

she could and fetched her good cape, her 'Katinka,' which was carefully stowed away in a chest. But when she returned to the inn with it, she heard that the Baal Shem had already left for Mezbizh. She immediately set out after him and since she had no money to ride, she walked from town to town with her 'Katinka' until she came to Mezbizh. The Baal Shem took the cape and hung it on the wall. 'It is well,' he said. My mother walked all the way back, from town to town, until she reached Apt. A year later, I was born."

"I, too," cried the woman, "will bring you a good cape of mine so that I may get a son."

"That won't work," said the maggid. "You heard the story. My mother had no story to go by."

One could use that anecdote as an introduction to *An Intelligent Woman's Guide to Existentialism*. Death, despair, and dread, intimations of nothingness, the mystery of mood, and the logic of commitment have been the central preoccupations of the existentialists. In this country, there has been a tendency to add our American obsession with courage and sex. These concerns are the no-man's-land of philosophy. Insubstantial, novelistic, too intimate for the coiled cosmological speculations of metaphysics, irrational and alien to the classical niceties of ethics, utter anathema to the post-Logical Positivists of Oxford, existentialism remains nonetheless the one non-sterile continuation open to modern philosophy, for it is the last of the humanisms, it has not given its unconditional surrender to science.

The existential premise in "The Story of the Cape" is that we learn only from situations in which the end is unknown. As an epistemological scheme it suggests that man learns more about the nature of water by jumping into the surf than by riding a boat. Certainly he learns more about the nature of water if he comes close to drowning. Restated in a framework of Zen, one might say that the nature of experience is comprehended to the degree it is seen in purity, in the purity of no concept. A career soldier, armed with the professional necessity to be brave, can go through combat without ever entering an existential moment. His duty is simple. It is to fight until he dies or wins. It is only if he goes through enough combat to exhaust the concept of his duty and is thus reduced to a man who may either have the will to continue or the desire to quit, that he will have then entered the existential terrain where one discovers authenticity in one's desires. ~~Such situations were at the heart of Hemingway's work~~

~~until *The Old Man and the Sea*, which permits no existential moment for the fisherman: the old man is never reduced to the point of debating whether to let the big fish go.~~

The logic in searching for extreme situations, in searching for one's authenticity, is that one burns out the filament of old dull habit and turns the conscious mind back upon its natural subservience to the instinct. The danger of civilization is that its leisure, its power, its insulation from nature, so alienate us from instinct that our consciousness and our habits take on an autonomy which ~~can~~ censor even the most necessary communication between mind and instinct. ~~For~~ Consciousness, ~~once it is~~ alienated from instinct, begins to construct its intellectual formulations over a void. The existential moment, by demanding the most extreme response in the protagonist, tends to destroy psychotic autonomies in the mind—since they are unreal, they give way first—one is returned closer to the reality of one's personal strength or weakness. The woman in search of a child goes on a pilgrimage in which her end is unknown—she may find the Baal Shem or she may not, but her commitment is complete, and the suggestion intrudes itself that on the long miles of her march, her mind, her habits, and her body were affected sufficiently to dissolve the sterilities of her belly and prepare her for a child.

Her commitment created her new condition. In giving herself to a concept outside herself, the experience she encountered was able to change her. The second woman having heard the story was trying to cheat an existential demand. She was looking not for commitment but obedience to a precedent. And precedent is the spine of all consciousness which is constructed upon a void. Precedent, it can be said, is the description of an event which occurred in the past, and has therefore altered the present in such a way that the same event could not take place again.

Knowledge *

~~They say that in his youth, Rabbi Israel studied eight hundred books of the Kabbalah. But the first time he saw the maggid of Mezritch face to face, he instantly knew that he knew nothing at all.~~

* *The Early Masters*, p. 287.

1967

MP 237-24
Arrives of 12/14

~~"Some day in quieter times I hope we have the opportunity to meet and discuss some of these matters."~~

~~"Yes, Mr. Mailer," said Seafie, "so do I."~~

2584

10: THE COMMUNICATION OF CHRIST

Five minutes later was a scene of congratulation on the grass outside the open arcades of Occoquan. He had signed papers, gone through a few small formalities, and now stood in front of Leiterman's camera, speaking into the microphone held by the sound man, Heiss, while the reporters from *The Washington Post* stood by with pads in their hands, taking every word he said, and he spoke slowly at the rate of dictation he might have used with a new stenographer.

John Boyle, the Presbyterian Chaplain at Yale, was also there. Released yesterday, he had come out to Occoquan today, and he and Mailer greeted each other with warmth, next to old buddies now on the impetus of their bust. But he had also greeted Leiterman with warmth, Leiterman with his faithful camera—how many hours had Fontaine and Leiterman and Heiss been waiting for his release; and in the open celebrative sentiment of being free of jail, and out on that last unexpected high hurdle—funds of great affection now for de Grazia also listening to his speech before the camera, and for Hirschkop now back in some other courtroom, working no doubt with the same dedicated ferocity to gain a verdict for the next prisoner, Hirschkop, the most unexpected bonus of the day, yes he could even forgive Hirschkop for those tons of unreconstructed schmaltz about Mailer the model prisoner, yes, in this resumption of the open air after twenty-four hours, no more, there was a sweet clean edge to the core of the substance of things—a monumentally abstract

remark which may be saved by the concrete observation that the air was good in his lungs—not often could Mailer count on such sweet air. He felt a liberation from the unending disciplines of that moral ladder whose rungs he had counted in the dormitory while listening to Kupferberg, no, all effort was not the same, and to eject oneself from guilt might yet be worth it, for the nausea on return to guilt could conceivably prove less: standing on the grass, he felt one suspicion of a whole man closer to that freedom from dread which occupied the inner drama of his years, yes, one image closer than when he had come to Washington four days ago. The sum of what he had done that he considered good outweighed the dull sum of his omissions these same four days. So he was happy, and it occurred to him that this clean sense of himself, with a skin of compassion at such rare moment for all—yes, even for noble Commissioner Scaife and the dour U. S. Attorneys, no, not quite them, not quite, but go on—this sense of nice expectation and shining conception of his wife, and regrets for the guards, and pride in the prisoners, too much, much too much, it must come crashing soon, but still—this nice anticipation of the very next moves of life itself (and all for just an incredibly inexpensive twenty-four hours in jail) must mean, indeed could mean nothing else to Christians, but what they must signify when they spoke of Christ within them, it was not unlike the rare sweet of a clean loving tear not dropped, still held, oh he must be salient now, and deliver the best of himself to these microphones and reporters, and in respect to Boyle, pick up some of the Chaplain's language, why not? Some message from the Marchers at the Pentagon had to reach America and Americans.

So he made the following speech:

"Today is Sunday, and while I am not a Christian, I happen to be married to one. And there are times when I think the loveliest thing about my dear wife is her unspoken love for Jesus Christ." Unspoken it was, most certainly. She would wonder if he was mad when she read this, for outside of her profound observance of Christmas Eve and her dedication to decorating a Christmas tree, they never talked about such matters. As a child, she had

rarely gone to church, but he knew what he meant—some old pagan spirit of her part Swedish blood must have carried Christ through all the Southern exposures of her mixed part Indian blood, crazy American lass, one-time mouther of commercials on television, mother of his two—would they be mighty?—boys, angel or witch, she had a presence like silver, she was on all nights of the full moon near to mad, and he loved her for that quality he could never explain—her unexpected quixotic depths of compassion, yes the loveliest thing about his dear wife was her unspoken love for Jesus Christ.

"Some of us," said Mailer to the reporters and the photographer and the microphone, "were at the Pentagon yesterday, and we were arrested in order to make our symbolic protest of the war in Vietnam, and most of us served these very short sentences, but they are a harbinger of what will come next, for if the war doesn't end next year," then said he, feeling as modest as he had felt on the steps of the Department of Justice, "why then a few of us will probably have to take longer sentences. Because we must. You see, dear fellow Americans, it is Sunday, and we are burning the body and blood of Christ in Vietnam. Yes, we are burning him there, and as we do, we destroy the foundation of this Republic, which is its love and trust in Christ." He was silent. Wow.

