

Background for The Gospel of Mark

By Tom Baker

Christianity is the most widespread religion on earth and has largest number of adherents. One in three people in the world are Christians. Christianity is a devotional religion. Judaism, from which Christianity emerged, is a legal religion. Judaism is a religion of the law as seen through the history of a people and the lives of individual people, while Christianity is a religion of devotion to a man and his deeds and his approach to God. The moral life of the Christian is, however, structured by the law of Judaism. At the center of Judaism is the Divine Law of Moses, and at the center of Christianity is the Divine Man Jesus.

Jesus:

The earliest account of the life, acts, and sayings of Jesus is the Gospel of Mark. Tradition has it dictated by the apostle Peter to a fellow follower of Jesus, John Mark, about 68 AD, which was two years before the Romans razed Jerusalem and effectively dispersed Israel. The other two synoptic Gospels, Matthew and Luke, rely on Mark for their basic story but add new material such as the sermon on the mount, the birth accounts of Jesus, and several parables such as the Good Samaritan and the Prodigal Son. The letters of Paul, which are placed after the Gospels in the modern New Testament, were written before any of the four Gospels but almost never quote Jesus or speak of his life in any detail, save for his death and resurrection. Paul concentrates on the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Chronologically we get the meaning of Jesus first from Paul and later receive the specific acts, events, and what appear to be public and private teachings in the Gospels, the character of which is somewhat different in emphasis than Paul's summary of what Jesus meant which centers on the saving death of Jesus.

The man Jesus was a Jewish mystic born in a stable, executed as a criminal at age 33. There is no evidence that he was a carpenter. He owned nothing. According to Edgar Cayce Jesus was evidently educated widely in India, Persia, and Egypt during the hidden years between 12 and 30 after being taught by the Essene teacher Judy. Jesus wielded no earthly power;

produced no books or systematic teaching and his ministry was only three years long, yet he is the most influential spiritual teacher in the history of the world. Lao-tzu's writing is better, the Buddha's teaching ministry was far more thorough and impressive, and the Hindu spiritual cannon is far more comprehensive, yet Jesus remains the giant.

Jesus stepped out from Judaism and took exception to it. Taking exception to a religious tradition in a way that makes charismatic sense is rather rare, although we don't appreciate how rare since we're used to hanging on to Jesus' rebellious coattails.

The holiness program of Judaism, just like the holiness program of Hinduism (the caste system), drew lines between people that made some people acceptable to God and left others out in the cold: clean and unclean, Judaism is a religion of observances, over 500 laws and this left many people unobservant and unclean = unholy; sacred and profane like working on the Sabbath; Jew and Gentile like the rest of the world; righteous believer and sinner like Matthew the tax collector.

The central attribute of God for Jesus was compassion, thus he challenged injustice like an Old Testament prophet but from the personal and more passionate angle of the individual. This put Jesus at odds with the religious order of the day and finally got him executed.

Jesus= image of God also suggests a new image of human beings. I knew a man who, when I assured him that God loved him, replied that he didn't think God liked him. He had been raised in a too legalistic Catholicism where the rules had grown larger than the central presence of Jesus. Jesus liked people and they liked him in return. Edgar Cayce says of Jesus that he was simply likable; people enjoyed being around him. Part of this was his unhidden and consistent life. He lived what he taught and taught what he lived. Jesus treated people as if they were more than they knew themselves to be and more than others knew, and it wasn't flattery or trickery. He meant it, and it played itself out in healing and extraordinary devotion.

But what was the yoga of Jesus? Jnana-knowledge, Bhakti-devotion, karma-work, raja-experimentation. While Christianity appears to be a bhakti yoga or religion, directing to God the love that lies at the base of every human heart, Jesus confronts human resistance to love by practicing, embodying, and counseling forgiveness. A Course In Miracles suggests that the releasing of grievances is the heart of Jesus' yoga.

ACIM description of Jesus from Manual for Teachers, Clarification of Terms.

P.1--There is no need for help to enter Heaven for you have never left. But there is need for help beyond yourself as you are circumscribed by false beliefs of your Identity, Which God alone established in reality.

P.2--The name of Jesus is the name of one who was a man but saw the face of Christ in all his brothers and remembered God. So he became identified with Christ, a man no longer, but at one with God.

--Jesus remains a Savior because he saw the false without accepting it as true.

P.3--In his complete identification with the Christ----the perfect Son of God, His one creation and His happiness, forever like Himself and one with Him----Jesus became what all of you must be.

--He offered you a final demonstration that it is impossible to kill God's Son; nor can his life in any way be changed by sin and evil, malice, fear or death.

P.4--And therefore all your sins have been forgiven because they carried no effects at all. Arise with him who showed you this because you owe him this who shared your dreams that they might be dispelled.

P.5--Is he the Christ? O yes, along with you. His little life on earth was not enough to teach the mighty lesson that he learned for all of you. He will remain with you to lead you from the hell you made to God. And when you join your will with his, your sight will be his vision, for the eyes of Christ are shared. Walking with him is just as natural as walking with a brother whom you knew since you were born, for such indeed he is. Some bitter idols have been made of him who would be only brother to the world. Forgive him your illusions, and behold how dear a brother he would be to you. For he will set your mind at rest at last and carry it with you unto your God.

