

A Prophet from Nazareth

In writing history, historiography and interpretation go together.' We cannot do one without doing the other. As we attempt to understand the Jesus of history, we rely on certain concepts which help us to understand and situate Jesus, concepts that are both interpretative and also rooted in historical data. An interpretation is reliable because it purports to be the best interpretation of the facts. The relationship is such that the facts point to this interpretation and this interpretation points to these facts. Such is the concept of prophet. It is both hermeneutical and historiographical. To speak of Jesus of Nazareth as a Galilean prophet involves both interpretation for the sake of our understanding him and also data which point toward such an interpretation.²

In chapter two we saw the need to root Jesus within Palestinian Judaism. But, within early Judaism, Jesus was

In volume two I will consider the relationships among faith, history, and historiography at greater length. I ordinarily prefer the word historiography rather than history when referring to the research and methodology of historians. Historiography is what historians do.

²Important to any discussion of Jesus as prophet is the classic essay by C.H. Dodd, "Jesus as Teacher and Prophet," in *Mysterium Christi*, ed. Bell and Deissmann (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1930), 53-66. Also see James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (London: SCM Press, 1975), 82-84, Reginald Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Charles Scribner's

not Sadducee or Pharisee or Essene or Zealot. Jesus had "Zealots" among his disciples and he was quite aware of the delicate political and religious situation within which he lived.³ He, however, was not one of the "brigands" himself. Jesus was undoubtedly aware of the Essenes and may have even been tempted to join them. The wilderness played a role in his spirituality, yet he evidently was not an ascetic like John (Mk 2:18; Lk 7:31-35). In many ways Jesus was like the Pharisees.

He practiced his religion, studied Torah, and respected Temple worship.⁴ Yet his program for the renewal of Judaism differed significantly from theirs.⁵

The earlier traditions of Israel had spoken of kings, priests, prophets, and sages. These were the ones who played the role of God's agents in history. The monarchy no longer existed in the time of Jesus, although there was the hope for its restoration. But Jesus was not a king, and the royal ideology and its terminology do not help us to "situate" him. Nor did Jesus function as a priest. In "the religion of old," of pre-exilic days, these two, kings and priests, were the institutionally established religious agents. The domain of the former was the kingdom itself; the domain of the latter was the Temple and cult. In post-exilic Judaism, since the

Sons, 1965), 125-31. Whatever one may say about other aspects of their interpretations, the prophetic character of Jesus' life and ministry is solidly established by A.E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1982); and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Jesus, an Experiment in Christology*, trans. Hubert Hoskins (New York: Seabury Press, 1979), esp. 105-319, 439-515. For remarks pertinent to Jesus as an eschatological preacher, see W.D. Davies, *The Sermon on the Mount* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 131-34.

³Oscar Cullmann, *Jesus and the Revolutionaries*, trans. Gareth Putnam (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); also *The State in the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), 8-23.

⁴John Bowker, *Jesus and the Pharisees* (Cambridge: University Press, 1973). Benedict Viviano, *Study as Worship, Aboth and the New Testament* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1978), 171-95.

⁵Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984). Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, trans. John Bowden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

monarchy no longer existed, the priesthood grew in importance. As such, there was no institutionalized religious role into which Jesus moved.

There were two other traditional religious roles arising out of the prophetic and sapiential traditions. Both of these traditions, however, were less institutionalized (though not completely uninstitutionalized); the prophets were charismatic, and the sages were critical and in dialogue with international thought. As we will see, Jesus had roots in both wisdom and prophecy, in the more "charismatic" Israelite and Judean traditions.⁶

Prophecy had died out in Israel during the fifth century B.C.E., after the post-exilic prophecy of Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. The gift of the Spirit of prophecy had come to be associated with eschatological times. John seemed to be perceived as a prophet and to have manifested the gift of the Spirit. Jesus seems to have received the gift of the Spirit at his own baptism. Many Palestinian Jews perceived Jesus as a prophet. Who did people say that he was? Some said John the Baptizer; others said Elijah, or Jeremiah; others said one of the prophets (Mk 8:28; Mt 16:14; Lk 9:19).

A prophet was a messenger of God, one who spoke the word of God, who gave God's very own word to the people, and who was an interpreter of that word for these people or this king at this time in history and in these circumstances. The prophets in Israel, par excellence, were Moses and Elijah.⁷ The classical prophets of old were Amos, Hosea, Isaiah and Micah, of the eighth century B.C.E. The prophets associated with the exile were Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Deutero-Isaiah. Zechariah, Haggai, and Malachi were all post-exilic prophets. Malachi seems to have been the last of these prophets. Like the priests and kings, the prophets were a sacred part of Israel's history and traditions.

⁶See Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D.M.G. Stalker, 2 vols. (New York: Harper and Row, 1962-65), 1:93-102. Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers*, trans. James Grieg (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

⁷See R.B.Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets* (New York: Macmillan Co., 1971), 68-69, for his discussion of the five stages of prophetic succession.

Abraham Heschel describes the prophet as one "who feels fiercely," one "intent on intensifying responsibility," often "an iconoclast," both "a messenger of God" and one "who stands in the presence of God." "We will have to look for prophetic coherence, not in *what* the prophet says but of *whom* he speaks ... The ultimate object and theme of his consciousness is God."

The prophet is not a mouthpiece, but a person; not an instrument, but a partner, an associate of God. Emotional detachment would be understandable only if there were a command which required the suppression of emotion, forbidding one to serve God "with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your might." God, we are told, asks not only for "works," for action, but above all for love, awe, and fear. We are called to "wash" our hearts (Jer 4:14), to remove "the foreskin" of the heart (Jer 4:4), to return with the whole heart (Jer 3:10). "You will seek Me and find Me, when you seek Me with all your heart" (Jer 29:13). The new covenant which the Lord will make with the house of Israel will be written upon their hearts (Jer 31:31-34).

The prophet is no hireling who performs his duty in the employ of the Lord. The usual descriptions or definitions of prophecy fade to insignificance when applied, for example, to Jeremiah. "A religious experience," "communion with God," "a perception of His voice" - such terms hardly convey what happened to his soul: the overwhelming impact of the divine pathos upon his mind and heart, completely involving and gripping his personality in its depths, and the unrelieved distress which sprang from his intimate involvement. The task of the prophet is to convey the word of God. Yet the word is aglow with the pathos. One cannot understand the word without sensing

§Abraham Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), 23. For the quoted references in the text, see chapter one, "What Manner of Man Is the Prophet," 3-26.

the pathos. And one could not impassion others and remain unstirred. The prophet should not be regarded as an ambassador who must be dispassionate in order to be effective.

An analysis of prophetic utterances shows that the fundamental experience of the prophet is a fellowship with the feelings of God, a *sympathy with the divine pathos*, a communion with the divine consciousness which comes about through the prophet's reflection of, or participation in, the divine pathos. The typical prophetic state of mind is one of being taken up into the heart of the divine pathos. Sympathy is the prophet's answer to inspiration, the correlative to revelation.