And Boyle gave him a sidelong look, as if to say, "Watch it, old buddy, they put junior reverends in the cuckoo house for carrying on." But Boyle looked pleased. And the reporters looked pleased. And Fontaine and Leiterman, Leiterman particularly, looked ecstatic, for the end of their movie might be there.

They drove back to Washington in de Grazia's car, and Mailer changed at the hotel, called his wife, caught a shuttle, had a merry ride back with Fontaine for there were hordes of young girls on the flight and the air between New York and Washington was orgiastic with the breath of release, some promise of peace and new war seemed riding the phosphorescent wake of this second and last day's siege of the Pentagon, as if the country were opening into more and more on the resonance of these two days, more that was good, more that was bad,

and Mailer met his wife at P. J. Clarke's for dinner, but their luck was poor: an old girl friend of the novelist passed by, tapped him possessively on the hair, and so he spent the evening in a muted quarrel with his wife, the actress, Beverly Bentley.

And a few days later saw his immortal speech on Christ as it was printed in *The Washington Post*. There was no mention of the scene outdoors on the grass. The story went like this:

Novelist Norman Mailer using a makeshift courtroom to deliver a Sunday sermon on the evils of the Vietnam war, received the only prison sentence yesterday as justice was meted out in wholesale lots for hundreds of anti-war demonstrators.

In his courtroom speech, Mailer said, "They are burning the body and blood of Christ in Vietnam."

"Today is Sunday," he said, "and while I am not a Christian, I happen to be married to one. And there are times when I think the loveliest thing about my dear wife is her unspoken love for Jesus Christ . . ."

Mailer said he believed that the war in Vietnam "will destroy the foundation of this republic, which is its love and trust in Christ." Mailer is a Jew.

It was obvious the good novelist Norman Mailer had much to learn about newspapers, reporters, and salience.

~~H. SKINS AND HIDES~~

~~Still he was not injured unduly. His hide was hard. He laughed when he read the red bordered story in Time about his scatological solo at the Ambassador Theater.~~

(31-57)

2588

~~10~~

The Fast, John the Baptist,
and the Devil

People said, and it was true when I saw him, that the Baptist wore but one small wrapping of camel's hide to conceal his loins. He was so naked to the sun that he looked darker than any of his visitors, a thin man with a thin beard.

I had also heard how he believed that meat and wine inspire demons to live in one's body; therefore he ate nothing but wild honey and locusts, the poorest food of the poor. Yet it was said that these locusts could devour all the disbelief in the hearts of those who came to John. And the wild honey gave warmth to his voice when he spoke in the words of Isaiah: "The crooked shall be made straight and the rough ways made smooth."

Yet I had also been told that the locusts he ate kept him harsh in spirit and he would greet penitents by saying: "Generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

The people would ask: "What shall we do?" And John the Baptist would answer: "Let him who has two coats give one to the man who has none." And he would always speak of the man mightier than himself who was yet to come.

Yet when I first saw his face, I wished to hide my own. For I knew that he would not be long among us. And I knew this as if I heard a beating of wings overhead.

I had joined a group of many people and so I could stare at John before he saw me and was able to watch the pilgrims as they were baptized and departed. I remained. Even in the loneliness of this place in the desert, he still could not see me, for I concealed myself in the shadow of a rock. It was only when the others were gone and the stones were hot from the sun that I came forward. To which he said, "I have waited for you."

His eyes had more light than the sky, yet they were paler than the moon. His thin beard was long. The hair that grew from his ears was matted, and so too was the hair that grew from his cheeks. A wing and a leg of a locust were caught in his beard. I wondered how this man who bathed others and washed himself many times a day could still show such leavings. Yet it was not unfitting. His face was like a ravine and small creatures would live within.

2590

Looking at me, he said, "You are my cousin." Then he said, "I knew that you would come today."

"How can you know?"

He sighed. His breath was as lonely as the wind that passes through empty places. He said, "I have been told to wait for you, and I am tired. It is good that you are here."

I felt so near to him that I soon confessed my sins—I had never done as much for another. I would have deemed it belittling to whatever pride I had as a man. (For my sins were too small.) I might be a master carpenter and thirty years of age, but I felt young before him, and modest and much too innocent for such a grave man. I searched to find evil in myself and came back with no more than moments I could recall of disrespect toward my mother and contests in the night with lustful thoughts. Perhaps there had been a few acts of unkindness when judging others.

"Well," he said, "you can still repent. Our sin is always more than we know." And John came behind me as I entered the water, and with the strength of a desert lion, he seized me by the nose and, with his other hand pressing upon my forehead, thrust me back into the river. Passing so quickly from air to water, I gasped first at my loss of breath and then from all the water I swallowed. Still, in this moment I saw many things, and my life was changed forever.

Was the Holiest descending toward us in the shape of a dove? And when I came up from the water, the dove was

on my shoulder. I felt as if much had come back to me from all that had been lost. I was one again with myself—a poor man, but good. And then I felt more. I had a vision of glory. The heavens opened for an instant and it was as if I saw a million, nay, a million million of souls.

I heard a voice, and it came from the heavens. It came into my ear and said: "Before I formed thee in the belly, I knew thee." Fear and exaltation were in me then, and in greater measure than I had ever known. I raised my face to the heavens and said, "Lord God, I am like a child."

And the Lord spoke as He had to the prophet Jeremiah. I heard: "Say not 'I am a child,' for you shall go to all the places that I shall send thee." And I felt as if His finger blessed my mouth even as the beak of the dove touched my lips. His Word came into me like the burning fire in my bones when I was twelve and sick with fever.

Now John withdrew his hand from my head and we stood in the river. Away went the dove. And John and I spoke to each other a little. I will tell of that, and soon. But when I left, I knew that I would never see him again. He began to sing as I left, but it was to the River Jordan, not to me. And the taste of that brown river was still in my mouth and the dust of the desert in my nostrils as I set out on my long march home to Nazareth.

11

It was late in the afternoon. The light upon the rocks turned to gold. And I could still hear John the Baptist as he sang. Since he knew no song, the music of his throat came forth like the voice of a ram.

I walked with strength. For now I was no longer like other men. My legs took larger strides than before. Now I knew the other man who had lived within the shell of myself, and he was better than me. I had become that man.

A great cloud came over the sky. There was a downpour. A rainbow arose from one end of the desert to touch the other, and above me was the radiance of the Lord. Soon I lay down upon the hot damp sand, and soon I heard His voice. He said: "Stand upon your feet."

When I did, He told me: "Once I spoke to the prophet Ezekiel and he saved our people in Babylon. Now these words given to Ezekiel are for you: 'Son of Man, I send thee to the children of Israel, to a nation that hath rebelled against Me, even unto this very day. For they are impudent children and stiff-hearted. But you will speak My words unto them. Since they are not a people of a strange speech whose words you cannot understand but are the house of Israel, behold! I will make your face strong against their face. So fear them not.'"

Then this voice said into my ear: "Those were My words to Ezekiel. But to you I say: You are My son, and therefore you will be mightier than a prophet. Even mightier than the prophet Ezekiel."

I still had many hours to travel across land I hardly knew. Again I was full of exaltation, and again I was full of fear. I was also weary. The scrolls I had studied since childhood were not as close to me as the words of this high Lord my God, yet now that He was near, I could only fear Him. For the sound of His voice can be heard in the echo of great rocks when they fall. And I did not know how to serve a Lord who could leave boils upon the flesh of every man and beast in the land of Egypt and cast hail to blight every herb of the field, or fire in the grass until every tree was consumed. I raised my hands toward heaven as if to ask whether I was truly the one to exercise His force. And God said to me, "Since you are not yet

strong, do not return to your home. Go up rather into the mountain that is there before you. Go now. In that wilderness, fast among the rocks. Drink the water that is beneath the rocks. But eat no food. Before the sun sets on the last of your days of fast, you will know why I have chosen you."

Soon I learned of His power to protect me. As I climbed, darkness fell and I had to share my ground with serpents and scorpions. Yet none came near. In the morning I climbed further and for much of the day upward on this mountain. And it was worthy of the lamentations of the prophet Isaiah, for one could say that the cormorant and the bittern possessed it.

In every direction was emptiness. On the ramparts of the rock, vultures looked down on me, side by side, every vulture with her mate. It was then I thought of how John the Baptist had asked, on saying farewell: "Did the light of the Lord appear when you were immersed?"