P.6--It is possible to read his words and benefit from them without accepting him into your life. Yet he would help you yet a little more if you will share your pains and joys with him, and leave them both to find the peace of God.

The Good News:

The apostle Paul: Knew what Jesus had taught but almost never quotes him. Instead he speaks of the experience of Christ, summed up in the phrase Jesus Christ, Son of God, Savior. Early Xians were simple, cheerful, tranquil, and kind.

The early church was a "discipleship of equals"/race, gender, status meant nothing for in Christ Jesus there is neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, slave nor free. Despite differences in function or social position, their fellowship was marked by a sense of genuine equality.

Early Christians had an inner peace that found expression in an exuberant joy, a radiance. "Life for them was no longer a matter of coping. It was glory discerned."--Huston Smith. Why such joy? Because they were released from 3 burdens: Fear, esp. the fear of death, guilt, and the cramping confines of the ego. Fear was addressed by Jesus assuring his followers, "I will be with you always, even unto the end of time." Guilt was addressed by Jesus' acceptance of people as someone beyond their acts and mistakes. Ego was addressed by Jesus being at the center of their lives, the spirit of which is in the bracelet WWJD or the Eucharist or the Bible or the hymn "He walks with me and he talks with me, and he tells me I am His own." In a real way Jesus replaces the ego or false self as the director of who the self is and what it is to think, say and do.

The Pharisees was the group Jesus was constantly arguing with. These were the letter of the law folks, the popular religious leaders like Rabbis of today. In fact, Judaism today is pharisaical Judaism. The idea is to apply the law and the prophets to daily life, like keeping the Sabbath holy. A very good idea. Basically apply the first three commandments: One God; Keep Sabbath holy; and Don't take God's name in vain. Judaism very much an everyday religion: you will know God by how you live and the devil is in the details. Although Jesus often seems opposed to the Pharisees, he is sympathetic to their cause, but is more expansive and abhors people being

classified in any way. Thus Jesus will come into conflict in letter of the law/spirit of the law matters, as he does, according to Cayce, with John the Baptist. The Pharisees wanted to preserve Judaism, its character and charisms, within captivity. First Persians, then the Babylonians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans had tried to absorb Jewish culture but to no avail, and in the time of Jesus it was the Pharisees that held the line.

The Sadducees were compromisers who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead or reincarnation. The Pharisees believed in reincarnation but paid little attention to it because their emphasis was on the practical holiness of this life.

The Zealots were political revolutionaries and hid in the caves above Capernaum lived most of his life.

The Essenes was a group that centered itself at Mount Carmel and that, from the time of Elijah, about 300 yrs. prior to Jesus, had worked on preparing a channel for a messiah. The Essenes concentrated on more esoteric studies such as astrology, numerology, and reincarnation. The choosing of Mary was the culmination of all the years of preparation.

Mary and Joseph were both Essenes, dedicated by their parents.

Cayce suggests that the choosing of the maidens was the beginning of the foundation of the Church. Church was built on the Rock that was Peter but was conceived from the transparent heart of Mary. In fact as a priest, the model of priesthood was not Peter or even Jesus, but Mary as the surrendering, transparent vessel of God's grace. The Baptism of Jesus repeats this pattern.

Just as the Spirit comes upon Mary as the potential for the Spirit filling human beings, so the Spirit comes upon Jesus as that potential realized. **Spirit is Ruha meaning wind, air, or breath, so the dove descending is more the rush of wings, an energy that lifts and opens and vitalizes, seen again when Jesus breathes upon his disciples after the Resurrection.**

Mary is the twin soul of Jesus and from her acceptance of the Spirit on Cayce says that women have been the guiding influence in the civilizations of the world.

12 maidens chosen. The other Mary, the innkeeper's daughter Edithia, and the wife of James.

Trained as to physical exercise, a bit like Yoga and trained mentally to chastity, purity, love, patience, and endurance. Special diet: no fermented drinks and specially foods formulated in Egypt. Mary chosen for training at 4 yrs. old and chosen on the stair by the angel Gabriel with a clap of thunder at between 12 and 13 in the temple at Mount Carmel. With the Essenes, women were considered equal with men, a value which Jesus continues.

According to Cayce, the virginity of Mary was maintained only until Jesus started his training at 6 or 7 yrs. old and after that had 3 children. In the church virginity became a symbol of holiness just as in priesthood a good celibate was equated with a good priest. Human beings like to single out certain acts or disciplines as guarantees of virtue, mainly because we feel so unsafe. Being celibate made me safe, being virginal made a nun holy. In the west sexual discipline has been part of the practice of virtue. In the east the acting out of serenity was a way to guarantee safety. The smiling, nodding man is the safe man.

Cayce says of Jesus:

He has promised to stand in the places of those who are discouraged, disconsolate, or have lost a vision, or lost hope. In the same way, this entity may be a channel through which many may take hope and be aroused to the awareness that the Lord is near, and that He stands at the door of thy consciousness so that ye may be awakened.