on a belief that he or she can hold with certainty. Skepticism is surely not for lazy people. The search can be most depressing since ultimate truth is understood to be beyond human reason by most philosophers. It's like "looking for love in all the wrong places," as the old song says.

Reasoning is a unique human ability, and all human reasoning, whether it is prior to an act or posterior to an act has a goal. The goal of the use of reason is to know and understand truth, and since there seems to be a determinate reason for everything, when that reason is universally known — it will be true. The great interrogatory "why?" would have been asked for the last time.

In terms of rationalization, many of our scientists believe that once a Grand Unified Theory is proven we will then know all there is to know about life. Would that include life in the other universes which they also speculate about? Would the String Theory provide us with a total understanding of initial causality, or will it just remain the answer to another higher mathematical puzzle? Will God be proven to be humanity's false rational? Will we see "transcendence" as really only a figment of imagination, and man's creativity nothing more than peculiar flights of fancy from the human psyche conditioned by habit? For what strange reason is beauty and goodness so closely related and desirable? There are the universal laws of nature, so organized that it tempts one to say, with Pascal, "There are reasons that reason does not know." Granted, with the use of human reasoning, it is all but impossible to ascertain

absolute truth, but every thinking human being knows, apophatically, that Truth does exist and is a reasonable goal to which we may all aspire, similar to the understanding that there is an answer to every mathematical problem. Schrödinger says, “It does not come into being when we discover it, it is timeless.” It is there a priori, and inductive reasoning in this case appears to be no less legitimate than deductive reasoning. The following states the difference:

Deductive and inductive refer to two distinct logical processes.

Deductive reasoning is a logical process in which a conclusion drawn from a set of premises contains no more information than the premises taken collectively. All dogs are animals; this is a dog; therefore, this is an animal: the truth of the conclusion is dependent only on the method. All men are apes: this is a man; therefore, this is an ape: The conclusion is logically true, although the premise is absurd. There is a big difference between a man and an ape, but sometimes, in reality the distinction is difficult to discern.

Inductive reasoning is a logical process in which a conclusion is proposed that contains more information than the observations or experience on which it is based. Every crow ever seen was black; all crows are black: The truth of the conclusion is verifiable only in terms of future experience and certainly is attainable only if all possible instances have been examined. In the example, there is no certainty that a white crow will not be found tomorrow, although past experience would make such an occurrence seem most unlikely. If you happen to run across an albino crow, be sure to call the

Audubon Society post haste, and tell them how the exception proves the rule.

Most of us have some idea or understanding of simple logic. Logic is systematized reasoning, it is defined as the most pure form of reasoning. In many ways it is similar to mathematics, i.e., reasoning within the rules of the system. Reasoning, or thinking outside the system is distinct from logic in a way that is generally free of inalterable rules. It often skips steps and doesn't add up the same way that formal logic does. If we are to understand one another in language, we need to be able to associate sequential ideas that make sense to us in an exchange of thoughts. As human beings, we have habitually learned to associate ideas based on our experiences of cause and effect. If this happens, this will be the result; if we do that, this may or may not happen, and so forth.

The human mind has developed and produced the tools of thought that we use to reason and communicate. These include observation/perception, intuition, mimesis, sensitivity, imagination, and memory. These factors are affected by our genetic inheritances and our chance experiences. Right from the very start we are all in the process of becoming. Each one of us is most precious and unique and of equal value, we all belong to one another. As far as we know there is only one "family of man" on this planet. Value can only be placed where there is purpose and meaning beyond the mundane. The common thread of humanity is that our greatest value lies in the ultimate importance of our relationship with one another. Our inevitable differences are completely reconcilable with innate empathy, sympathy, generosity and an understanding of one another for the best reasons. What appears to be irreconcilable

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among us falls under the principles of fairness and justice which, hopefully, has been created by us in the community and personally as reasonable ways of employing the universal moral code of a “higher good,” intrinsic in us all. You have to be taught to hate.

Most of us know that there is perfection but we cannot know what *absolute* perfection is. The best we can do to understand with a degree of certainty was explained by John Henry Newman:

That there are cases in which evidence, not sufficient for scientific proof, is nevertheless sufficient for assent and certitude, is the doctrine of Locke, as of most men. He tells us that belief, grounded in sufficient probabilities, “rises to assurance,” and as to the question of sufficiency, that where propositions “border near on certainty,” then we assent to them as firmly as if they were infallibly demonstrated.

We do know that we are surely not perfect. Absolute perfection, of necessity, is eternal and without flaw. If perfection was finite, it would not be perfect — *per se*. We all inherently know that perfection exists as the ultimate good, and within reasons limits, most of us are willing to pursue it. At the beginning of the first section of Emmanuel Kant’s *Groundwork* he says:

There is nothing it is possible to think of any where in the world, or indeed anything at all outside it, that can be held to be good without limitation, excepting only a good will.

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Absolute certainty is not completely available to human beings. To some degree, we all are skeptics, however we cannot positively deny a higher good, a higher reality, since everything seems to be appointed with a higher purpose. The aesthetics displayed on the cave walls of Altamira help to prove that point. It was said that Mahler's music searches for God, and Bruckner's found him. We certainly do not live our lives to make things worse than they are, at least most of us don't. No one is happy in ignorance or in a chaotic state. We tend to strive for what we know of perfection to the best of our ability using our good will. One is reminded of the announcement of the multitude of angels to the "lowly" shepherds in Luke 2:14, saying:

Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men of good will. (or, to men with whom he is pleased).