Even as John's eyes stared into mine, I had wondered if the million million of souls that I had seen were the face of the Lord. But to John I said only: "Is it not death and destruction to see Him?"

He replied: "For all but the Christ." Then John said: "Once the Holy Spirit came to me. He was so near that I put my hands before my eyes. But the Holy Spirit said: 'I will let you gaze upon My back,' and He allowed me to see that His back was noble, a noble back." Then John

grasped my arm. "I have known since I was a child that my cousin must come after me and replace me. For my mother spoke of how your mother told her of all that had been with her." Now he kissed me on both cheeks. "I baptize with water," he said, "and can cleanse any soul who has truly repented, even as water can extinguish fire. But you will baptize with the Spirit. You will root out evil with God's mercy." And he kissed me again.

It was hard not to remember the breath of John the Baptist when he embraced me, for it was full of all that is in the odor of an exhausted man. And indeed, no matter how often one seeks water to soothe the throat, such an odor cannot be separated from the flesh. A vast fatigue speaks of all that has been lost to one's striving. Yet his skin had been honest and full of the loneliness of the desert and its rocks. And so did he also smell of the waters of the River Jordan and the heavy wisdom of its mud and silt.

12

At the summit, the rocks stood about like tombs, and the steps between were treacherous. It was midday. The heat of the sun was on me.

I sat in the shadow of a great stone and looked out on the lands of Israel, upon Galilee to the north and Judea to the south. The haze had a golden hue, and I wondered whether one could even see the spires of gold that rose above the hills of the holy city. But I did not think long on Jerusalem; living without food for a day, I was hungry.

Yet I also knew why the Lord had sent me to the summit of this mountain. For it was not enough to be His son and cousin to John the Baptist. I had to pass through tri-

als, and the first test must be not to eat. Even as I said to myself, "I will take no food until sundown," the Lord replied.

I did not see Him, nor did I feel His presence other than His voice (which was in my ear), but He said: "You will fast until I tell you to eat."

So I was without food for that day and the next. And by the fifth day, when the pangs of my stomach had given way to a solemn emptiness of spirit, I felt weak and no longer knew if I had the strength to climb down from this mountain. So I said aloud, "How long, O Lord?" and He replied, "Long. It will be long."

Since I was not there to dispute Him but to follow His will, fasting grew easier. I shielded myself from the sun and came to love the taste of water and the wisdom that is found in the shade of large rocks (until they grow too cold at night for any wisdom). And the air of night was cold. No plants grew on the summit of this mountain. Which was just as well. For there were hours when I could have chewed on their thorns.

In the second week, I had visions of King David and knew that he had committed a great sin. I could not recall the offense, but I did remember that he had been punished, and on his death the Lord had appeared to the son of David, King Solomon, and asked: "What shall I give thee?"

And Solomon replied: "O Lord my God, I know not how

to go out nor to come in, and Thy servant is in the midst of Thy people, a great people that cannot be numbered nor counted. Give therefore Thy servant an understanding heart that I may discern between good and bad."

And I recalled how this speech had so pleased the Lord that He said to Solomon: "Because thou hast not asked for a long life nor for riches nor begged for the death of thine enemies but asked for discernment in judgment, then, behold, I have given thee a wise and understanding heart."

And God gave Solomon all that he had not asked for, both riches and honors, until there were no kings as great as Solomon in those days.

But now the voice of the Lord was saying to me: "Solomon did not keep My Commandments. Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five. All people came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, in that he exceeded all the kings of the earth. And these kings brought him silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks. But," said the Lord to my ear, "King Solomon loved many strange women: the daughter of Pharaoh and the women of the Moabites, the Ammonites, the Edomites, the Sedonians, and the Hittites, whereas I had said unto the children of Israel, 'Ye shall not go in to them. For surely they will turn your heart toward their gods.' But Solomon had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and when Solomon was old, his heart was not perfect with Me. I had given him too many gifts. So,"

said the Lord, "I will not give you riches. And you will never tarry with a woman, or you shall lose the Lord."

He had given me Solomon's sins on which to meditate, and that was an advantage not given to Solomon. I, being without food, had no desire for a woman, nor did I feel at odds with the Lord's decision. My fast continued.

The prophets were often with me in these weeks: Elijah and Elisha, Isaiah and Daniel and Ezekiel. I could recall their words as if they were my own. Before long, I had a dream that made me one with the prophet Elijah, and in this dream I had contests with the prophets of Baal. More than forty such pagan prophets had come to my mountain to sacrifice a bullock, but first they destroyed the Lord's altar on the summit. Then they lacerated themselves with knives to show their devotion to Baal. Blood spurted from the wounds of these prophets and they cried aloud, yet the god Baal could not speak.

Seeing that Baal was silent in my presence, I put twelve large stones on end, to stand for the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel, after which I restored the altar of the Lord. Then I dug a trench around the stones and put wood on the altar and cut the bullock into pieces, laying the raw flesh upon the wood. And then I poured four barrels of water on the sacrifice until this water ran into the trench.

And the fire of the Lord blazed through the meat of the bullock and the sopping wood and the wet stones and licked up all the water that was in the trench. And I be-

headed these forty prophets of Baal with a sword, and only then did I awake.

Now it came to me that I was not Elijah but only dreaming of the scroll of Elijah, and the dream had been there to tell me that my fast must continue for forty days and forty nights. For if I did not change my ways or the people of Israel did not change theirs, then all of us were in danger of God's final judgment.

So could I also see how my youth had passed with more thought given to the wood under my tools than to my people. Nor had I listened when Joseph would say: "All share in the sinfulness of Israel because we do not work hard enough to overcome it."

I was yet to learn that I would care about sinners more than for the pious, but now I was content to quote the words of Isaiah to myself: "Though Thy people Israel be as the sand of the sea, yet a remnant shall return." And there, near to the sixth week of my fast, full of the spirit of Isaiah, I hoped that with the aid of this remnant of good Jews I might recover all that had been lost in the nation. So I would repeat the sayings of Isaiah aloud, speaking even into the eye of the sun until my eyes burned and I was obliged to return to the shade. I pondered the prayers I would use with sinners and decided that I would tell them, even as had Isaiah: "'Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings; relieve the oppressed.'"

And it was the fortieth day. As evening came, the Lord

said to me, "Tomorrow you may step down from the mountain and take food." Hunger came back to me on these words, and I was ravenous.

Yet even as I was thinking of what I would eat, the Lord said, "Tonight, remain on the mountain. A visitor will come."

The visitor came at dawn. And he was as beautiful as
 a prince. He had a gold crown on a gold chain
 about his neck, and in the crown was the face of a
 king. He had a more noble air than I had ever seen.
 And the hair of his crown was as long, as soft and lux-
 urious. He was dressed in robes of velvet that were as pur-
 ple as the last evening, and he wore a crown as golden as
 the sun. He had climbed the mountain, yet there was no
 dust on his robes nor sweat upon his skin. He could be no
 other than who I thought, and indeed he soon introduced
 himself. I said to myself, "The Devil is the most beautiful
 creature God ever made."

13

The visitor soon arrived. And he was as handsome as a prince. He had a gold ornament on a gold chain about his neck, and in this ornament was the face of a ram, bestial yet more noble than any ram I had ever seen. And the hair of this prince was as long as my own and lustrous. He was dressed in robes of velvet that were as purple as the late evening, and he wore a crown as golden as the sun. He had climbed the mountain, yet there was no dust on his robes nor sweat upon his skin. He could be no other than who I thought, and indeed he soon introduced himself. I said to myself, "The Devil is the most beautiful creature God ever made."

His first words were: "Do you know how the prophet Isaiah met his death?"

I was overcome with silence. So I was obliged to listen as he said: "Isaiah was killed by a Jewish king, the pagan Manasseh, cohort of Amon. A bad Jew." The Devil nodded as if he were a good Jew (which I was certain he was not!). Then he held up one finger and spoke again: "This Manasseh, wishing to destroy the religion of his fathers, sent out a royal order that Isaiah was to be uprooted from his home in the city and hunted like an animal. Hearing of this, Isaiah fled, and the soldiers of Manasseh set out after him into the wilderness. There, the prophet looked for a tree with a hollow large enough for a man to stand inside. This sanctuary," said the Devil, "he found in a stout oak with a rotten center, and he placed himself inside it. But the officers of Manasseh discovered where he was hiding and brought a great saw to the tree and cut it in half. Isaiah went screaming into his death. Did you know?" asked the Devil.