Prophetic sympathy is a response to transcendent sensibility. It is not, like love, an attraction to the divine Being, but the assimilation of the prophet's emotional life to the divine, an assimilation of function, not of being. The emotional experience of the prophet becomes the focal point for the prophet's understanding of God. He lives not only his personal life, but also the life of God. The prophet hears God's voice and feels His heart. He tries to impart the pathos of the message together with its logos. As an imparter his soul overflows, speaking as he does out of the fullness of his sympathy.'

The Greek word *prophetes* means one who speaks on behalf of someone else. That someone else is the Lord: it is the Lord who speaks. The prophet is not primarily a predictor of future events, although sometimes God's word is addressed to a future close at [hand.R.B.Y.Scott](#) writes, "The prophets were primarily *preachers* in the highest sense of that term" (italics in original).¹⁰

Some of the prophets gathered disciples about them (Is 8:16). They took issue with the policies of the state, yet they

⁹Heschel, *The Prophets*, 25-26.

¹⁰R.B.Y. Scott, *The Relevance of the Prophets*, 14.

did not engage in revolutionary activity. They "carried out their criticism of society with a moral insight and a radical consistency never known before." They came to their work with a sense of divine vocation, with some definite experience of call. The prophet was a human being who stood in tension between two poles or two worlds; they stood both in the presence of God and also in the world of history. They spoke *God's word to this world*.

There can be little question but that Jesus was seen by his contemporaries as being a prophet. We have already referred to Mark 8:28 (// Mt 16:14; Lk 9:19). After raising the son of the widow of Naim from the dead, the crowd proclaimed, "A great prophet has arisen among us" (Lk 7:16). The Pharisee, Simon, on the occasion of his dinner during which a prostitute poured ointment on the feet of Jesus, thought to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would have known who and what sort of woman this is who is touching him, for she is a sinner" (Lk 7:39). At the time of his entry into Jerusalem, the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee" (Mt 21:11). Members of the Sanhedrin wanted to get rid of Jesus, but "they feared the multitudes, because they held him to be a prophet" (Mt 21:46).

A Prophetic and Social Consciousness

Not only did Jesus' contemporaries consider Jesus to be a prophet. It would appear as if this is a fundamental way in which Jesus perceived himself as well. Jesus presented himself as a prophet. He spoke with the authority of the prophet. His mission, as he himself understood it, was primarily that of preaching (Mk 1:38-39). He interpreted the failure and lack of acceptance in his home territory in prophetic terms: "A prophet is not without honor, except in

his own country, and among his own kind, and in his own house" (Mk 6:4; // Mt 13:57; Lk 4:24). After the reference to a prophet's lack of acceptance in Luke's version, Jesus continues and contrasts himself with Elijah and Elisha (Lk 4:24-27).

Jesus' conscious intent not to avoid Jerusalem manifested a prophetic consciousness as well.

At that very hour some Pharisees came, and said to him, "Get away from here, for Herod wants to kill you." And he said to them, "Go and tell that fox, 'Behold, I cast out demons and perform cures today and tomorrow, and the third day I finish my course. Nevertheless I must go on my way today and tomorrow and the day following; for it cannot be that a prophet should perish away from Jerusalem.' O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you! How often I would have gathered your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not! Behold, your house is forsaken. And I tell you, you will not see me until you say, 'Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.'" (Lk 13:31-35)

In the world of early Judaism, Jesus was a prophet.

An important aspect of any prophet's consciousness was their social consciousness. One evident fact about Jesus is that he related to and was concerned for the social outcasts of his world. C. H. Dodd, in choosing nine Gospel passages, diverse with respect to form and motive for inclusion in the tradition, concludes, "All of them in their different ways exhibit Jesus as an historical personality distinguished from other religious personalities of his time by his friendly attitude to the outcasts of society."¹² Jesus was a prophet particularly concerned for society.

¹²C. H. Dodd, *History and the Gospel* (London: Nisbet and Co., 1983), 94, also 92-103. The passages he is referring to are Mk 2:14; 2:15-17; Lk 19:2-10; 7:36-48; Jn 7:53-8:11; Lk 15:4-7 (// Mt 18:12-13); Lk 18:10-14; Mt 11:16-19 (// Lk 7:31-35); Mt 21:32.

Social consciousness is, of course, one of the distinctive characteristics of a prophet. The classical eighth century prophets - Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, and Micah - were supreme exemplifications of that. Amos is often referred to as the prophet of social justice; Micah has been described as the Amos of the south. Amos 2:6-8; 3:10; 4:1; 5:7-12; 5:21-24; 8:4-7; Hosea 6:5-6; Isaiah 1:11-17; 1:23; 2:4; 3:12-15; 5:1-7; 10:1-2; 29:13-14; 32:6-7; Micah 6:8; Jeremiah 6:13-15; 6:20; 7:5-7; 8:8-9; 22:13-17 are only a few of the texts which show how deeply based the thirst for justice was within the prophetic consciousness.

What to me is the multitude of your sacrifices? says the LORD: I have had enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts; I do not delight in the blood of bulls, or of lambs, or of he-goats.

When you come to appear before me, who requires of you this trampling of my courts?

Bring no more vain offerings; incense is an abomination to me. New moon and sabbath and the calling of assemblies - I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assembly.

Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hates; they have become a burden to me, I am weary of bearing them.

When you spread forth your hands, I will hide my eyes from you; even though you make many prayers, I will not listen; your hands are full of blood.

Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil; learn to do good; seek justice, correct oppression; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow. (Is 1:11-17)

Within this tradition the prophetic and social anger of Jesus comes as no surprise. Abraham Heschel writes, "That justice is a good thing and a supreme ideal is commonly accepted. What is lacking is a sense of the monstrosity of injustice. The distinction of the prophets was in their re-

morseless unveiling of injustice and oppression."¹³ This is a description of Jesus as well. Jesus was not identified with any of the major socio-political, religious parties within Palestinian Judaism. Yet he was willing to be identified with the *am ha-aretz* (the people, literally, the people of the land). Benedict Viviano writes, "With respect to the *am ha-aretz* or religious lower class of Palestinian Jewry, our hypothesis would run: Jesus was sensitive to their needs, he judged that the Pharisees could never meet them, and he directed his mission to them in a special way (Mt 15:25; 11:25 par; Mk 2:17 par; 6:34 par). Little wonder then that many of them received him as a messenger of God sent directly to them (Mk 1:45; 1:22; 12:37)." ¹⁴ Jesus of Nazareth was a socially conscious prophet in an eschatologically conscious period of history.

Any understanding of Jesus as prophet must be within the context of the "quenching of the spirit" or absence of prophecy in late post-exilic Judaism. First Maccabees refers to this tragedy: "A terrible oppression began in Israel; there had been nothing like it since the disappearance of prophecy among them" (9:27, also 4:46, 14:41). Oscar Cullmann wrote, "Prophecy as a profession no longer existed in New Testament times. In fact, there were rarely prophets at all any longer in the specifically Israelitic sense of spiritually inspired men who had received a special calling from God. Prophecy had died out more and more until by this time it really existed only in the written form of the prophetic books." ¹⁵ Joachim Jeremias also wrote, "This view took the following form: In the time of the patriarchs, all pious and upright men had the spirit of God. When Israel committed sin with the golden calf, God limited the Spirit to chosen men, prophets, high priests and kings. With the death of the

¹³Heschel, *The Prophets*, 204.