The scripture seems to have known that there are some who have chosen to use their freedom to do evil, those of ill will. Who would not want peace or need peace in their lives? Peace and selfishness are a contradiction. Good will without limitation was for Kant, a will that is in no way self centered, but tuned to the moral imperative, to the higher good, still, in his late rumination's he was not prone to postulate that there is a God. Just what is free will?

Reason, developed and structured in human kind, is the innate power of determination, the ability to sort out the options that are presented to the mind in the thinking process. The Will, and Freedom of the Will is much the same. Aquinas tells us that "The appetitive powers must be proportionate to the apprehensive powers." He continues: "On the part of the

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intellectual apprehension we have intellect and reason, so on the part of the intellectual appetite we have will and freewill which is nothing else but the power of choice.” Depending on the capacity of the “intellect,” (that process by which we know things), some people are able to conjure more options than others. For example, individuals like Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein and others, were able to combine their creative abilities with their monumental intellectual capacity and powers of observation, resulting in some of the most complex sequential ideas and concepts known to man. Once these theories were scientifically and repeatedly proven, they were used to change what we know about our universe and the laws that govern it. Indeed, the great age of science that is upon us has changed forever the way we live, both in our communal and our private lives, both for good and for evil. These giants were able to build their reasoning on such simple observations as an apple falling from a tree, or the fantasy of taking a joy ride on a beam of light. Our knowledge of falling bodies and understanding the speed of light has given us the models known as the Space Time Continuum and Quantum Physics. Both these geniuses were able to do what they did because they decided to do it, they had the appetite, the will to do it; to postulate and explain their reasoning, laying down formal arguments leading to conclusions that could be tested. They made the choices free from the constraints that might have held lesser men back, along with the constraints of what was believed to be the correct laws of nature understood for generations before them. To frame what free will is, it is necessary to fathom what “freedom” is; at least to a degree that would “rise to assurance and border on certainty.”

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The idea of freedom, long tortured by the meandering of philosophical jostling, is said to have begun by the Atomists of ancient Greece. That may be so, but, the story of freedom's beginning is illustrated beautifully in Genesis. After creating light and laying the "foundations of the world," God creates man in his image and likeness and even supplies him with a spouse to alleviate his loneliness, but there's a hitch. Man's freedom in the super garden they were given, where he and his wife ruled over everything, was contingent on refraining from eating the fruit of a certain tree called the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil, or else they would suffer the consequences. That's when the snake advised them that if they ate the fruit they would become gods themselves. How could they resist? So they forfeited what they had because they wanted it all. They were then summarily ejected from this very special place and finally in chapter three, verse twenty-two, the writer metaphorically infers what freedom is:

Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, knowing good and evil; and now, he might stretch out his hand, and take also from the tree of life, and eat, and live forever."

They got their wish; they had become little gods with the ultimate freedom of choice, understanding good from evil and the option to choose one over the other. According to the story, they could look forward to a tough existence with their progeny as punishment for their disobedience.

The "Tree of Life" is known in many religions and mythologies. In the case of Genesis, the words "he might stretch out his hand" and live forever, seems to be indicative of

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the option every person has in choosing the culture of life rather than the culture of death, spiritually speaking. Freedom is the ability to choose between: good and evil, right and wrong, what we will do, and will not do, using the gift of pure reason, i.e., acquiescence to the moral imperative; to the higher good, or to fall strictly into the slavery of self interest, unlike the gift of practical reason. To some, it may seem a little naive to use the story of Adam and Eve to make the point of the origin of the concept of freedom. Once you get the point, it becomes quite clear that we humans are responsible for our deliberate actions, for everything we put into motion, no matter how inconsequential it may seem based on our intellect. If Einstein can uncover relativity and change our understanding of space and time by imagining a ride on a beam of light, perhaps our imaginary visit to Eden is not too far fetched.

The entire system of justice and the moral law, built on freedom concerning the innate sense of the “Good” is installed in every human being at the “factory,” by the Creator. Over the millennia, many of our enlightenment philosophers have worked hard to change those defaults. The will (volition) is always free; its option to choose, along with cognizance, the intellect and the power of reason is the essence of being human. We are given to know that we know. Kant is probably right, good will is “good without limitation,” the will is unrestricted, unconstrained. It is its *use* that differentiates between good will and ill will, considering the difference between pure and practical reason. Whether reason is controlled by the passions or the passions control reason “willing” is always free. As the senses provide us with a continuous flow of impressions, we assimilate them and with the use of free will control our own fate. Like life, freedom is the most precious gift we have. I

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presume that's why many are willing to die to preserve it — as a matter of principle. Why there are those who think that we are both cause and effect of ourselves requires some serious re-rationalization. Since the goal of reason is *absolute* truth, Etienne Gilson's remark from *God and Philosophy* ought to be taken seriously:

The great curse of modern philosophy is the almost universal prevailing rebellion against intellectual self-discipline. Where loose thinking obtains, truth cannot possibly be grasped whence the conclusion naturally follows that there is no truth.

Regardless of the philosophers, absolute Truth is the reality beyond reasons reach; without it nothing has meaning.