"Not of such a death did I hear."

Whereupon he laughed. I felt weakened by this story more than by any deprivation of the fast.

He, however, was not about to cease speaking. "The manner in which Isaiah met his death need not give you large concern," he said, "since you are not a prophet but indeed the Son! To my recollection, which is not small, the Lord has never performed an act of this kind before.

Indeed, to look upon you is to give me much to contemplate. For you seem innocent of all that I know."

He looked at me fondly. His eyes were black marble, but there were lights within. He said, "Are you hungry? Are you in need of drink?" And he brought forth a jug of wine and a leg of lamb, well cooked, which I had not seen beneath his robes until he produced them. And now he approached me so closely that my nostrils took in the spirit of the wine and the gravies of the lamb, even the smell of the Devil himself, which penetrated a small cloud of perfume rising from the folds of his robe. I could also perceive how greed came forth from his body. For that was kin to the odor that lives between the buttocks. Therefore I refused his food, but still, the other odors of his body entered my appetite like the savory that comes from an oven when food is roasting. And he, seeing such deliberation, smiled once more and said, "But of course you have no need of food. Being the Son of God, you can as easily command these stones to be bread. Which is proper food for an Essene. However, your garment is neither clean nor free of dust. Indeed, that you are the Son of God surprises me. Why did your Father choose you? Say to Him when next you converse that I salute Him. For do you know? Your Father and I have had much traffic and considerable dispute, and so We are always eager to obtain word of the Other and His doings. Indeed, on those occasions when We meet, I tell Him that men and women are the crown

of all He has conceived among the animals and the plants of the field but that it is I, not He, who has a better understanding of this Creation. For His work has given issue to many small creatures and spirits that He hardly knows as well as I do. Of course, I was once His servant, His most trusted servant. Contemplate, then, how well I understand Him."

I was amazed. He did not inspire fear but comfort. Now I knew how it might feel to be a sinner in a low tavern drinking wine. The labors of this long fast were gone; I felt balm come to my limbs. I could talk to the Devil; he was comfortable. If his odor could leave me uneasy, it also offered sympathy to desires I had not yet allowed myself to feel.

Yet if I would allow him much, still I could not agree that God, the Lord of the Universe, did not understand His Creation better than my visitor. "It is not possible," I exclaimed. "He is all-powerful. The heavens and the earth, the stars and the sun, bow before Him. They do not bow to you."

For one moment, Satan snorted like a horse. Was he unwilling to accept the bridle?

"Your Father," said the Devil, "is but one god among many. You might take account of the myriad respected by the Romans. Are we to give no homage to the great will of the Romans? Why, your Father does not even have the power to command His own Jews in their own land even

though so many see Him as the only One. You would do better to consider the breadth of His rages; they are unseemly for a great god. They are swollen and without proportion. He issues too many threats. He cannot bear anyone who would dispute Him. Whereas I confide to you that a hint of disobedience and a whiff of treachery are among the joys of life, and are to be ranked with its spoils rather than its evils."

"That is not so," I was able to answer. "My Father is God, and of many dimensions, and of all dimensions." But my words tasted like straw.

The Devil replied, "He is not in command of Himself!"

Nor did the Devil show any fear of what he had said. He answered me back. "My Father," he said, "does not have the right to demand complete obedience from His people. He does not comprehend that women are creatures different from men and live with separate responsibilities. Indeed, your Father has no inkling of women. His sense for them is shared by the prophets, who speak to them alone, with the women. And they do. For rarely will He represent them! Look at Isaiah: tell me that Isaiah does not live in your Father's house when he says: 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched forth necks and wantonness, walking and dancing as they go, they shall be brought down.'"

14

Nor did the Devil show any fear at what he had said. He continued to speak. "Your Father," he said, "does not have the right to demand complete obedience from His people. He does not comprehend that women are creatures different from men and live with separate understanding. Indeed, your Father has no inkling of women; His scorn for them is shared by His prophets, who speak, so they claim, with His voice. And they do! For rarely will He reprimand them! Look at Isaiah! Tell me that Isaiah does not live in your Father's heart when he says: 'Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walk with stretched-forth necks and wanton eyes, walking and mincing as they go, therefore the Lord will smite with

a scabbard the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion, and the Lord will discover their secret parts.' *Their secret parts,*" repeated the Devil. And he continued to speak with the words of Isaiah: "The Lord will take away their bracelets and bonnets, the ornaments of the legs, the earrings, the rings and the nose-jewels, the fine linen, the hoods and the veils. And it shall come to pass that instead of sweet smell there shall be stink; and instead of a girdle, a rent; for lovely hair, there shall be baldness, and burning instead of beauty.'"

"My Father was speaking of the nation of Zion," I said. "So were we taught."

"No," replied the Devil. "He pretends to speak of the nation of Zion. But it is women He belittles. His mighty curses He saves for the men. When He wishes to address the nation of Israel, He is speaking only to men: 'The indignation of the Lord is upon all nations, and His fury upon all their armies: He hath utterly destroyed them, He hath delivered them to the slaughter. Their offal shall come up out of their carcasses and the mountains shall be melted with their blood.' What a rage! His failures burn in His heart! Can He suspect that He may not be all-powerful? No! He does not have enough spirit to say: 'Yes, I have lost, but my soldiers were honest and fought well.' No, He is vengeful. 'The palaces will be forsaken,' says Isaiah, 'the forts and towers shall be dens forever, until the Spirit be poured upon us from on High.'

"But when," asked the Devil, "will the Spirit be poured

upon us? Your Father would send you forth to improve the hearts of men when His own heart is caked with the blood of those He has slaughtered. His love of all He has created is choked by His curses. His rages may be mighty, but they do not satisfy His desire. His language reveals how much He adores the grandeur He pretends to despise.

"Tell me that your Father is not filled with an adoration of women. Which He hides from Himself! For He hates their power to entice Him. Ezekiel knows what is in your Father's heart. After all, he heard these words from the Lord: 'I swore unto thee and entered into a covenant with thee, and thou becamest mine. I washed thee with water; yea, I thoroughly washed away thy blood, and I anointed thee with oil. I clothed thee also in brodered work, and fine linen, and I covered thee with silk, with ornaments, and I put bracelets upon thy hands and a chain on thy neck, and earrings in thine ears, and a beautiful crown upon thine head. Thou wast decked with gold and silver; thou didst eat fine bread, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceedingly beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty which I had put upon thee.' Now," said the Devil, "hear how He complains! He is pitiful in His complaints: 'But thou didst trust in thine own beauty, and played the harlot because of thy renown, and poured out thy fornications on everyone that passed by, and multiplied thy whoredoms. Thou hast also committed fornica-

tion with the Egyptians, thy neighbors, great of flesh; and hast played the whore also with the Assyrians because thou wast insatiable.

“Wherefore, O harlot, because thy filthiness was poured out, and thy nakedness discovered, therefore I will gather all thy lovers with whom thou hast taken pleasure; and will gather them round about against thee, and give thee into their hand, and they shall throw down thine eminent place, and shall strip thee of thy clothes, and shall take thy fair jewels and leave thee naked and bare, and they shall stone thee, and thrust thee through with their swords. And they shall burn thy houses with fire, and execute judgments upon thee in the sight of many women: and I will cause thee to cease from playing the harlot.’

“Does all this take place,” asked the Devil, “in order to scorn Jerusalem? Say rather that your Father’s language reeks of desire.”

“Your words are pollutions.” I hoped to excite enough anger in myself to reply, but I could only repeat: “Your words are poisonous.”

Satan replied: “Your Father’s tongue is as ripe with lust as my own.”

I knew confusion. Could I deny that my loins had quickened as I listened to the repetition of my Father’s words?

Now the Devil said: “You believe that you are sitting on the summit of this mountain, but we are no longer there. We have risen to a place above the holy places.”

His embrace of my vision was complete. Now I saw the city of Jerusalem, and it was beneath us. For we were no longer seated on the mountain. We were on the highest dome of the Great Temple in Jerusalem.