¹⁴Viviano, *Study as Worship*, 173.

¹⁵Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, trans. Shirley C. Guthrie and Charles A.M. Hall, revised edition (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963), 13.

last writing prophets, Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, *the spirit was quenched* because of the sin of Israel." ¹⁶

The spirit of prophecy had been replaced by that of the Law, and the Law gradually became normative from the times of Ezra and Nehemiah on. ¹⁷ Even the prophetic canon existed pretty much as it does today by 200 B.C.E. In the post-exilic period, prophecy was judged in terms of whether it was in accord with the Law, not vice-versa. The author of Zechariah 13 envisioned the death penalty for a false prophet. John and Jesus appeared as prophets in an era of the Law.

At the same time that there was a *felt absence* of the Spirit there was a *longing hope* for its return which, given the eschatological character of early Judaism, became an eschatological hope. "Everywhere in Judaism at this period the hope of the end was united with the expectation of the renewal of prophecy." This eschatological hope for a return of the Spirit can be traced to prophetic utterances like those of Joel: "I will pour out my spirit on all flesh. Your sons and daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. Even upon the menservants and maidservants in those days, I will pour out my spirit" (2:28-29).

This expectation of the return of the Spirit, of the return of prophecy, became the expectation of *the* prophet of the eschatological times, an eschatological prophet distinct from the royal and priestly messiahs. This expectation of an eschatological prophet eventually moulded itself into two forms, that of Moses on the basis of Deuteronomy 18:15-18, and that of Elijah on the basis of Malachi 3:1; 4:5-6.

The starting point for the expectation of Elijah was 2 Kings 2:1-12, his miraculous removal to heaven. Then the prophecy in Malachi 3:1 was interpreted early to be Elijah in Malachi 4:5 and in Ecclesiasticus 48:10.

¹⁶Jeremias, *New Testament Theology, The Proclamation of Jesus*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 80-81.

¹⁷R.H. Charles, *Eschatology* (New York: Schocken Books, 1963), 196-205, 235.

¹⁸Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 22.

Behold, I send my messenger to prepare the way before me, and the Lord whom you seek will suddenly come to his temple; the messenger of the covenant in whom you delight, behold, he is coming, says the Lord of hosts. (Mal 3:1)

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. (Mal 4:5)

The prophet like Elijah was not equated with the Davidic Messiah. Sometimes he was seen as the forerunner of the Messiah, sometimes as the forerunner of the Lord. He was to appear as the preacher of repentance and to establish the spiritual conditions necessary for the end. Later, in Ecclesiasticus, he also acquired the function of restoring the tribes of Israel. His essential function, however, was preaching repentance.

Besides the Elijah expectation, there was the expectation of a prophet like Moses, **based on Deuteronomy 18:15-19.**

The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brethren - him you shall heed - just as you desired of the Lord your God at Horeb on the day of the assembly, when you said, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the Lord my God, or see this great fire any more, lest I die.' And the Lord said to me, 'They have rightly said all that they have spoken. I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brethren; and I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him. And whoever will not give heed to my words which he shall speak in my name, I myself will require it of him.' (Dt 18:15-19)

This text originally did not refer to an eschatological prophet but to historical prophets who would come after Moses. Evidence of the expectation of an eschatological prophet like Moses is not found in the Hebrew Scriptures themselves; it comes later. There is evidence for the expectation in the New Testament (Mk 8:27-28), and Qumran

discoveries indicate an expectation based on Moses or one like him, along with messianic expectations.

Jesus clearly saw himself in prophetic terms (Mk 6:4; Lk 13:34-35). The question remains open as to whether he saw himself in eschatological terms, as an eschatological prophet. It would be going too far to say that he thought of himself as a definite, particular prophet, like Moses or Elijah. In the initial stages of his ministry, he may have seen himself more as a prophet like John, and his ministry as a continuation of John's: preaching, repentance, proclaiming the reign of God. The wilderness context at the origins of Jesus' own mission had Elijah and Mosaic overtones, and as we suggested there, Jesus seems to have spiritually identified more with the wilderness, Moses-prophet, exodus tradition than the Jerusalem, David-Messiah, Zion tradition.

Jesus and Messianism

We have situated Jesus within Israel's charismatic and prophetic tradition. In the course of our discussion we have found ourselves describing Jesus' very own consciousness as prophetic and social. Jesus' self-understanding is a question of great interest, but there are two misunderstandings which any discussion needs to avoid lest the question be falsely posed: (a) a misunderstanding of consciousness and (b) a misunderstanding of Jesus.

First, there is the question of the nature of consciousness itself. Whatever particular philosophical or psychological perspective one may take, there is a quality of consciousness that is difficult to deny: its fluidity. Consciousness, as we know it in ourselves, is movement. Although this is particularly a Bergsonian way of speaking, whether we are "existentialist" or "essentialist," "realist" or "idealist," consciousness does not stand still. We need not develop or agree on a particular phenomenology of consciousness in order to make the point. Consciousness is a reality that

cannot be pinned down. It is too alive and active to be fixed.

Bergson's analysis of *durée* makes us aware that pinning consciousness down to being "this" or "that" is to attempt to stabilize that which is by nature movement, to spatialize that which is by nature temporal, to solidify that which by nature flows. One cannot describe a river by stopping it or a liquid by solidifying it or life by killing it or consciousness by atomizing it. Thus one cannot describe the "self-consciousness" of someone in too fixed, mechanical, or stagnant a way and still be describing consciousness. To segmentalize duration, for Bergson, is no longer to have duration. To compartmentalize consciousness can mean losing what we seek to grasp. Still life is no longer life, and a photograph cannot capture movement. This is not to advocate a particular philosophical perspective. It is simply to caution us against pinning "self" or "consciousness" down too tightly. Jesus' self-awareness was on the move. He was alive. One day flows into but is not the same as the next. That which is so prone to change cannot be best understood in terms of tightly fixed categories. Thus an approach to the self-understanding of Jesus through neatly delineated and fixed categories or titles is doomed to failure. One is attempting to fix that which in life is not fixed. Clarification of different concepts, expressions, or titles is of intellectual importance. One cannot eliminate conceptual clarity, but neither can one make rigid that which in life and history move. We can also go too far in the direction of saying that nothing can be said at all. We may well be able to describe the flow or direction of consciousness, but we must be careful not to picture it as fixed once and for all.

Secondly, a quest for the self-understanding of Jesus can too readily be based on a concern that was not there at that period of history - personal identity is a modern concern - and especially not there in Jesus of Nazareth, biblically pictured as an un-self-preoccupied person. Jesus was what he was without being self-preoccupied. He was not ego-dominated. Much modern discussion about "the self" does not help us to understand the historical Jesus because his primary concerns did not include himself. He was not self-

focused, but focused on others, the poor, his heavenly Father. His self-consciousness was much more God-consciousness. His concern was to do the will of his Father in heaven. The dominant emphasis for him was trusting in God. This does not imply that he had no identity, but that self-identity was not a primary focus of his consciousness. His Father, his Father's will, were his concern, as were those to whom the Father sent him. We learn more about the consciousness of Jesus from his prayer and ministry than we do from attempts to pin or not pin certain titles on him. Certainly Jesus may well have thought of himself as a prophet or servant of God, but this only says that he thought first of God. Not "who am I?" but "Thy will be done," better reflects the concerns of Jesus. This does not mean that a description of Jesus as prophetic and socially conscious is inaccurate. It simply cautions us to be careful about what and how we say something about the fluid psychic contents of so un-self-preoccupied a human being.