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Chapter I

Mary, the mother of Jesus, was a young Jewess from Nazareth, a town in Galilee about ten km northwest of Mount Tabor. She was betrothed to a woodworker named Joseph who was from the House of David and who is presumed to have been considerably older than she. While promised to Joseph, the gospel of Luke tells us that she, a virgin, conceived of a son by the Holy Spirit of God:

The angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And coming in, he said to her, "Hail Mary! The Lord is with you." But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end." Mary said to the angel, "How can this be, since I am a virgin?" The angel answered and said to her, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; and for that reason the holy Child shall be called the Son of God. And behold, even your relative Elizabeth has also conceived a son in her old age; and she who was called barren is now in her sixth month. For nothing will be

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impossible with God.” And Mary said, “Behold, the handmaid of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her.

At this time, according to custom, Mary would have been about fourteen years old.

Today, in the scientific age, Luke’s gospel certainly stretches credibility. The idea that a virgin could conceive without sexual activity is reason enough for empiricists to dismiss all of Holy Scripture and the Koran as being totally bogus. Yet here in the twenty-first century, well over four billion people are willing to believe the gospel story. That would be more than two-thirds of the current world population, and would include literally millions of the best and the brightest scholars and scientists. For the average skeptic, these numbers tend to have no relevance, since the story contradicts an obvious scientific fact. Once what is known as the Incarnation is called impossible rather than incredible, the choice is made and belief is totally suspended if not completely gone. The concept of “parallel-universes” is believed more readily without one shred of evidence beyond different mathematical formulations. For many, these stories become childish fantasies.

So too, there is more than reasonable doubt by the skeptics about how the writers of scripture fudged the place where Jesus came into the world. In Judea, the little town of Bethlehem became historic because King David was born there into an Ephrathite family between 1040 and 1030 BCE (Before the Christian Era). The gospels writers placed the birth of Jesus there as well, since this was the message given to Mary and would also be a fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies

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concerning from whence Israel's Savior, the Messiah, the "King of the Jews," would come. Besides the many major biblical antagonists who challenge the gospel's veracity, there is another controversy over whether Bethlehem is the place of Jesus' birth or whether he was born in Nazareth as the gospels of Mark and John allude to, or in Bethlehem of the North, in Galilee, one of the twelve ancient cities of the tribe of Zebulun. The city was only a short way from Nazareth and the contention is that Joseph most likely would have taken Mary there to give birth to spare her a scandal in Nazareth as a result of the short time she had carried the child. Others contend that the archeological evidence does not support this hypothesis. It is an interesting thought because of a quote from the prophet Isaiah:

The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, by way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the gentiles — the people who were sitting in the darkness saw a great light, and those who were sitting in the land and in the shadow of death, upon them a light dawned.

However, this quote may have easily referred to Jesus' preaching rather than his birth. It appears in the gospel of Matthew just after Jesus returned to Galilee from his forty days in the desert said to have been tested by the devil.

Jesus' baptism by John is considered by most biblical scholars as the beginning of his public ministry. According to Luke, he was then, "about thirty years of age." His baptism took place at Bethany beyond the Jordan, also called Bethabara, in Perea, not to be confused with the Bethany near Jerusalem where the gospel says he raised Lazarus from the dead. Once back in

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Galilee he began publicly to proclaim the “Kingdom of Heaven” being close at hand. It was in Galilee that his miraculous activities began, and along with his powerful teaching, which was a new paradigm, he drew huge crowds wherever he went who witnessed all he was saying and doing.

According to John the Evangelist, we only have a small sampling of Jesus’ activity regarding the miracles, and he tended to downplay many of them by telling the recipients not to flaunt them. In fact, he asked many of those cured to keep the facts of their healing secret. I am presuming he did not want to rush his mission until he had accomplished all he’d been sent to do. The time was right; a new beginning, a new creation, for all humankind was in the process. He was establishing the Kingdom of God “on earth as it is in heaven.” From a small coterie he was instituting a universal church which even the “gates of hell” could not overpower. He was promising eternal life for all those who would keep his word. As the suffering servant of mankind, he would form a new covenant between God and man with his blood on the cross, and said when he is lifted up, he would draw all men to himself. Who would have ever imagined that this ancient instrument of humiliation, torture and death would become the symbol of peace, reconciliation and everlasting life? More than the Law, he would emphasize true charity among us, and teach us the power of forgiveness. In him we would receive “grace and truth.” He would send the Paraclete, the Holy Spirit, to guide us and fill us with enthusiasm and wisdom, knowledge and fortitude, courage and piety in the faith. In an incredible gesture, he would remain with us always, in the bread and wine of the Eucharist, and finally, he would demonstrate victory over

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death, open to all who would live in his words and follow him keeping the commandments of love for God and neighbor.

The skeptic may reasonably ask: why at this time in the history of the world would this phenomenon take place? For what reason, in the evolutionary timetable, would the time of Christ be known as the “fulness of time?” That particular question has been asked for generations. The answers given are always quite vague since the timelines of history are generally speculative. Many of the answers are also given to support certain religious speculations and have little relevance to history. Most skeptics would dismiss them on that basis alone.