I felt vertigo.

At that moment the Devil said to me, "Because you are the Son of God, you can feel free to leap! Cast yourself out. Your Father's angels will carry you."

I felt a temptation to jump. But, most suddenly, I did not feel as if I were the Son of God. Not yet!

An abyss was below me. And I knew it would be there for all the generations to come. Whenever they stood on a height, they would live in the wind of that unruly spirit who dwells in our breath and has a terror of the leap. Now the Devil looked at me again with his dark eyes, and the points of light within were like a night of stars; those eyes would promise glory. "If you stay with your Father you will labor for Him," he said. "You will be consumed. Jump! You can save yourself. Jump!"

I would be smashed. But would my extinction be brief? And my return to the living as quick? The Devil had taken me into him. By the light in his dark eyes, I knew his speech even though he said nothing. If I jumped, the Devil would possess me. I would have leaped to my death at his bidding.

But at this moment he said aloud, "You will be reborn. In secret. God will not know. I have the power to distract."

He was telling me of a life to come. It would be bountiful. "All is mine!" cried Satan aloud.

Indeed, greed was godly to him. Out of crude greed would come works of great power. "Those who have loyalty to me," said the Devil, "sit now upon the earth with such command that they never give vent to those little turds, fit only for a goat, that pinch themselves forth from the bony cheeks of your friend John. Why, he will not even shit on the Sabbath! And on other days he carries a small hoe to cover his leavings."

And I, in this same moment, wondered whether I could leap but not fall. Could I fly with angels? By power given to me by the Lord, could I fly?

Could I know? Satan stood between my Father and me. Did he have the power to deny the wings of the angel? I did not jump. I wanted to, but I did not dare. To myself I said, "I will not serve God as a brave son but as a modest one." That was just. Had I not spent more than half my life working carefully with many small movements, equal to equal, with the small mysteries of wood?

And now I had an inkling of why God had chosen Mary and Joseph to be my family. I said, "Get thee hence, Satan." If my voice was weak, I repeated it: "Get thee hence, Satan," and now my voice had more force. It was ready to draw upon the strength that comes from emptiness. And I saw the wisdom of the Lord. For even in fasting is strength, and that was the greatest strength one

could bring to bear against the Devil inasmuch as he hated emptiness. Who is more lonely than the Devil? I had the power at last to look into Satan's eyes and say: "It is not you I want. It is my Father." Even as I said this, I knew a small but sharp woe. I was losing something I desired, and I was losing it forever.

But Satan gave a cry like a beast just wounded by the spear. "Your Father," he cried, "will destroy His own Creation. For too little!" And he departed. And I was left with a vision of angels. They gathered about me to bathe my eyes. I slept. Never before had I known such exhaustion.

In the morning I awoke to see myself on this same mountain where I had lived for forty days. Now I was ready to come down. The road to Nazareth would be long and empty. Yet for the next day and the next, no brigands attacked. Which was just as well. My hour with the Devil had left me spent. My breath was foul. Nor did I feel that I had escaped altogether.

I was, however, not distraught. For as I marched, so could I recite the words of Isaiah: "'Unto us,'" I declared, "'a child is born; unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulders; and his name shall be called wonderful, counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the prince of peace.'" And if I was too insignificant for such words, I had to suppose that God had chosen me for His son because I had been born and had lived in the midst of common people rather than like a

king. Thereby I could understand many small virtues and weak habits in others. If I could increase in my powers (and I knew that He would pass on many powers to me), perhaps the world of men might multiply in virtue with me. So I had begun to believe in my Father. I would labor for Him. Soon He would come to save Jerusalem. He was Lord of the Universe. I would labor with joy. Through Him, comfort would come to those who were sorrowful, and the hungry would be fed, yes, and those sinners in greatest despair would find their sins remitted. And I felt such joy at these thoughts that I could not believe they were my own. Indeed, the Devil must have scraped me sore in my judgment, for I was now ready to do all. But then, on this new morning I was not much afraid of Satan. He had captured only a small part of me. I had been tested, had proved loyal, and now my tongue began to feel clean. As I walked, there was the smallest and sweetest of modest miracles. In this desert waste I came upon a small tree and it bore plums that slaked my thirst and gave a sweet warmth to my limbs. I fell to my knees and blessed my Creator, yet before I could even begin to pray, I came to my feet again.

I was obliged to wonder. Why had the Lord left me alone with Satan? Was it to scourge me of an excess of piety? Before long I would learn that there might be truth in this. There was work to do, and it could not be accomplished on one's knees.

pp126 127

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE SON

NORMAN MAILER

E504

Faith + lack of faith



RANDOM HOUSE NEW YORK

29

I was coming to comprehend that one must enter the darkness that lives beneath every radiance of spirit. And I wished to open my apostles to such a truth. I told them of a dream that had visited me each night for seven nights; it was a dream that the Son of Man would go to Jerusalem and be denied by the High Priest and be crucified.

On hearing it, my disciples said, "No, you will live forever. And we will live with you."

Then I knew why darkness lies close to exaltation. If they loved me, it was for my power to work miracles, not because I might teach them to love others. They wished to

preach like me, but only to increase their own power, not to preach with love. So I rebuked them, saying: "You savor not the things that be of God but the things that be of men." In the silence that followed these words, the dream was upon me again.

"If I am killed, I will rise again after three days," I said. But I did not know if I spoke the truth.

I looked into their eyes to see if their souls were open. For at just this moment, the miracle of faith would be present or would not. In their eyes I saw no more than a heaviness of spirit. It was the heaviness that speaks of concern for oneself. I had wanted to drive them toward faith, but now I realized that I, too, was not acting out of love for others but was looking for power to convince them. So I sighed at the intricacy of the heart. And they sighed after me, as if we all knew how close we had come to truth yet also knew how far away we were.

On another day, not long after, I wanted to be close to Peter and to James and to John. Had I not begun my ministry with them? So I chose to lead them up into a high mountain, and we were there by ourselves. A cloud followed. And I knew that a cloud like this had been overhead in the hour when Moses raised his tabernacle on Mount Sinaj, and the cloud had descended to cover the altar.

In that time, the children of Israel had been in the desert for forty years. At each place where the cloud came

pp136 140

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO THE SON

NORMAN MAILER

E 505

Conversations w/ Jude



RANDOM HOUSE NEW YORK

~~go. I will give as much to the last man as to you. Let the
fast be first and the first last."~~

I was uplifted by the force of my voice and spoke with such strength that the Lord whispered: "Enough! In your speech is the seed of discontent. When you are without Me, the Devil is your companion." And I felt as if the Lord held a thorn to my brow; I no longer knew to whose voice I listened. And I understood that to be the Son of God was not equal to being a Prince of Heaven but instead was my apprenticeship in learning how to speak simply and with wisdom, rather than by bewildering others with the brilliance of one's words; it was to know—most difficult of all—when the Lord was speaking through me and when He was not.

While we waited and worked to keep our spirits together, I had my times of doubt. I had labored in so many ways to reach the hearts of my fellow Jews, good men, even pillars of the community, but so many had wanted nothing to do with me.

It was then I had the longest conversation I would know with Judas. For, in an hour of doubt, I asked him: "Why do they not join me? How can they not wish to enter the Kingdom of Heaven?"

He was ready to tell me. "It is," Judas said, "because you do not understand them. You speak of the end of this world and our entrance into another realm. But a money-lender or a merchant does not want this world to end. He

is comfortable with his little triumphs, and he wishes to be able to brood on the losses of his day. So he is at home with everything that proves a little cleaner or a little filthier than it was supposed to be. He lives for the play of chance. That is why he is so pious when he does not play. He suspects that the Lord would never approve of chance, yet here is he, enjoying life to the degree that it is a game and not a serious matter. Except for money. Gold is the center of philosophy for such a person, and salvation is there to contemplate in one's thoughts, but not in one's actions. He could even live with what you say about salvation, except that you ask for too much. You tell him to give everything of himself to it. So you offend him profoundly. You want the world to end in order that glory can come for all of us. Your merchant knows better. A little of this, a little of that, and the Highest One to be revered—at a great distance, of course."

"You speak," I said, "as if you agree with them."

"In my thoughts I am often closer to them than I am to you."