We encourage caution in talking about the consciousness of Jesus. Yet we can describe him as a prophetic figure. Let us go one step further and see what can be said about Jesus as a messianic figure.¹⁹ Although the expression Christ (Messiah) became the common way of describing Jesus in the early Christian traditions, to the extent that it eventually became a part of his name, Jesus himself as far as we can tell rarely used the expression. Only three times in the Synoptic Gospels do we find some response on the part of Jesus to this title as applied to himself, twice during his "trial" when the high priest and Pilate asked him, "Are you the Christ?" and earlier in the confession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. The implication in these instances is that some people had begun to think of Jesus as more than a prophet. They saw him as the Messiah.

¹⁹See Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 111-36; Reginald Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, 23-31, 109-11; Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology, Their History in Early Christianity*, trans. Harold Knight and George Ogg (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 131-222; A. E. Harvey, *Jesus and the Constraints of History*, 134-51; and Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 129-59.

Jesus certainly never claimed in any unambiguous fashion to be the Messiah himself. He seldom referred to the awaited Messiah in his own teaching. In Mark 12:35-37 (Mt 22:41-46; Lk 20:41-44) we have a polemical exchange between Jesus and the Pharisees concerning the relationship between the Messiah and the house of David but no definite teaching of Jesus himself. Matthew 24:5, 23-24 and Mark 13:6, 21-22 are concerned with false messiahs, but teach nothing about Jesus' own beliefs and they are most probably not authentic Jesus material. Luke 24:26, 46 are sayings of the risen Jesus. Mark 9:41 is the only other reference of Jesus himself to the Messiah and it is generally considered Christian interpolation. Geza Vermes' conclusion seems reliable: "It is clearly not an exaggeration, therefore, to suggest that Messianism is not particularly prominent in the surviving teaching of Jesus." 20

Jesus seems not to have taught a particular messianic doctrine. In reference to the attitudes of others toward Jesus, perhaps some of his disciples thought of him as the Messiah, as reflected in the response of Peter to Jesus' question at Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:29). Otherwise there does not appear any such accusation or suggestion prior to Jesus' arrest and trial when he was handed over to Pilate as a messianic pretender. The three main texts which concern us in which Jesus has to face the opinion of others that he is the Messiah are: Mark 8:27-33 (Mt 16:13-23, Lk 9:18-22); Mark 14:60-62 (Mt 26:62-64, Lk 22:67-70); and Mark 15:2-5 (Mt 27:11-14; Lk 23:2-5).

There is no need to treat the two references from the arrest and trial at length since they leave us with the same conclusions as the study of the profession of Peter at Caesarea Philippi. Mark 14:60-62 and Mark 15:2-5 both pertain to the arrest and trial of Jesus, the former Jesus' response to the high priest and the latter Jesus' response to Pilate. A characteristic of Jesus' response during the arrest and trial is his silence, Mark 14:61; 15:5 (also the parallels, Mt 26:63; Mt 27:12; Lk 23:9). Or the response is ambiguous, such as,

"You have said so" (Mt 26:64; 27:11; Mk 15:2; Lk 22:70; 23:3). There is also the response, "If I tell you, you will not believe" (Lk 22:67). The only text to record an unambiguous response ("I am") is Mark 14:62.²¹

We will thus confine ourselves to a more detailed reflection on the confession of Peter. The earliest version of this event is Mark's.

²⁷And Jesus went on with his disciples, to the villages of Caesarea Philippi; and on the way he asked his disciples, "Who do the people say that I am?" ²⁸And they told him, "John the Baptist; and others say, Elijah; and others one of the prophets." ²⁹And he asked them, "But who do you say that I am?" Peter answered him "You are the Christ." ³⁰And he charged them to tell no one about him. ³¹ And he began to teach them that the son of humanity must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.³² And he said this plainly. And Peter took him, and began to rebuke him. ³³But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter, and said, "Get behind me, Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of humanity." (Mk 8:27-33)

The above incident seems to have occurred while Jesus was alone with his disciples (Lk 9:18) in the territory of Philip near Caesarea Philippi (Mk 8:27; Mt 16:13). Jesus was concerned about how he was being perceived by others. The responses reflect varied prophetic images. When he addressed the disciples directly about their own perception, Peter spoke up and said: "You are the Christ." Jesus' response (v. 30) is quite significant and the major object of discussion. There are three things to note in verse 31 - Jesus did not directly speak of himself as the Messiah, as Peter had proclaimed, but rather referred to the son of

²¹ Morna Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant, the Influence of the Servant Concept of Deutero-Isaiah in the New Testament* (London: SPCK, 1959), 88-89, interprets the Synoptic trial material as being less ambiguous than I do.

humanity; Jesus taught that he would suffer much, be rejected and be put to death; he taught that he would rise again. Mark insists that he taught these things quite clearly.

This teaching must have been so straightforward that, Peter was taken aback. After his recent messianic proclamation, he must have thought: How can this be? The Messiah suffer and die?²² So Peter reprimanded Jesus for the comments about his suffering and death. Peter's rebuke leads Jesus in turn to reprimand Peter, and to do so quite strongly: "Get behind me, Satan." Peter's insinuations angered Jesus for they were diabolical, perhaps temptations akin to the testing in the wilderness. The Evil One had put these things in Peter's mind.

Contemporary interpretation of this text must concern itself with the messianic secret.²³ Jesus knew that he was the Messiah but did not want others to realize or proclaim this lest they misinterpret or misunderstand what this meant. Jesus was not the Messiah in the royal sense in which the Jews expected the Messiah and Jesus rebuked Peter because Peter himself did not seem to understand. Was this secretiveness an expression of Jesus' own desire and self-understanding? Or was it a Marcan convention to hold together the fact of Jesus' disowning the messianic title and Mark's own intention in the Gospel to proclaim Jesus to be the Messiah?

The more common current interpretation of the text interprets verse 30 on secretiveness as Marcan and then interprets the text as a whole as an explicit rejection on Jesus' part of the messiahship.²⁴ In other words, the text

²²See Mowinckel, *He That Cometh*, trans. G. W. Anderson (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1954), 325-33, about a suffering messiah. For the notion of the slain messiah, see Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 139-40.

²³The notion of the messianic secret goes back to W. Wrede who maintained that Mark was the one who introduced into the tradition Jesus' command not to be proclaimed as Messiah. See William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*, [trans. J.C.C. Greig](#) (Greenwood; S. C.: Attic Press, [1901] 1971). Also see *The Messianic Secret*, ed. Christopher Tuckett (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

²⁴Bruce Metzger, *The New Testament - Its Background, Growth, and Content* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1965), 151, presents the traditional point of view. Jesus was reluctant to use the title of Messiah, but not because he did not believe

does not teach that Jesus is the Messiah but does not want people to know. Instead it makes clear Jesus' rejection of any messianic claim and consciousness.