The story of the Incarnation, was and is, intimately connected to the history of Israel. Jesus was born a Jew during the Roman period, about four BCE. Perhaps it is necessary to speak of the “fulness of time,” specifically in connection with Israel and her place in the history of mankind. Only seventy or so years after the birth of Jesus, Israel was no more, and the Jews were dispersed everywhere in the world. Not until 1948 was she reestablished, declared her independence, and became part of the community of nations under much different circumstances. The phrase “fulness of time” came from St. Paul in Galatians 4: 4, and Ephesians 1: 10:

But when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the Law... Galatians 4:4

...with a view to an administration suitable to the fullness of the times, that is, the summing up of all things in Christ, things in the heavens and things on the earth.... Ephesians 1:10

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It could very well be that St. Paul's remark about "summing up all things in Christ" in heaven and earth, gives us a reasonable explanation why he used the phrase "fulness of time" to speak of the Incarnation. From the time of his being struck down and blinded on the road to Damascus, to the time that he said the Risen One appeared to him, he zealously preached the "good news" that the long awaited Messiah who had been promised in the ancient texts was Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, the Son of God, who summed up Israel's express purpose of being — since Abraham's covenant with God, about 1943 BCE. As Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: "Salvation comes from the Jews," and that it was he, the Christ, to whom she was speaking (John 4: 22-26). The faith of the Fathers of Israel had reached its culmination: Abraham had seen Jesus' day and was glad, the Holy Temple in Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans, animal sacrifice was finished, and Judaism and the reading of Torah was carried on in Synagogues in all parts of the world for the next 1,930 years. Today, the Jewish calendar remains in effect as the Sabbath is celebrated every Friday evening at sundown, and the Holy Days, in their ancient sequence, still remain the center of Jewish life for over 14 million Jews worldwide with only about half of them presently living in Israel.

Chapter II

The gospels do not give us any information about Jesus between the age of twelve and about thirty. Most scholars think that he was working with his stepfather in the carpentry craft at Nazareth and the towns surrounding Nazareth, especially in Sepphoris which was Antipas' capital in Galilee for approximately 20 years. About the year 19 CE Antipas, began building Tiberias, named after the emperor, as the new capital of Galilee. There would have been plenty of work for artisans of all kinds. It's hard to imagine Jesus and the family not being involved and known in the area. Later, (John 6), when he was speaking of himself as doing the will of his Father, and being "the bread of life that has come down from heaven," the gospel tells us that those who had heard him say these things started grumbling saying:

Is this not Jesus the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know?

It was at Cana, in Galilee, where Jesus' supernatural, public acts are reported to have begun. The family was invited to a wedding feast along with Jesus' new followers, and when the host ran out of wine, at the notification of his mother, to save the man embarrassment, he had the attendants fill six large stone jugs with water and instructed them to draw some out and take it to the headwaiter. Once they had done so the headwaiter called the bridegroom and said: "Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests are well wined, but you have kept the best wine till now." No doubt, through the servants, the word spread about what had happened. The early disciples who were with him at the time, began to realize why

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they were drawn to him in the first place. Although quite confused about what was happening, they believed what they had seen with their own eyes to be most extraordinary, to say the least. It is interesting that he would have first revealed his “glory” under these happy circumstances and among the reasonably well off people of Southern Galilee. Luke says (Luke 4:14) in Galilee, his reputation spread through the countryside. He taught in their synagogues and was highly praised by everyone. Luke then reports that he returned to Nazareth, and on the Sabbath, in the synagogue, the following took place:

And He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up; and as was His custom, He entered the synagogue on the Sabbath, and stood up to read. And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written,

*The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives
And freedom to prisoners;*

And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.” And all were speaking well of Him, and wondering at the gracious words which were falling from His lips; and they were saying, “Is this not Joseph’s son?” And He said to them, “No doubt you will quote this proverb to Me,

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‘Physician, heal yourself! Whatever we heard was done at Capernaum, do here in your hometown as well.’” And He said, “Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown. But I say to you in truth, there were many widows in Israel in the days of Elijah, when the sky was shut up for three years and six months, when a great famine came over all the land; and yet Elijah was sent to none of them, but only to Zarephath, in the land of Sidon, to a woman who was a widow. And there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha the prophet; and none of them was cleansed, but only Naaman the Syrian.” And all the people in the synagogue were filled with rage as they heard these things; and they got up and drove Him out of the city, and led Him to the brow of the hill on which their city had been built, in order to throw Him down the cliff. But passing through their midst, He went His way.

Here, Jesus is giving his neighbors a perfect example of how “his own” would reject him. He knew what they wanted. They were ready to have his miraculous powers used on their behalf, but did not get the message that when quoting Isaiah, he was referring to himself, and that his mission was meant not only for Israel, but for the whole world.

In John’s gospel, after changing the water to wine at Cana, Jesus goes to Jerusalem for the first Passover and then returns to Galilee for the second “sign” at Cana.

Hearing that Jesus had arrived in Galilee again, a royal official, whose son was deathly sick at Capernaum, came to him and asked him to come to Capernaum and cure him. It is obvious that the official knew that Jesus had been demonstrating his supernatural powers elsewhere.

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So Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you simply will not believe." The royal official said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies." Jesus said to him, "Go; your son lives." The man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him and started off. As he was now going down, his slaves met him, saying that his son was living. So he inquired of them the hour when he began to get better. Then they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." So the father knew that it was at that hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives"; and he himself believed and his whole household.