"Then why are you with me?"

"Because many of your sayings are closer to me than any enjoyment I receive by witnessing their games. Having grown up among them, I know what is in their hearts, and I detest them. They continue to believe they are good. They see themselves as rich in charity, in piety, and in loyalty to their people. So I scorn them. They not only toler-

ate the great distance between the rich and the poor, they increase it."

"Then you are with me?"

"Yes."

"Is it because I know that we cannot reach the Kingdom of Heaven until there are no rich and no poor?"

"Yes."

"Still, you almost speak as if you do not care about entering the Kingdom of Heaven."

"God strike me, but I do not believe in it."

"But you say you are with me. Why, then, are you with me?"

"Can you bear the truth?"

"I am nothing without it."

"The truth, dear Yeshua, is that I do not believe you will ever bring us all to salvation. Yet in the course of saying all that you say, the poor will take courage to feel more equal to the rich. That gives me happiness."

"That alone?"

"I hate the rich. They poison all of us. They are vain, undeserving, and wasteful of the hopes of those who are beneath them. They spend their lives lying to the lowly."

I hardly knew what to reply. He had left me not unhappy. Indeed, I was all but merry. For I could see that he would work for me, and work hard. So, he would help to bring us all to salvation. What a smile of joyous disbelief would be on his face when we entered the gates together.

Only then would he see how all I said came truly from my Father.

I loved Judas. In this hour I loved him more even than I loved Peter. If all my disciples would dare to be as truthful with me as Judas had been, then I could be stronger and accomplish many things.

"If," I now asked, "I ceased to labor—by even a jot or a tittle—for the needs of the poor, would you see less of value in me?"

"I would turn against you. A man who is ready to walk away from the poor by a little is soon ready to depart from them by a lot."

I had to admire this man. Judas had not seen the glory I knew. Yet his beliefs were as powerful to him as were mine to me. Yes, he was more admirable even than Peter, whose faith was as blind as a stone and so could be split by a larger stone.

So too did I know that trouble might arise between Judas and me. For he had none of the accommodation that my Father had given to my heart to make me ready for those trials that could come upon us unforeseen.

I can also say that this conversation with Judas was wondrous for clearing disarray. At last all seemed to be in order. We were ready. I could hardly believe we were ready to set out at last for Jerusalem, but it was a good morning. If none of us were without fear, we were

touched by happiness as well. For we had not been enslaved by our fear. Our legs knew their own joy.

Then, and only then, did we truly step out. And in the vigor of our march, many began to believe that in two days when we were close enough to see Jerusalem, the Kingdom of God would appear. The Lord would be among us.

To entrance into Jerusalem

Since I wished my people to feel heartened by our journey into Jerusalem, I sent forth two of my disciples and so I said: "Go into this village before you and wherever you find an ass whom no man has ever sat. When you find one, bring him to me. Tell them that the Lord is in need of such an animal."

And they went away and soon found a colt, young and unsaddled, and led him back. They upon this animal, which until now had been ignorant of a rider, and I held to its mane. For if I could not subdue such a young beast, how then could I claim the upper to the hearts of men marching on to the Temple?

146-195

2651

32

The entrance into Jerusalem

Since I wished my people to feel heartened by our entrance into Jerusalem, I sent forth two of my disciples and told them: "Go into this village before us and ask for a colt on whom no man has ever sat. When you find one, bring him to me. Tell them that the Lord is in need of such an animal."

And they went away and soon found a colt, young and spirited, and led him back. I sat upon this animal, which, until now, had been ignorant of a rider, and I held to its mane. For if I could not subdue such a young beast, how then could I calm the uproar in the hearts of men awaiting me at the Temple?

In time, the colt jumped less and pranced more, and we were able to walk in procession. And I liked the animal. I also felt as hungry as if I might never eat again.

Whereupon, seeing a fig tree that was heavy with leaves, I trotted toward it in order to take my fill. Yet on its branches I found no ripe figs.

Did an ill wind blow toward us? I said to the fig tree, "Let no man eat fruit from you again."

But a weight came upon my heart for cursing the roots of another. "I am the Son of God," I told myself, "yet also a man; by a thread does man live without heedless destruction."

So I also knew that Satan still clung to me. Like a hawk who searches the fields below for one small creature, then swoops for the kill, so had I scourged the tree.

Now the crowd of men and women who walked ahead of me took branches from the palms we passed and strewed them on my path. They sang, "Hosannah! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Blessed is the kingdom of our David who comes in the name of the Lord. Hosannah in the highest." And some cried out, "Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord." These people of Jerusalem (and most had not seen me before) were full of favor; in the windows, many waved. Word of our good deeds had come to Jerusalem before us.

Yet I did not forget the fig tree. Its branches would now be bare. Such thoughts made me brood upon the end of

the city of Tyre. A thousand years ago it had dwelt in splendor, renowned for its tables of ebony, its emeralds and purple linens, its stalls of honey and balm, its coral and agate and chests of cedar. Yet the sea had washed it all away. Would this yet be said of Jerusalem, as wealthy in this hour as Tyre once had been?

I gazed upon great white buildings with columns so tall that I could not know whether I beheld a temple or a seat of Roman government. I said to myself, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches," but the words were too pious (for my heart had leaped at the sight of these riches). So I also said: "The mouth of a strange woman is a deep pit. And a great city is like a strange woman."

Yet I could not scorn Jerusalem. The people of Israel lived with as much magnificence now as in the time of King Solomon, when his palanquin had been made from cedar of Lebanon, its pillars fashioned of silver, its base of gold. The seat of the palanquin was purple and its claws had been wrought by the daughters of Jerusalem. Wondrous was Jerusalem in the time of Solomon, and wondrous was it now.

Yet my followers could hardly share such glory. I saw a Roman noble stop before our procession and stare at our hundreds walking by twos and by threes and fours in the lane. Some were well attired, but most of my people were in plain clothing, or in rags.

I, too, now stared at this throng that belonged to me.

The people of Jerusalem were joining us in large numbers; and I was seeing as many faces as there are aspects of man. Among those who followed were many who could be counted as less than believers but were rather among the curious and the tormented and the cynical, and these last were accompanying us to jeer at the Pharisees and thereby repay them for old rebukes.

Some of these new followers were solemn. So in their eyes shone the hope that I might provide a new piety that weighed upon them less than their old piety, which had turned drab in their hearts from too much repetition of the same prayers. And there were children who looked on all the sights and laughed at the wonder of God's bounty when it came to the faces of people; they were the closest to joy. There were also men with the fearful dissatisfaction of boredom on their brow.

And there were the poor. In their eyes I saw great need, and new hope, and much depth of sorrow; they had been disappointed many times. And I spoke to all, good and evil equally, as if they were one, since changes for the better can occur rapidly at times like these. In a bad man, evil and good can shift more quickly than in a good man; bad men are familiar with their sins and often weary of the struggle to deny remorse.

As the throng increased, so was the colt full of many wicked spirits, but they were young and without the foul odors of more practiced devils. Still, my beast would

buck, and I knew it was in his mind to throw me over his head onto the stones of the road. Yet I rode him. He was the colt for me. And for this moment I felt like the master of good and evil.

Only at this moment, however. For as I approached the Temple, I grew solemn with awe. I could not believe I was more than a Jew with a modest trade approaching a great and consecrated edifice. We were coming near to the Temple of Temples, and they had built it on a mount.

Even before I came to it, I remembered that its steps would rise from courtyard to courtyard, facing ever more august chapels and sacred sanctuaries, and there would be one chamber into which only the High Priest could enter and then only on one day of the year. That was the Holy of Holies. I was the Son of God, but I was also the child of my mother and so my respect for the Temple was, with each breath, growing larger than my urge to change all that was within. I shivered when the men and women in front of me, on mounting an incline in the road, began to cheer, and soon I too, on mounting the hill, saw the Temple walls.

But as I took in the sight, so did I also know that the future of this magnificence was in peril. In years to come, enemies would be ready to tear down the walls until nothing would remain but one wall. Hardly a stone would be left to rest upon another. All this would pass unless the priests of the Temple came to understand that my message was from the Lord.

Sitting upon the colt, I wept openly at my first sight on this morning of the Great Temple. It was beautiful, but it was not eternal. And I thought of the words of Amos, who had said: "The houses of ivory shall perish." It was then that I dismounted, and continued on foot.