Verses 27-33 are to be read as a unit. Read the text and skip verse thirty for a moment. Peter proclaimed Jesus to be the Messiah. Jesus then continued to teach. There is a significant shift, however. Jesus did not teach that *the messiah* would have to suffer and die, but rather that *the son of humanity* would do so. Jesus spoke of himself as the "son of humanity." In fact, "son of humanity" occurs on the lips of Jesus over sixty times in the Synoptic Gospels. Thus, if anything, Jesus saw himself as the "son of humanity." When Peter objected, Jesus' rebuke was extremely strong. The whole messianic interpretation of Peter was diabolical, and Jesus recognized it for what it was - a work of Satan. Jesus' exhortation to secrecy (v. 30) is a Marcan way of holding together Jesus' explicit rejection of a messianic designation in his lifetime and the early Church's explicit affirmation of Jesus as being the Messiah.

himself to be the Messiah. Jesus' reluctance arose from the political and national expectations associated with the concept of Messiah which he did not want to be associated with his own teaching.

Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 122-25, concludes that Jesus showed extreme restraint toward, and possibly even rejection of, the *title* Messiah. Yet Jesus, and not the Church, is the source of the messianic secret. Cullmann maintains that Jesus neither affirms nor denies Peter's messianic confession. In rooting Jesus' command to secrecy in Jesus himself, Cullmann is taking the traditional opinion. By interpreting Mark 8 as being noncommittal on the part of Jesus, he opens the door, however, to a new direction for interpreting the text, which interpretation he moves further by suggesting that Jesus may have even *rejected* the *title* Messiah.

This newer and quite common interpretation of Mark 8 as Jesus' explicitly rejecting messiahship can be found in Fuller, Hahn, Vawter and Vermes. Reginald Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology*, 109. Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology*, 157-61, 223-28. Bruce Vawter, *This Man Jesus*, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1973), 89. Geza Vermes more or less takes the same stand, *Jesus the Jew*, 145-53. On the one hand he writes in reference to Mark 8, "It would admittedly not be correct to deduce that Jesus thereby denied that he was the Messiah" (146). Also in reference to the arrest and trial texts, "Jesus is not claimed positively to have asserted that he was the Messiah" (149). Yet, "If the Gospels have any coherent meaning at all, his comment on Peter's confession and the answers to the high priest and Pilate are only to be understood as a denial of messiahship" (154).

But let us return to the text itself: Jesus was in the region of Caesarea Philippi and asked the disciples what the people were saying about him (v. 27). The disciples replied that people were talking about him as being a prophet (28). Jesus then addressed the question to the disciples and Peter responded that Jesus was the Messiah (29). Jesus asked that they not repeat this (30). In and of itself, this is a quite explicable response. The only reason it would not fit would be if Jesus did not in any way at all think of himself as messiah. But we cannot yet assume that. Nor is it appropriate to excise this verse, and then show how the remaining text could so prove a rejection of any messianic association, and then return and justify the excision of the text on the basis of its incompatibility with a non-messianic consciousness. This is obviously a circular argument. If we come to a non-messianic interpretation of Jesus' consciousness we must do so on some other basis. Within this text, a messianic secrecy as originating with Jesus himself does make sense.²⁵

After instructing his disciples not to speak of him as messiah, Jesus continued to instruct them about the suffering, death, and resurrection (31). The text seems to indicate that Jesus was simply continuing to instruct them about

²⁵ Although secrecy is an obvious and prominent aspect of **Mark's Gospel and thus suggests his redactional work, it cannot be ruled out** that it also was present in the teaching of Jesus himself. Since Wrede (1901) it is often assumed that the secrecy motif has been imposed on the tradition by Mark rather than flowing from the life of Jesus himself (William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret*). H.C. Kee points out, however, that there are expressions which indicate that "Jesus took his followers aside or away from the crowds to give them special instructions or interpretation" (*Community of the New Age*, [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977] 52, also 3-7, 50-54, 93-96, 165-75). Not all of the secrecy in Mark can be summed up under the phrase of "messianic secret." For instance, instructions following healings and exorcisms (5:43; 7:36; 8:26) **do not serve the same purpose as the silencing** of demons (1:23-25; 1:34; 1:43-45; 3:1 *ff.*), **and neither of these are the same as the messianic secret strictly speaking, the effort to restrict the messianic consciousness to the circle of disciples** (8:30; 9:9). Another valuable study is that of T.A. Burkill, "The Hidden Son of Man in St. Mark's Gospel," *New Light on the Earliest Gospel—Seven Markan Studies* (London: Cornell University Press, 1972), 1-38. Burkill attempts to trace the secrecy motif prior to Mark and concludes that it is not a Marcan invention but rather a situation of Marcan adaptation of a pre-Marcan tradition which may have some basis in the life of Jesus himself.

what lay ahead for him. Peter, however with an understanding of Messiah that excluded the way Jesus was speaking (there was no notion of a suffering Messiah in early Judaism), objected to what Jesus was saying (32). Jesus' forceful rebuke of Peter then simply referred to the teaching that Jesus would suffer and die (33). Jesus' words in verse 33 were a response to Peter's behavior in verse 32, and not to Peter's statement in verse 29. To see Jesus' response as a rejection of what Peter said in verse 29 does violence to the text by excluding verse 30, by denying the order in the fact that verse 33 follows verse 32 and not verse 29, and by denying that verse 30 does make sense in response to 29 and verse 33 does make sense in response to 32. To assume a great discontinuity between the (un-messianic) mind of Jesus and the (messianic) mind of the early Church is gratuitous at this point. The more obvious sense is that Peter reacted to Jesus' teaching about his future suffering and Jesus' rebuked Peter for not accepting or hearing what lay ahead.

The meaning of the text does not depend upon whether Jesus' consciousness ought to be described as messianic or un-messianic. In fact the text as such cannot answer that question either way. Neither can the ambiguous response of Jesus during his trial before Pilate. Other than the three ambiguous references, during the incident at Caesarea Philippi and during his arrest and trial, Jesus nowhere spoke of himself as being the Messiah. Thus it hardly constituted a part of his teaching. Whether interiorly, however, he knew himself to be the Messiah is another question, but one to which there is no historiographical access, especially given our cautions above.

We need to avoid extremes: (1) Jesus thought of himself explicitly as a suffering Messiah whose true identity was to remain hidden until after the resurrection although revealed earlier to his disciples; and (2) The secrecy associated with **Jesus' life** and teaching is thoroughly Marcan, therefore Marcan innovation. The truth probably lies between these two. As presented in Mark, it is undoubtedly Marcan. Yet a pre-Markan tradition may well have maintained a *memoria Jesu* about Jesus' teaching which was reserved for the circle of his disciples in which he spoke more freely and more explicitly about suffering to come.