Jesus' miraculous power was very much a part of his public ministry, although clearly the cures and healing were not his primary purpose; they were performed either because of his compassion, or the faith of the person he was helping. Most of the healing was done in public and his following grew into very large crowds. He was also almost continuously accompanied by the disciples. At one point they were sent on their own to do the same as he, and to primarily preach the "good news" of the kingdom of God. The crowds were to grow even larger. He then appointed some seventy more as Luke relates (Luke 10):

...The Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves. Carry no money belt, no bag, no shoes; and greet no one on the way. Whatever house you enter, first say, 'Peace be to this house.' If

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a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; but if not, it will return to you. Stay in that house, eating and drinking what they give you; for the laborer is worthy of his wages. Do not keep moving from house to house. Whatever city you enter and they receive you, eat what is set before you; and heal those in it who are sick, and say to them, 'The kingdom of God has come near to you.' But whatever city you enter and they do not receive you, go out into its streets and say, 'Even the dust of your city which clings to our feet we wipe off in protest against you; yet be sure of this, that the kingdom of God has come near.' I say to you, it will be more tolerable in that day for Sodom than for that city."

Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles had been performed in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. But it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will be brought down to Hades!

The one who listens to you listens to Me, and the one who rejects you rejects Me; and he who rejects Me rejects the One who sent Me.

After explaining to the disciples, everything had been entrusted to him by the Father, and that no one knows who the Son is except the Father, and who the Father is except the Son – and to those to whom the Son wills to reveal him, he turned to the smaller group and said privately:

Blessed are the eyes which see the things you see, for I say to you, that many prophets and kings wished to see the things

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which you see, and did not see them, and to hear the things which you hear, and did not hear them.

The gospels give an account of some forty miraculous events by Jesus himself which include bringing the dead back to life. There is no room in this piece to relate and comment on them all, but they each, in their own way, have a message beyond the practical reasons for the healing and resurrections, and that was to promote the fact that the will of God be done, “On earth as it is in heaven.”

In Jerusalem, the sick, the lame, and the paralyzed gathered around the pool of Bethesda. This double pool was north of the temple mount near the Antonia Fortress, a large barracks for the Roman occupation forces. The pool was spring fed and when the water was disturbed by welling up, the infirm were said to be cured by bathing in the moving water. There was one man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him, he had compassion for him and asked if he wanted to be well again. The man told Jesus that he had no one to put him in the water when it was disturbed, and that the others got there before him. Jesus said to him: “Pick up your mat and walk,” which he did forthwith. The Jews began harassing Jesus because he had cured the man on the Sabbath. He angered them further when he told them “My Father goes on working, and I am at work, too” obviously making a direct connection between him and the Father. The following dialogue between him and the Jews is riveting. (John 5)

After curing Peter’s mother-in-law at Peter’s house in Capernaum, the whole town came crowding around the door at dusk. They brought all their sick with them and he cured many.

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He then went all through the towns and villages, preaching in their synagogues and, healing as he went. There were lepers, the blind, paralytics, the deformed; he cured all the maladies that were presented to him “by the power of God.”

When he cured the centurion’s servant from a distance, he praised the officer with the highest praise for the unquestioning faith he displayed in Jesus’ curative powers. The centurion had said to him: “ Lord, I am not worthy that you should enter under my roof, but say the word and my servant shall be healed.” He was healed.

He raised the son of the widow of Nain.

He healed the Gergesene demoniacs, cured the woman with blood issues at Gennesaret, and raised Jairus’ daughter to life. The deaf were to hear, the dumb spoke, and sight was returned to those who were blind. The lepers were cleansed.

As one reads the testaments, or testimonials, it becomes clear what they allude to beyond the physical acts themselves. By following Jesus’ miraculous acts in the gospels we can see them vividly, as though they were taking place in our own time. These miraculous acts were timeless, and came about supernaturally by the will of God in Jesus. They came out of the infinite, and spanned the centuries to inspire us with a fuller understanding of the love of the Father for man, in Christ, through the Spirit. If we have faith, “They invite us to believe.” If we are willing to look and listen, we can discern many miraculous events taking place in our own day and in our own lives. The cures were used by Jesus for getting attention to his primary mission of saving mankind from itself, “in the name of

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the Father.” Left to his own freedom, man would invariably choose selfishness as he had done once before, metaphorically, in the story of Eden. The world was getting its second and final chance with the Incarnation and the solemn promise of life everlasting.

Along with the miraculous cures and healing, Jesus delivered his message of the coming of the Kingdom with wonderful and touching parables as well — approximately fifty in all. However, the primary purpose of this paper, is to treat the miracle stories regarding *the will to believe*. Matthew’s gospel, 4: 23-25, sums up the scope of the public ministry:

Jesus was going throughout all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness among the people. The news about Him spread throughout all Syria; and they brought to Him all who were ill, those suffering with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, paralytics; and He healed them. Large crowds followed Him from Galilee and the Decapolis and Jerusalem and Judea and from beyond the Jordan.

He had become enormously popular with all the people, at all levels, and as a result he was feared by the occupying Romans and the temple cult whose power he seemed to be infringing upon. To them, it appeared that he was building political capital, while completely resisting the reasonable idea that the Christ, who had been prophesied in the ancient scriptures, had come, and by word and deed was validating all the prophecies.