Having climbed the steps of the entrance, I could look into the temple itself. Beyond the first gate was a large court where all could exchange money and goods. There one had to witness the beauty of these men in their robes. They had been washed by a warm bath and were immaculate in their pride. So their movements looked like peacocks. And the priests also looked like peacocks as they moved among them. All was vanity. At home, these robes would be beautiful, while the poor sat in the stinking alleys of the city.

I wrapped silence about me like a holy cloth. They would not dare to speak. I sat alone on a stone bench and

33

Having climbed the steps of the entrance, I came into the Temple itself. Beyond the first gate was a large court where all could exchange money and goods. How one had to admire the beards of these men of Mammon! They had been curled by a warm iron and were immaculate in their pride. So these moneylenders looked like peacocks. And the priests also looked like peacocks as they moved among them. All was vanity. At home, their tables would be bountiful, while the poor sat in the stinking alleys of the city.

I wrapped silence about me like a holy cloth that others would not dare to touch. I sat alone on a stone bench and

looked at how these people cast money into the alms box. Many who were rich cast much. But then came a poor woman, and her shawl was threadbare; she threw in her small coin. My heart leaped.

I called to those disciples who were near and said: "This poor woman has put in more than all the rich. They leave a tithe of their abundance. She gave her living. So she has turned money into a tribute to the Lord. The wealthy give only to impress each other."

I thought of money and how it was an odious beast. It consumed everything offered to it. What slobbering was in such greed! I thought of how the rich are choked with the weight of gold, and their gardens grow no fruit to satisfy them. There is oppression in the perfume of the air, and none of the rich man's blooms bring happiness. For his neighbor is wealthier than himself and his gardens are more beautiful. So are the rich always envious of the next man's gold.

Here, in the outer court of the Temple, surrounded by these moneylenders, I spoke to all, and my voice was my own. I said: "No man can pay allegiance to two masters. For he will cling to the one he needs and, in secret, despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon."

Then I heard the Devil speak to me for the first time since I had been with him on the mountain. He said: "Before it is over, the rich will possess you as well. They will put your image on every wall. The alms raised in your

name will swell the treasure of mighty churches; men will worship you most when you belong to me as much as to Him. Which is just. For I am His equal." And he laughed. He knew what he would say next:

"Greed is a beast, you say, but note this! Its defecations are weighed in gold. Isn't gold the color of the sun from which all things grow?"

The Lord chose to reply in my other ear: "Everything he says makes sense until it does no longer. He gives this speech to all who catch his eye, and his eye is only for the best, and most beautiful, whom I have fashioned with great hope. He scorns those who are modest but remain with Me."

And this was more than my Father ever said again about Satan, but at this moment it gave little force to my faith. Did my Father speak well of the meek because they were the only ones who remained loyal to Him and to me? How full of chaos was such a thought! I fell prey to a wrath greater than any I had known before.

In the eyes of the moneylenders, greed was as sharp as the point of a spear; the rage of Isaiah came to me. In his words, I cried out: " 'These tables are a pool of vomit. In such filth, nothing is clean!' "

And I overturned each of the tables before me. I threw them over with the money that was on them, and I exulted as the coins gave small cries on striking the stones of the courtyard. Each possessor ran after his lost coins like the swine of Gadarene as they rushed into the sea.

Then I knocked over the seats of those who sold doves and I opened the cages. On this commotion of wings the multitude who were with me came forward and cheered at this defiance of usury.

I said: "My house shall be known before all nations as a house of prayer. Whereas you are men of Mammon and have made it a den of thieves."

Indeed it was the truth. Men who sought Mammon were thieves. They were thieves even if they had never stolen a cup of wheat. Their greed stripped virtue from all who would emulate them.

Soon the priests would be speaking of this act in all the sanctuaries within this Great Temple. For the priests, like the moneylenders, also kept their accounts with God separate from their accounts with Mammon. And how quick they were to water all the vines of cupidity that grew on one side of their soul.

Pastor

EROSIONS

Money
 is a
 river
 flowing
 downhill
 over
 hills
 of
 character
 in the
 rich

35The Dialogue with The Scribe

I could see that the scribe who addressed me as Master wanted to continue our discourse. He asked: "What, by your understanding, is the first Commandment of them all?"

I answered: "'The Lord, our God, is one Lord.' This must be the first Commandment. The second is to love thy neighbor as thyself."

The scribe said: "To love one's neighbor as oneself is more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices."

He was wise in the way he spoke to me. Could he be the Master of the Book in this Great Temple? His manners were as subtle as his well-curled beard. And his speech

was as handsome as his appearance. Yet his eyes were pale like the faded blue of the sky when the sky is white. So I did not trust him. Still, I listened as he said: "Here, we are all circumcised. We share a single faith. Many of us in this Temple believe that you have not come here to rend us asunder but to bring us nearer to one another. And this we still believe, even though disruption has followed you like the dust before a storm." He paused to great effect. All among us were now listening to him. "Still," he said, "there are storms that cleanse. So I would ask of you, Master, when will the Kingdom of God be with us?"

As he spoke, I could hear the same two voices that live side by side in many a Pharisee. Their speech is often endowed with good manners, but there is also quiet mockery in their utterance and this is as finely sifted into their courtesies as powder into sand. Nonetheless, I listened. For he was not without some desire to believe that I was the Son of Man. It was possible that the priests who had sent him were also ready to listen. We spoke, therefore, as men who were equal. Only in the second hour did he reveal his knowledge of the scrolls, and thereby began a gentle dispute over the working of cures on the Sabbath.

"Do you recall the verse," he asked, "that says: 'And while the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man that gathered sticks upon the Sabbath day, and they brought him to Moses and Aaron and to all the

congregation. But the Lord said to Moses, "The man shall surely be put to death: all the congregation shall stone him." And the congregation took him outside the camp and did stone him and he died.'" The scribe now said, "That was a thousand years ago, and our congregation today would not stone such a man. Yet the principle may remain. You shall not work on the Sabbath."

I replied that I had answered this question many times. "If you circumcise a babe on the Sabbath," I told him, "then you may also lift the scales from the blind and flex the limbs of the halt."

But here he began to speak with such skill that I did not know how or where to interrupt.

He said, "I have been waiting for all of this year to talk with you. For I have thought of your works, Master, and I would say, even as the prophet Samuel said to King Saul: 'Rebellion is the sin of witchcraft.' Contemplate what I have just said. If you come from Him whom you will not declare but wish us to believe is the Lord, why not say as much? For if you refuse to declare yourself, suffering could result from your good deeds. Your cures could appear to us as witchcraft and full of the bright fire of rebellion. We in the Temple fear that fire. We have labored for ten hundred years to learn what is in the Book. Many have died for the five books of the Torah. Yet with the strength of our beliefs we have built the walls of this Temple. We are able to live by the light it provides us. It is the same

light that was given to us by the deeds of our martyrs. They died for our scrolls and our laws. So I would remind you, even as it is written in First Maccabees, that King Antiochus, a heathen king, was set over us, and he declared to his whole kingdom that we should now be one people, Jews and gentiles alike. And all were ordered to obey the laws of this new religion even if it was not ours.

"The gentiles agreed. To our shame, many Israelites also consented to a faith that worshipped idols. Indeed, so many accepted these edicts of Antiochus that the only clear measure of a man who was still a good Jew came to be that you could kill him before he would profane the Sabbath.

"Then, King Antiochus commanded us to abstain from circumcising our children. Whoever did not obey would die. Good Israelites had to flee Jerusalem. The priests of King Antiochus then placed swine upon the altar. Whoever was found with the Book was put to death. When soldiers found infants who were circumcised, they killed them. And they hung the priests who performed the circumcision.

"We learned then," said the scribe, "that our Book could not restrain evil unless all of us gave absolute obedience to the laws of the Book. When we listen, therefore, to what you say, we do not always hear your understanding of the ten hundred years of the Book. Nor do we feel your recognition of the martyrs who died for the Law. Instead, we

see that in your haste to serve God, you encourage publicans, sinners, even the uncircumcised. You rush to destroy all that you have learned in all the years of your schooling. Do you not comprehend that blind rejection of the Law is as evil as idolatry?"