An *argument against a messianic consciousness in Jesus* would go as follows. The concept of the messianic figure varied from a royal to a priestly to a prophetic figure. The more prevalent concept, however, was that which patterned itself after the expectation of a future king, with its Davidic, nationalistic, political, and royal implications. There was great inconsistency between the conception of the awaited Messiah and what Jesus taught and how he presented himself. He was concerned with a coming kingdom, but one not like the kingdoms of this world. As in the traditions of Israel and Judah, and even at the time of the decision whether Samuel ought to anoint a king in the first place (1 Samuel 8: 4-7, 10-22), the Lord God is King. For Jesus the coming kingdom was God's and the kingdom of God was not like the kingdoms of this world. Jesus in fact seems explicitly to have stayed away from such a notion. It hardly seems possible that secretly Jesus thought of himself as the royal Messiah. And thus it would be accurate to say that Jesus did not think of himself as the Messiah in any way in which that was understood within the Judaism of his day.²⁶

²⁶See Reginald Fuller, *The Mission and Achievement Of Jesus* (London: SCM, 1967), 116: "'The life of Jesus was un-Messianic'-such was Bultmann's conclusion about the Jesus of History. At best this statement conserves an important half-truth. The life of Jesus was un-Messianic in any sense of that term previously recognized in Jewish eschatological hope. The life of Jesus was un-Messianic in the sense that Jesus never proclaimed himself to be the Messiah. The life of Jesus was un-Messianic in the sense that Jesus did not possess what modern critics have called 'Messianic consciousness' or make a 'Messianic claim'(except perhaps right at the end, at the supreme, paradoxical moment of his humiliation). The life of Jesus was un-Messianic in the sense that he did not impose a Christology upon his disciples. But **what was the life** of Jesus? It was a life wrought out in conscious obedience to the eschatological will of God, a life in which proclamation of the impending advent of the Reign of God and the performance of the signs which heralded its approach culminated in the suffering of the cross as the decisive event by which the eschatological process should be inaugurated. Was that life un-Messianic? It would be truer to say it was 'pre-Messianic,' for it was the outcome of the lowly history of Jesus that he was, in the belief of the Church, exalted to be the Messiah."

I would agree with Fuller that the life of Jesus was unmessianic in the sense in which that was commonly understood within Judaism and in the sense that Jesus never explicitly proclaimed himself to be Messiah. Whether Jesus possessed a messianic consciousness is another question, however. The expression "pre-messianic" shows an attempt on Fuller's part toward a balanced and reasoned statement.

But, it has never been argued that Jesus was the Messiah precisely in the way or in any of the ways in which such a figure was expected within Judaism. The early Jewish hope and the early Christian proclamation were not coextensive, even though the Christians proclaimed a fulfillment in Christ Jesus. But, as with all of God's promises, there was no simple correspondence between the promise and its fulfillment. God is a God of surprises, and the ways in which God fulfills God's promises do not always correspond to our expectations. Thus it can be well granted that there is a "missing link" between Jewish messianism and Christian proclamation, even though the latter claims to have been the fulfillment of the former. That missing link was Jesus. The Christians did not claim that Jesus was the Messiah *in the way that* the Messiah was understood or awaited within the Judaism of his day. He was the Messiah but in a different, unexpected way. Jesus was the one who realized God's future plans for Israel and who realized that he was the awaited one who would inaugurate its accomplishment. And he also realized that it would not be accomplished in the ways expected. Thus Jesus was the Messiah, thought of himself as the Messiah, but not the Davidic Messiah as such. Rather he was one who would have to suffer and die. Within the teaching (or theology or messianology or christology) of Jesus, the very concept of messiah was being changed.

On the other hand, we must concern ourselves with the Judaism of Jesus' day and not post-resurrection Christian theology. We have already situated Jesus within Judaism and it is within that context that we must understand him. We all know that the meaning of words changes and language evolves and develops. Take the word *oaf*²⁷ An old superstition speaks of a changeling child - a misshapen child whom the fairies have left in place of a child they have stolen. In Old Norse, such a child was an elf. The word became *oaf* and the meaning changed; it referred to any mentally or physically abnormal child. Then the meaning

²⁷See William and Mary Morris, *Dictionary of Word and Phrase Origins*, vol. 2 (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 195.

changed again; it now refers to a clumsy or lazy person. We must pin the language down to the way in which it was used and available to Jesus within early Judaism. He did not think of himself as the Davidic royal Messiah.

But there is a *further objection*. Grant the messianic conceptions of Judaism and the "discontinuity" between these and the early Christian conception. But the question is whether Jesus provided the "continuity." The "sources" for the Christian conception cannot be limited to those within Judaism as it existed before or during the times of Jesus, but must be thought of as Judaism plus Jesus, a particular Jew who was keenly perceptive, present to God, and from any historiographical point of view a transition to something new. Therefore Jesus must be understood within but cannot necessarily be reduced to pre-Christian Judaism. Thus the issue is not the Jewish conception, nor the Christian conception, but what was Jesus' conception of the awaited one, and did he see himself as in fact fulfilling that role?

We must come after such discussion to some conclusions. Although both of the above sides of the argument can be defended, both involve their own assumptions. Therefore, my opinion is that it is better to describe Jesus' consciousness neither as messianic nor as unmessianic, for the following reasons:

1. Even within Judaism the concept of Messiah was varied and fluid at the time of Jesus. To "fix" it too tightly is untenable even on historiographical grounds. It allowed, within limits, room for maneuver and would have allowed rethinking and flexibility. If we introduce apocalyptic thought, as well as Essene, Zealot, and Samaritan thought, there was much room for creativity within Jewish eschatology.

2. Even apart from the variety within Judaism, we must give attention to the outstanding stature and prophetic character of the man Jesus. However one might evaluate him, he was associated with the origins of a new movement within Judaism which later separated from it. We cannot assume that the Jewish wineskins could contain the new wine of the man Jesus (Mk 2:18-22).

3. We must give some attention to our cautions above. Even if the concept of Messiah could be more fixed, the consciousness of Jesus could not be. He was human, changing himself, trying to understand, listening to God, and a fixed or precise concept or adjective or self-description or self-understanding simply become less workable or apt. It easily becomes too narrow to apply if we make it precise, or too broad to be meaningful if we leave it more fluid. One can rightly describe Jesus' consciousness as prophetic and social. These terms are applicable. But what does messianic mean when applied to Jesus? We see the difficulty. It is not that Jesus' consciousness was not messianic but that the expression messianic is not sufficiently clarified a concept when applied to Jesus to be helpful. It must always be qualified. We must keep in mind that we are talking about consciousness or awareness, a very fluid reality, and in this case that of a very creative and prophetic individual.

4. We can conclude by saying that Jesus' self-identity was not messianic in the sense that this was most commonly understood within his Judaism. He certainly did not see himself in a royal or priestly role. The messianic notion, however, was open to prophetic and new understandings as well. Jesus may have seen himself as messianic in the sense that he was offering in a definitive way God's salvation to Israel - and their responses to him and his message would be crucial to their salvation. One cannot describe Jesus' consciousness as messianic in the same way that we can describe it as prophetic or social. But this is not the same as saying it was not messianic. We must be open to the possibility that it was messianic *in a new way*. But we cannot know whether this new way would have been considered by Jesus himself as particularly messianic. Jesus' own eschatology is something to which we will come in a later chapter.