Chapter III

It is not insignificant that Peter's profession of faith and his preeminence took place in the region of Caesarea Philippi. Caesarea Philippi was founded by Herod the Great's son Philip II as the capital of the large tetrarchy of Batanea which included: Bashan, Golan and Hauran. The city was built on an ancient sanctuary dedicated to the worship of the Greco-Roman god Pan. The ancient site, Paneas, was named for the god. Long before Roman times, pre-Hellenic deities were also worshiped on this site. The Greeks held that the half-goat, half-man god lived in a huge cave in this very rocky place at the base of Mount Hermon. The site can still be visited today; it's about 35 miles northeast of the Sea of Galilee. Caesarea Philippi could certainly have been representative of the great Greco-Roman religions of antiquity and the gods of mythology catalogued by Hesiod in the Theogony. It is reasonable to speculate that the sites chosen by Jesus to expound on the "Kingdom of God" might not have been randomly selected. The questions asked by Jesus at this site definitely had future ramifications:

Now when Jesus came into the district of Caesarea Philippi, He was asking His disciples, "Who do people say that the Son of Man is?" And they said, "Some say John the Baptist; and others, Elijah; but still others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets." He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus said to him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, because flesh and blood did not reveal this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the

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gates of Hell will not overpower it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; and whatever you bind on earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall have been loosed in heaven..."

Along with all the cures, healing, and resurrections, Jesus demonstrated many incredible supernatural events similar to the changing of water to wine at Cana. When John the Baptist was beheaded by Antipas, Jesus and the disciples looked for some quiet time. Matthew brings us the story. (Matthew 14: 13):

Now when Jesus heard about John, He withdrew from there in a boat to a secluded place by Himself; and when the people heard of this, they followed Him on foot from the cities. When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and felt compassion for them and healed their sick.

When it was evening, the disciples came to Him and said, "This place is desolate and the hour is already late; so send the crowds away, that they may go into the villages and buy food for themselves." But Jesus said to them, "They do not need to go away; you give them something to eat!" They said to Him, "We have here only five loaves and two fish." And He said, "Bring them here to Me." Ordering the people to sit down on the grass, He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up toward heaven, He blessed the food, and breaking the loaves He gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the crowds, and they all ate and were satisfied. They picked up what was left over of the broken pieces, twelve full baskets. There were about five thousand men who ate, besides women and children.

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Large crowds continued to follow Jesus no matter where he went. They placed the infirm and the broken at his feet, and he cured them all. Even those who touched the hem of his cloak were cured of their specific maladies. In his travels he continued to warn everyone about the teaching of the Pharisees and the Sadducees. Matthew tells of a second miracle of the loaves, where four thousand men, women and children were fed on a mountain above the lake of Galilee. He suggested that if anyone wanted to be a follower of his, he should take up his cross and follow him. What would they gain, he asked, if they were to win the whole world and end up losing their soul as a result of ill will and the choice of the loss of virtue? Without the authority of the Heavenly Father, human freedom alone could not satisfy man's hunger for the absolute good, for he who is the "bread" that came down from heaven. He told them: "I am the way the truth and the life,"

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, how do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.

If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.

Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been so long with you, and

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yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father?' Do you not believe that I am in the Father, and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me; otherwise believe because of the works themselves. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes in Me, the works that I do, he will do also; and greater works than these he will do; because I go to the Father. Whatever you ask in My name, that will I do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If you ask Me anything in My name, I will do it.

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.

Now the promises were made utterly clear to those faithful few who were with him. Increasingly he was able to elucidate on the true purpose of the Incarnation. They began to understand the reason for his ultimate death as the sacrifice which must happen to reconcile humankind to God. For the Son of God to die for the many — for forgiveness of sins, and so to fulfill his mission and open the pathway to eternity by his resurrection. When Peter raised an objection regarding his death, he rebuked him and called him an obstacle in that path, because he was thinking in an altogether human way, and not the way that God thinks.

Mount Tabor was about twenty km southwest of the Sea of Galilee near Nazareth and Nain, six days time, from where they were. They arrived in its vicinity, and a most significant event took place. Mark tells of it succinctly:

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Six days later, Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John, and brought them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His garments became radiant and exceedingly white, as no launderer on earth can whiten them. Elijah appeared to them along with Moses; and they were talking with Jesus. Peter said to Jesus, "Rabbi, it is good for us to be here; let us make three tabernacles, one for You, and one for Moses, and one for Elijah." For he did not know what to answer; for they became terrified. Then a cloud formed, overshadowing them, and a voice came out of the cloud, "This is My beloved Son, listen to Him!" All at once they looked around and saw no one with them anymore, except Jesus alone.

The two times that the Father is said to have vocally manifested himself in the gospels was at the baptism and at the transfiguration of Jesus. The transfiguration is considered the culmination of Jesus' public ministry and a very important sign of the reality beyond our comprehension. It is also a connection between prophesy, the law, and redemption, brought about by the saving history of the Jews, and the "New Creation." With the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus in the flesh, before our eyes, through the people of the first century CE, and the apostolic succession of personal witnesses, who were not only willing to die for what they saw, the facts were passed down to all of us to this day.