I could hear more and more sounds of assent among those who listened. Some of my own people were muttering that he was right. And many had wept as he spoke of the deaths of these martyrs.

I was slow to reply. "Do not think," I told him, "that I am here to deny the Law or the prophets. I have not come to destroy but to fulfill." Here I stopped, and looked into his pale eyes. "Unless the righteousness of my followers exceeds the righteousness of your scribes and Pharisees, we shall not enter the Kingdom of Heaven."

Before he could reply, I added: "All that you say is just if people observe the Book. But they do not. This land of Israel has committed so many great sins that the Lord now looks upon the people of Israel as living in whoredom. Are we not supposed to find a way to save the whore?"

The scribe answered in a tone so light and so full of the wings of confidence that his words danced upon his tongue; in that moment I heard Satan stir in his throat. For he said: "Save the whore? Yes, you will finish by saying to gentiles, a people who are not your people, 'You are my people,' and they will say, 'You are my God.'" And the

scribe laughed softly. All the mockery he had mixed into his courtesy settled over me. It was as if he had seen all things evil and wise where I had not. So he knew to a certainty that gentiles were ignorant and worshipped statues whereas he, like other good Pharisees, was of the Chosen.

I did not speak until I could find the words I sought. And then I spoke in Hebrew, even as I had read it in the Book. "From the words of Ezekiel," I said: "'My sheep were scattered because there is no shepherd, and they became meek to all the beasts of the field when they were scattered. Neither did My shepherds search for My flock, but fed themselves. Behold, I am against the shepherds.'"

"And these shepherds," the scribe answered, "are kin to me? Can it be that this is what you say?"

I was thinking that even a drunken man would know what it was now politic to say. I was lacking in all knowledge of how to offer what would gain the most and offend the least. But then I had no desire to be politic. I wanted these Pharisees to remember my words forever.

"I look," I told the scribe, "to gather my flock from all places, from wherever they have been scattered. So I do not despise those who are uncircumcised or those who are ignorant of the Book."

"Are you saying that you would give a light to the gentiles?" he asked.

"Yes," I said. "That would be for the salvation of all." The scribe was silent; I think he was weary. He had stud-

ied the teachings of the great prophets, and they had dreamed of the hour when God would bring salvation to Israel. But it had not come to pass. Was the scribe wondering whether this Galilean and his peasants could know more about salvation than our heroes and prophets, even the kings of the glorious and holy past?

I continued to speak. "The Lord," I said, "has made my mouth a sharp sword. In the shadow of His hand He has hidden me. He has told me: 'Raise up the tribes of Jacob and the strong reserve of Israel.' But He also said: 'I will give you a light to the gentiles in order that you may be My salvation unto all the ends of the earth.' "

To which the scribe said, "Is that not blasphemy?"

I replied, "It is what my Father has said."

On these words he left. With him went many who agreed with his thoughts. A large number. I was alone again with my followers.

Start

The end

238-242

238

There are some who say that there was an earthquake and the angel of the Lord descended from heaven to roll back the stone from the door. Since the raiment of this angel was as white as snow, the guards fled.

Others say that very early on the morning of the third day, even as death can bring together the harlot and the woman who is virtuous, so did Mary Magdalene come to the sepulchre, where she met Mary my mother. And they agreed to perform proper rites for me. But now that they were there, who would roll away the stone?

Yet when they looked, they saw that the tomb was open. They could enter. Inside, they met a young man who wore a long white garment, and he said: "You seek Jesus of Nazareth, but he is risen. Tell his disciples that he goes before you into Galilee and there you shall see him."

This may be close to the truth. For I know that I rose on the third day. And I also recall that I left the sepulchre to wander through the city and the countryside, and there came an hour when I appeared among my disciples. I said to them: "Why are you sad?" And they did not recognize me. They thought I was a stranger in Jerusalem and did not know what had happened. They even said to me, "Our sorrow is for Jesus of Nazareth, who was a mighty prophet. But our rulers have crucified him."

I said to them: "Behold my hands and my feet!" And Thomas looked and, seeing the holes, he asked to feel

eachquake
 saved to
 ment of this

of the third
 urlet and the
 lent some to
 men and they
 low that they

re tomb was
 a young man
 id. "You seek
 disciples that
 you shall see

that I rose in
 e sepulchre to
 id and there
 i. I said
 no recognize
 sales and did
 aid come. "Our
 was a mighty
 ."
 my feet! And
 e asked to feel

them (which is why he is known to this day as Doubting Thomas). But the sight of these wounds allowed them to believe. Soon, all who were there began to say that I had been received in heaven and was seated on the right hand of God. In any case, I had by then wandered away and they could no longer see me. All the same, my disciples went forth and preached that the Lord was with them. And they came at last to believe that they had the power to cast out devils. They spoke with new tongues, and when they laid hands on the sick, a few recovered.

But the Jews were much divided by my death. Many went forth with my disciples and became new followers, calling themselves Christian; others remained close to the Temple and argued among themselves for a hundred years over whether I was or was not the Messiah.

The rich among them, and the pious, prevailed; how could the Messiah be a poor man with a crude accent? God would not allow it!

Still, it must also be said that many of those who now call themselves Christian are rich and pious themselves, and are no better, I fear, than the Pharisees. Indeed, they are often greater in their hypocrisy than those who condemned me then.

There are many churches in my name and in the name of my apostles. The greatest and holiest is named after Peter; it is a place of great splendor in Rome. Nowhere can be found more gold.

2040

God and Mammon still grapple for the hearts of all men and all women. As yet, since the contest remains so equal, neither the Lord nor Satan can triumph. I remain on the right hand of God, and look for greater wisdom than I had before, and I think of many with love. My mother is much honored. Many churches are named for her, perhaps more than for me. And she is pleased with her son.

My Father, however, does not often speak to me. Nonetheless, I honor Him. Surely He sends forth as much love as He can offer but His love is not without limit. For His wars with the Devil grow worse. Great battles have been lost. In the last century of this second millennium were holocausts, conflagrations, and plagues worse than any that had come before.

Yet it is believed by most that God gained a great victory through me. And it may be that the Devil was not clever enough to comprehend the extent of my Father's wisdom. For my Father knew how to recover from debacle and disaster. Some fifty or more years after my death, the Gospel According to John was composed, and the work of this John (unknown to me) may have been illumined by my Father, because John's words proved unforgettable. They said: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believed in him should not perish but have eternal life." So powerful is the force of this message that no other prophet has ever been followed by

2641

ll
o
n
n
ly
or
th

re.
ch
for
ave
um
ian

ory
ever
om.
dis-
spel
this
y my
They
y be-
t per-
f this
ed by

as many who were ready to die in his name. Of course, I was not only a prophet but His son.

Nonetheless, the truth is more valuable even than the heavens. Thereby, let it be understood: My Father may not have vanquished the Devil. Less than forty years after I died on the cross, a million Jews were killed in a war against Rome. The Great Temple was left with no more than one wall. Still, the Lord proved as cunning as Satan. Indeed, He understood men and women better than did the Devil. For my Father saw how to gain much from defeat by calling it victory. Now, in these days, many Christians believe that all has been won for them. They believe it was already won before they were born. They believe that this victory belongs to them because of my suffering on the cross. Thereby does my Father still find much purpose for me. It is even by way of my blessing that the Lord sends what love He can muster down to that creature who is man and that other creature who is woman, and I try to remain the source of love that is tender.

Yet I must also remind myself of Pontius Pilate, who said that in peace there was no truth, and in truth, no peace. For that reason I do not bring peace but a sword. I would wage war on all that makes us less than we ought to be, less generous. I would not want the Devil to convince me that the quarries of our greed are a noble pit and he is the spirit of freedom. But then, who but Satan would wish to tell us that our way should be easy? For love is not

the Lord
p
f
s
n
s
i
a
o
u
s
9

122

33

the sure path that will take us to our good end, but is instead the reward we receive at the end of the hard road that is our life and the days of our life. So I think often of the hope that is hidden in the faces of the poor: Then from the depth of my sorrow wells up an immutable compassion, and I find the will to live again and rejoice.

END

2643

Exodus

Goodbye America,
Jesus said.
Come back, *boy!*
we cried
too late.

end.