The question for Jesus was not what he thought of himself, but how did he envision what the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob was doing at this point in history. He saw himself as preaching a social and religious message which people interpreted in prophetic terms. We can see how difficult it would be for Mark 8 or the trial texts to be

interpreted either as support for or refuting of a messianic self-understanding on the part of Jesus. Jesus means *both* Judaism *and* newness.²⁸

Preacher and Healer

Jesus was called by God, but called for the sake of others. Prayer and mission, being "of God" and "for the people," were two sides of the same person. Jesus was one of us, called by God, for our sake. Which is more important for a proper understanding of Jesus? His being "from" or "of" God; or his being "with" or "for" the people? Which is more important: inhaling or exhaling? One can distinguish but cannot separate in Jesus of Nazareth his relation to and love for his heavenly Father, and his relation to and love for the people.

Mark's Gospel weaves together these two sides of Jesus - prayer and ministry.

And in the morning, a great while before day, he rose and went out to a lonely place, and there he prayed. And Simon and those who were with him pursued him, and they found him and said to him, "Everyone is searching for you." And he said to them, "Let us go on to the next town, that I may preach there also; for that is why I came out." (Mk 1:35-39).

Who was Jesus? He was of God. This identity is clear within the first chapters of the Gospel of Mark (1:1, 11, 14; 2:7; 3:11). Disciples did not always recognize that he was from God and were astonished at his authority (1:22,27; 2:10,12). Yet his own claim was that his authority and power came from God (2:3-12). Also, Jesus lived for others, a life of ministry which consisted in preaching (1:38), healing (1:31),

²⁸We may not be able to improve much upon C.H. Dodd's statement, *The Founder of Christianity* (New York: Macmillan, 1970), 102-3.

and exorcising demons (1:23). His ministry was especially devoted to outcasts and sinners (2:16-17). He also called disciples to himself (1:16; 2:13; 3:14) and was an itinerant teacher. Toward chapter four of Mark, the shift is toward Jesus as teacher (4:1, 38; 5:35), and his teaching pertains to the reign of God (4:26, 30).

This picture of Jesus also comes through in the Gospel of Matthew.

And he went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and preaching the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every infirmity among the people. (Mt 4:23-24; also Mt 9:35; 10:5-8)

Luke also perceives Jesus as being "of God" and "for others." In chapter four, which opens with the wilderness experience, we find Jesus at prayer (4:42, also 5:16; 6:12), preaching (4:18, 43, 44), teaching (4:15, 31-32), healing (4:38-39,40) and casting out demons (4:35,41). His ministry is seen especially as a mission to the poor (4:18-19). Evidence indicates two very closely related activities in Jesus' life: 1) preaching and teaching, 2) healings and exorcisms.

Jesus' life was so much for the people that his death came to be understood in those terms as well. Paul writes, "And he died for all, that those who live might live no longer for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised" (2 Cor 5:15).

It is clear that the earthly Jesus cured people of varied illnesses.²⁹ The Synoptic Gospels speak of Jesus healing multitudes in Capernaum (Mk 1:32-4) and throughout Galilee (Mk 3:7-12 and 6:53-6). They also speak of twelve very specific healings: three cases of blindness (Mk 8:22-26; 10:46-52; Mt 9:27-31), two cases of leprosy (Mk 1:40-44; Lk 17:11-19), one case each of fever (Mk 1:29-31), hemorrhage

²⁹Cf., Norman Perrin, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), 8-20. Donald Senior, *Jesus* (Dayton, Ohio: Pflaum Press, 1975), 113-31. Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew, A Historian's Reading of the Gospels* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973), 22-25, 59-69.

(Mk 5:25-34), a withered hand (Mk 3:1-5), deafness (Mk 7:31-7), paralysis (Mt 8:5-13), another case of paralysis which also involves the forgiveness of sin (Mk 2:3-11), lameness (Lk 13:10-13), and dropsy (Lk 24:1-6).

As prominent as was Jesus' power over disease, so was his authority over the demonic world. He was both healer and exorcist. The synoptics record six specific cases of exorcism (Mk 1:23-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29; Mt 9:32-4; 12:22-24). In addition, the first three Gospels speak of numerous exorcisms accompanying the healings (Mk 1:32-4, 39).

One ought not draw a sharp distinction between the healings and exorcisms. Matthew lists the demoniacs along with the epileptics and paralytics as examples of "those afflicted with various diseases" (Mt 4:24). How many of the diseases stemmed from "psychic" or "spiritual" causes? To what extent were some diseases understood to be cases of possession? Some descriptions of demoniacs seem to describe epileptics (Mk 1:23-28; 9:14-29). Muteness is involved in three of the cases of demonic possession (Mk 9:14-29; Mt 9:32-4; 12:22-24), but in another instance a deaf and at least partially mute person is not presented as a case for exorcism (Mk 7:31-37).³⁰

The prophetic character of Jesus' life together with the astonishing wonders he performed as healer and exorcist, wonders which are part of the tradition about prophetic activities (consider Moses, Elijah, Elisha), again indicate that Jesus of Nazareth can be situated in the context of "charismatic Judaism."³¹

³⁰W as this Marcan deaf-mute a case of exorcism? See John M. Hull, *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition* (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1974), 78-82. For further discussion of the relation between healing and holiness, and between sickness, sin and demonic possession, see Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 59-68.

³¹Cf., James D.G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit, a Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (London: SCM, 1975), 9-92; *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament, an Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), 184-89; Martin Hengel, *The Charismatic Leader and His Followers* (New York: Crossroad Pub. Co., 1981); Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 58-82. Bruce Molina, however, has called into question whether the expression "charismatic" is an appropriate description of Jesus' authority, "Was Jesus a Charismatic Leader?" *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 14 (1984), 55-62.

The history of Israel and Judah included many conflicting and complementary traditions, among others the royal, priestly, prophetic and sapiential traditions. One can hardly overestimate the role of the king, priest, prophet, and sage in Israel's history. We would call the kingship and priesthood "establishment." After the exile, the role and influence of the priesthood had grown. The prophetic tradition, which had died out, manifested a more charismatic, less institutionally controllable factor in Israel's history. The sages gave rise to a critical wisdom as well as a folk wisdom. In addition, in post-Maccabean Judaism, there were many varied "enthusiasts" - martyrs, messiahs, ascetics, zealots, wonderworkers. As an itinerant preacher and healer, Jesus had much in common with these enthusiasts, even if he never claimed to be *the* Messiah, even if he was less ascetical than John, even if he never joined the resistance movement.³²

The astonishing deeds performed by Jesus (the *erga* of the Synoptics) were not a phenomenon unique to Jesus. Among others, Hanina ben Dosa, a first century C. E. Galilean like Jesus, was known for his power of concentration during prayer, his ability to cure illnesses as well as effect healing from a distance, his power over demons, and his ability to influence nature. He lived in poverty, seemed uninterested in legal and ritual issues, and was resented by the leaders of the Pharisees.³³

In our attempt to understand Jesus, we must not only acknowledge his reputation as a healer but also his hesitation to present himself in this way.³⁴ Jesus was reticent

³²It is almost commonplace today to describe the Judaism of Jesus' day in terms of four "parties": Sadducees, Pharisees, Essenes, and Zealots. It is very questionable, however, whether there existed in the first half of the first century anything like a Zealot party as an identifiable, ideologically distinct group. This does not deny an anti-Roman resistance movement. See Marcus Borg, *Conflict, Holiness and Politics in the Teachings of Jesus* (New York: Edwin Mellen Press, 1984), 27-49, 64-68.