Chapter IV

According to John, after the miracle of the loaves, Jesus realized that the crowds were about to come and take him by force and make him king of the Jews, so he fled back into the hills alone. Since it was near Tiberias, the port on the western side of the lake, the disciples got into a boat and made for Capernaum on the North shore about 10 km away without Jesus onboard. It was evening and it was getting dark. The wind was up and the sea was getting rough. They couldn't set sail so they rowed about five or six km. It was at this time they saw Jesus walking on the swells coming towards them and they were frightened. He shouted to them: "It is I; do not be afraid," and as they were receiving him into the boat, immediately the boat reached the landing at Capernaum, where they all debarked and went home for the night.

The next day, the crowds knew that the disciples had departed for Capernaum by boat on the previous evening and that Jesus was not with them. In the mean time, other boats had arrived at Tiberias near the place where the bread had been eaten. When they found out that Jesus and the disciples were not there, they all set off for Capernaum to look for him. When they found him nearby the synagogue of Capernaum on the main road through the town they said to him: "Rabbi, when did you come here?"

Jesus answered them and said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not work for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you, for on Him the Father, God, has set His seal." Therefore they said to Him, "What shall we

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do, so that we may work the works of God?” Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.” So they said to Him, “What then do You do for a sign, so that we may see, and believe You? What work do You perform? Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread out of heaven to eat’”

At this point, there had to have been many thousands of people who had seen the miraculous acts Jesus demonstrated. They saw him cure those with diseases of all kinds, they saw supernatural acts like changing water to wine, or multiplying five loaves of bread, and a few fish to feed the huge throng who had followed him. They were there when he cured people at a distance, and raised the dead to life, and yet, they were still seeking a “sign.” Is it possible that they were still looking to be fed? When they asked Jesus what they were to do to “work the works of God.” The answer was simple and clear; they were to believe in him who had come from God, but that didn’t seem to be enough regardless of what they had seen, so Jesus pressed his case further:

Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.”

Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst. But I said to you that you have seen Me, and yet do not believe.

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All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out. For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of Him who sent Me, that of all that He has given Me I lose nothing, but raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him will have eternal life, and I Myself will raise him up on the last day.”

Therefore the Jews were grumbling about Him, because He said, “I am the bread that came down out of heaven.”

They were saying, “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does He now say, ‘I have come down out of heaven?’” Jesus answered and said to them, “Do not grumble among yourselves. No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, ‘and they shall be taught of God.’ Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father, comes to Me. Not that anyone has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father. Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life. I am the bread of life. Your fathers ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread which comes down out of heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down out of heaven; if anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread also which I will give for the life of the world is My flesh.”

By now the crowd was getting very uncomfortable. Many of them had heard him say some incredible things and saw him work the “impossible.” However, here he was, a man known to many of them as the son of a carpenter, shaking their faith in

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the almighty God of Israel, The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, The God who gave the law to Moses, having led them out of slavery in Egypt.

Then the Jews began to argue with one another, saying, "How can this man give us His flesh to eat?" So Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in yourselves. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day. For My flesh is true food, and My blood is true drink. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who eats Me, he also will live because of Me. This is the bread which came down out of heaven; not as the fathers ate and died; he who eats this bread will live forever."

They could not contain themselves any further after these remarks. They were tearing their garments, holding their ears in disbelief, and the majority of them were exiting the black basalt structure as quickly as they could. There was a great uproar as they poured out of the building from every exit onto the street and into the courtyard next to the main hall.

Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard this said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?"

*But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? What then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before? **It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing; the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and are life.** But there are some of you who do not believe."* For Jesus knew from the beginning

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who they were who did not believe, and who it was that would betray Him. And He was saying, "For this reason I have said to you, that no one can come to Me unless it has been granted him from the Father." As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God." Jesus answered them, "Did I Myself not choose you, the twelve, and yet one of you is a devil?" Now He meant Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was to betray Him. These things He said in the synagogue as He taught in Capernaum.

The preaching of the Kingdom of God, all the parables and miracles, were now coming to fruition. Jesus' relationship to the Father was being explained in new and different ways, spiritual ways which the Jews could not understand by studying the nuances of the law. The only way he was to be understood was by a leap of faith in himself. He was asking those who trusted in the Father to trust in him because he and the Father were One. As he had said to Philip "If you have seen me you have seen the Father." Now, the Prophets, those whom Jesus quoted liberally in his teaching, could be seen as referring directly to himself, the expected one of God. The "bread of life" which has come down from heaven, the Messiah, the Son of the living God who would to be totally rejected and humiliated. Finally, dragged to Golgotha and nailed to a barbarian cross with a sign hung around his neck: "Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews."

Chapter V

As the Passover drew near, there was much speculation whether Jesus would attend the festival or not. The chief priests and the Pharisees had let out the word that anyone who knew where he was should inform them since they were eager to arrest him. They wanted to keep the festivities quiet due to his great popularity as a prophet and wonder-worker. Jesus had been staying at Bethany about two km from Jerusalem with his friends Martha, Mary and Lazarus whom he had raised from the dead. Today there is a Mosque over the tomb from which Lazarus emerged. Moslems and Christians both venerate the site. The crowds, as usual, found out where he was and mobbed the house to get a glimpse of both him and Lazarus. What happened the following morning is recorded in John's gospel, (John 12: 12):

On the next day the large crowd who had come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took the branches of the palm trees and went out to meet Him, and began to shout, "Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord even the King of Israel." Jesus, finding a young donkey, sat on it; as it is written, "Fear not, daughter of Zion; look your king is coming riding on the foal of a donkey." These things His disciples did not understand at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things to Him. So the people, who were with Him when He called Lazarus out of the tomb and raised him from the dead, continued to testify about Him. For this reason also the people went and met Him, because they heard that He had performed this sign. So the Pharisees said to one another, "You see that

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you are not doing any good; look, the whole world has gone after Him.”