³³Geza Vermes, *Jesus the Jew*, 72-78, also 69-72 for a consideration of Honi the Rain Maker.

³⁴A continuing area of significant research is the relationship between Jesus and the "magical tradition" attested in Palestine and the Hellenistic world. Morton

about asking God for miracles and in performing signs (Mk 2:5; 5:34; 10:52; Lk 7:50; 17:19).

The Pharisees came and began to argue with him, seeking from him a sign from heaven, to test him. And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and said, "Why does this generation seek a sign? Truly I say to you, no sign shall be given to this generation." (Mk 8: 11-12)

Jesus hoped to evoke faith from people without signs. "It is an evil and unfaithful generation that asks for a sign!" And, "The only sign it will be given is the sign of the prophet

Smith's *Jesus the Magician* (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), however, has major flaws in its thesis which interprets Jesus primarily and almost exclusively within that context. Smith recognizes but gives too little attention in his conclusion to the difficulty of providing a precise definition for magic, and thus his argument manifests equivocation. E.g., Jesus is a magician (in a wide sense of wonder worker); therefore, Jesus is a magician (in a narrower sense, in the sense of one who practices "magical," or diabolical, or supernatural rites). Smith recognizes the diversity and wide range of meaning behind the word *magic* (68-80), yet he "jumps" from a word with a wide meaning in his discussion to a word with a quite specific and focused meaning in his conclusion.

He goes from an identification of Jesus with a *part*, an aspect, of the magical tradition to Jesus' identity with the *whole*, or wider range of meanings. Because the sky is blue, and my shirt is blue, my shirt must be in the sky. Smith verifies well: One of the main characteristics of a magician was that of performing miracles. He also verifies: Jesus worked miracles. But likewise, one of the main characteristics of the sky is its blueness. Also, the ocean is blue. Therefore . . . the ocean is in the sky. Smith recognizes the difficulty but ignores it in drawing his conclusion. Smith: "A miracle worker is not necessarily a magician" (143). There is no question of the historical stratum which recognizes Jesus as a miracle worker, but given Smith's statement, how do we jump from the fact of Jesus' working miracles to his being a magician? The "primary characteristic of a magician was to do miracles" (109). But the fact that A and B have something in common doesn't mean A is B. Smith actually makes this "jump" through an interpretation of other evidence. But, at this point, his argument runs thin (109-139). E.g., that Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness after his baptism (Mk 1:12) indicates the compulsive behavior characteristic of demoniacs (143), and the "clearest evidence of Jesus' knowledge and use of magic is the eucharist, a magical rite of a familiar sort" (152).

A more balanced study of the relationship between the magical tradition and the Christian tradition is John M. Hull's *Hellenistic Magic and the Synoptic Tradition*. The belief that Jesus *was* a magician is an ancient belief going back as far as the middle of the first century. Jewish tradition attributed Jesus' miracles to magical power. Even Christian literature records the accusation that Jesus was a magician, and a magical interpretation of the miracles was easily possible.

It is not easy to distinguish clearly between magic and miracle. Is there such a

Jonah" (cf. Mt 12:38-42; 16:1-4).³⁵ At the same time that we place Jesus in a tradition of healings and exorcisms, we must be careful not to overemphasize it since evidence suggests that Jesus himself did not see this as his primary mission even if it was prominent.

Jesus' healings and exorcisms, however, do give testimony to a power at work within him. Words used to describe Jesus are *dynamis* and *exousia*. Luke's use of *dynamis* refers to a power which makes the power of the spiritual world present in our world.³⁶ According to Luke, after Jesus' conquest of Satan, he has the "power of the Spirit" (4:14). The power was effective against demons and Jesus at times felt it going out of him (Mk 5:30; Lk 8:46). One of the difficulties Jesus faced was that his power was sometimes used against him, under the charge that it was diabolical: "He is possessed by Beelzebul, and by the prince of demons, he casts out demons" (Mk 3:22; Mt 12:24; Lk 11:15).

thing as a non-magical *religious* miracle? One cannot simply resort to saying, "God works miracles, demons work magic" (Hull, 61). The distinction then becomes one of faith and interpretation alone. Miracles and exorcisms in the ancient world were often regarded as being associated with magical rituals and powers (45-72).

Hull concludes that "the results of our investigation must not be exaggerated" (142). Yet, "we do find, however, certain aspects of the gospels which are at home in the magical world view of the first century of our era, and a number of details relevant to the central concern of magic ... We find that the miracles of Jesus and particularly his exorcisms and healings were interpreted as being magical at an early date, that in the light of contemporary presuppositions it was inevitable that they should have been so interpreted, and that the gospels themselves witness to early stages of the interpretations" (142). "As well as using faith, prayer, knowledge of the Torah and holiness of life, the means by which God was believed to work miracles through the rabbis, Jesus was thought to have used folk remedies" (143). However, "Jesus did not think of himself as a magician," and "the most abiding impression left by the New Testament treatment of Jesus as the master-Magician is the restraint of that treatment . . . The potential of the magus-myth for Christology was not very great" (144-45).

Another valuable reference is Howard Clark Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World, a Study in Sociohistorical Method* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983).

³⁵See Richard A. Edwards, *The Sign of Jonah, in the Theology of the Evangelists and Q*, Studies in Biblical Theology, Second Series (Naperville, Ill.: Alec R. Allenson, 1971). Robert Jewett, *Jesus Against the Rapture, Seven Unexpected Prophecies* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1979).

³⁶For a discussion of this particularly Lucan understanding of Jesus' power, see Hull, *Hellenistic Magic*, 105-15.

There is no question of the historicity of Jesus' charismatic healings and exorcisms, which is not to affirm the historicity of all the miracles or even all the details of the healing miracles. It is simply to say that Jesus did cure the sick and expel demons. His works were in continuity with the mighty and prophetic acts of God which were always on behalf of God's people. Jesus' works manifested someone opposed to, in struggle with, and overcoming the powers of evil (the exorcisms) and someone who released power for good (the healings). The struggle began in the wilderness, continued in his ministry, and was still there at Gethsemane. His opponents accused him of being possessed by Beelzebul, but Jesus' defense was in terms of his being locked in a struggle against Satan, the king of devils (Lk 11:14-22). And it was not by the power of the Evil One, whom he had early met in the wilderness and against whom he continued to pray (Mt 6:13, save us from the Evil one), that he had power over demons, but by the very power of God (Lk 11:20).

Although Jesus was not simply a repeat at a later period in history of one of the earlier prophets, not simply another Moses, Elijah, Isaiah, or John, he is nevertheless connected to that prophetic tradition and has his roots within it. In his prayer and in his mission, as a preacher and as a healer, Jesus is the prophet from Nazareth.