Many who had seen the supernatural things he had done had reason enough to believe what he was saying about himself regarding the Father. It would have been impossible for them to deny what they had seen with their own eyes. Yet, many others who had surely seen the signs he had given them, could not or would not believe. They were unable to submit their will to what seemed impossible by human reason. For them, it just could not be true, regardless of what they had seen. John's gospel makes note of this:

But though He had performed so many signs before them, yet they were not believing in Him. This was to fulfill the word of Isaiah the prophet which he spoke: “Lord, who has believed in our report? And to whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?” For this reason they could not believe, for Isaiah said again, “He has blinded their eyes and he hardened their heart, so that they would not see with their eyes and perceive with their heart, and be converted and I heal them.” These things Isaiah said because he saw His glory, and he spoke of Him. Nevertheless many even of the rulers believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they were not confessing Him, for fear that they would be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the approval of men rather than the approval of God.

And Jesus cried out and said, “He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. He who sees Me sees the One who sent Me. I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not

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judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My sayings, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him at the last day. For I did not speak on My own initiative, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment as to what to say and what to speak. I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me.”

It was the first day of unleavened bread which is explained in Leviticus as the days the Jews were to eat only the matzoh. Jesus instructed the disciples to prepare for the Passover feast by speaking with a certain man in the city, arranging to use his house for the purpose. When the evening of preparation came, Jesus had decided to eat what would be his final meal with the twelve, one of whom would betray him to the temple cult. John's gospel relates the story of the washing of the disciples feet, but Matthew did not include it. John picks up the narrative with Jesus foretelling of Judas' treachery:

Now when evening came, Jesus was reclining at the table with the twelve disciples. As they were eating, He said, “Truly I say to you that one of you will betray Me.” Being deeply grieved, they each one began to say to Him, “Surely not I, Lord?” And He answered, “He who dipped his hand with Me in the bowl is the one who will betray Me. The Son of Man is to go, just as it is written of Him; but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been good for that man if he had not been born.” And Judas, who was betraying Him, said, “Surely it is not I, Rabbi?” Jesus said to him, “ You have said it yourself.”

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While they were eating, Jesus took some bread, and after a blessing, He broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins. But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom."

The disciples had to have thought back to the discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum where he spoke of himself as the true bread that had come down from heaven. He said that those who eat his flesh and drink his blood would have life everlasting. Now it made sense to them, and they had the faith to believe in the words he was speaking, not just because of his miraculous deeds, but on the strength of the words alone as being the will of the One who sent him into their midst. This is what he meant when he said to them: "I will be with you always, even to the end of the age." This was the new covenant that would be sealed with the blood of the cross not simply for Israel, but for all of humanity. Soon they would be involved in building that church that even the gates of hell would not prevail against; a church for those "who have not seen and have believed" based on their witness. The events which the holy gospel relates, the coming of the savior, his life, death and resurrection, is the single most momentous event in the history of all creation. It is the New Creation by the will of the Father, in Jesus Christ, all in the Spirit of Love.

Indeed, the bread of the Eucharist is the body of Christ. The wine is the blood of Christ; not by some idea or doctrine of the church only, but on the authority of Jesus himself at his unique

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paschal meal. Heaven and earth will pass away but these words will never pass away: This *is* my body, this *is* my blood. The cumbersome word “transubstantiation” will never do justice to the miracle taking place on the altars around the clock and around the world every day. The so called real presence of Jesus in the Eucharist is substantiated by the entire history of God’s presence among men. In the sacrament of the altar, through the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus is made present in the species of bread and wine, whole and entire, soul and divinity, which he himself had spiritually mandated.

For saints and sinners alike, there is no reasoning on earth available to absolutely understand this mystery of faith. It is only through faith that belief has any rational dimension. With the aid of reason, and by observing creation in all of its splendor, we can be made cogently aware of the existence of the Creator, as Deists believe, but it is only by an act of the will, in faith, and through the grace of God, that it is possible to believe in the promises made to us by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Faith, a gift from God, in conjunction with human reason, also a gift from God born in to every individual, cannot be separated. Together they give us the opportunity to more fully understand what has been revealed to us in Christ. “The human spirit is both intuitive and rational.” Faith alone tends to superstition. Reason, of itself is weak, and does not expand to its full capability.

Grace is sharing in the life of God, a course of virtue earning for us eternity in the Kingdom of Heaven by following the Risen One. It is with a firm *will to believe* that we are delivered, with our humanity, to share in his divinity. In the Eucharist, Jesus is with us in an unquestionably real way, but

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the absolute freedom to accept or reject him has always been our own. This “leap of faith,” answering the call of Christ, this full commitment of the human will to receive him into ourselves, and to sense his real presence, has been proven by so many to be *the* most important decision of their lives; their “yes” to eternity.

I am the way, and the truth and the life; no one comes to the Father but through me.