

**Pamphlet No.16**  
E.P. Wixted & Co.  
First Issued: Public Forum  
1964  
Brisbane, Q. Australia.

## **LET'S CALL HIM TOM**

The reader is no doubt already aware of that method of character assassination that is called "guilt by association". This method can only be effective where the public is unable, for one reason or another, to collect and weigh evidence on a rational basis. This present age has seen the technique perfected into one of the fine arts; this despite the so-called raising of educational levels. One of the most amusing sights of present day politics must surely be the way newspapers drum up "game" with grapeshot accusations which link guilt with association. The politicians, on the receiving end, run helter skelter for shelter piling denial upon denial as they run.

The evidence of this smear technique leads one to suspect the existence of an opposite technique, a technique of whitewash. Shall we call it "innocence by association"? Both are essentially confidence tricks. As with the smear, so with the whitewash. Both depend for their effectiveness upon a public insufficiently skilled in, or insufficiently concerned with the evaluating of evidence.

Guilt cannot be imputed to those who pursue legitimate ends by legitimate means. The Christianity of Jesus of Nazareth and his disciples was, in its origins, a religion of common sense and common decency. In the course of time there were those who attached themselves to the party of Jesus whose principles were self-interest, dissimulation and subversion. Through his name they justified their interference in the lives and private affairs of others. In the name of a spiritual king, they justified their attempts to set up a temporal kingdom. Behind the screen provided by the "**name**", the manipulators strove for worldly objectives with perverted spiritual means. For guilty hands to be made innocent of the blood of heretics it was necessary only to proclaim the "**name**"; the deaths that were died as just penalties were hailed as martyrdoms.

Jesus can no more be judged guilty for the activities of the wreckers than can the wreckers themselves be made innocent simply because they "associated" (and still associate) themselves with him. Removing the odium that clings to Jesus because of his "associates" is one of the most important reasons for writing this article.

A short statement of the line I intend to pursue would not be out of place at this juncture. I hope to demonstrate that the issues for which Jesus of Nazareth was crucified are universal and living issues made explicit by a collision of wills which took place at a certain time (30 CE), in a certain place (Palestine). Jesus was a man who died for a principle. He was crucified by self-righteous ignorance. The principle is the essential thing; time, place and personalities are only accidentals. Having said that, it still remains to argue along the following lines:

- (1) Evidence for the existence of Jesus,
- (2) The peculiar nature of his messiahship
- (3) The relationship between Hebrew Christianity and Catholic Christendom.

That the question of whether or not Jesus actually lived should be raised at all, is really a criticism of the distorted picture of him presented by clerical Christendom. The New Testament focuses a telescopic lens on this one man. The picture it gives of Jesus has to be refocussed in terms of a much wider setting and of a much greater spread of national and political interests. This simple procedure of refocussing for perspective is demanded both by logic and a sense of history; but it is ignored in the orthodox theological exposition of Jesus. The resultant lopsidedness of the theological exposition can hardly be laid at the door of those who wrote the New Testament. Certainly in John's gospel one can read that not even Jesus' brothers believed he was anything: they told him, somewhat sarcastically it would seem, that shadow sparring with the issue was pointless and that he should test his claims in the crucible of public opinion.

The pathetically small handful of people lamenting the death of their leader on a Roman stake - the scriptural picture - accords more with the lack of attention paid to Jesus by historians such as Josephus than it does with present popular misinterpretations of the New Testament. This does not imply that Jesus was unimportant and unknown. All it proves is that his contemporaries failed to perceive the more lasting significance of events, which they considered fairly mundane. Crucifixions were commonplace to all except the sufferers.

There are two major ways in which evidence bearing on the question of whether Jesus actually lived or not may be approached.

## **CONTEMPORARY EVIDENCE**

**First, as concerning the Jews:** For the present let us leave unargued the question as to how the New Testament came into being or the purpose for which it was written. It can be argued that the writers intended to convey that the man whose virtues they catalogue spent most of his time with the Jews in Palestine, and actually suffered as a result of a clash with the leading priests and lawmakers. Whether fact or fiction, that is the story! It must also be agreed - as a matter of fact in this case - that the Jews as a people have undergone extreme suffering and, in many cases near annihilation, because of the anti-Semitism which has followed acceptance by other races of the New Testament narrative as fact. It would be of tremendous advantage to the Jews were they able to prove that this Jesus whose name their opponents invoke, never existed at all, that the New Testament is actually fiction. Do Jewish scholars make any such attempt? Certainly, if they do, it is not reflected in their encyclopaedia. On the contrary their encyclopaedia states that the same Jesus can be clearly identified in rabbinical literature of very early times. And, if the original Talmudic references are checked, it will be apparent how easily the Jews could have concealed the necessary connection, or misrepresented its significance.

The Jews therefore - in faithfully serving the interests of scholarship despite the advantages, which would accrue to them from a documented denial - are prepared to acknowledge that Jesus is an historical figure. Should this correctly state their attitude then the pertinent question raises itself as to whether those who are engaged in proving the non-historicity of Jesus are activated simply by a bias that associates Jesus with the Churches, or a genuine desire to rationally evaluate evidence on the basis of scholarship. The wellspring of endeavours to deny Jesus historical status may be traced to a complete failure to refocus the New Testament picture of Jesus by applying the necessary corrective judgement. The rationalist is as guilty in this respect as is the theologian. The whole trouble arises from the fact that proportionally Jesus has been too well documented.

Arguments from silence can be conclusive only within certain limits. The claim that the ancient Jewish historian Josephus (circa 70 CE) leaves unnoticed the sect of the Nazarenes, the claims of Jesus, and the events that are recorded in the New Testament, and that this silence destroys Jesus' right to historical

status, is quite misleading. The emphasis of Josephus is always upon the political life of his times. On contentious questions he ventures few statements unsupported by documentary sources. He viewed history from the top down.

A movement, which emanated before his time at the lower levels of society - and concerning which there was no official literature available - would constitute for Josephus, a world of shadows. Josephus ventured into such areas of discussion only when contentious voices were silenced or when no one could claim authoritative knowledge. Moreover, it seems clear that a great many Jewish Christians had continued to maintain their traditional allegiances. They observed - apparently just as strictly as the orthodox - the requirements of the Law of Moses. With Gentile Christians the situation altered, but where the Orthodox Jew (simply as such) and the Christian Jew differed, was the question of where the emphasis was to be placed - on the forms or the feeling, on the external appearances or the internal reality.

That Jerusalem was totally convulsed by the appearance of Jesus is a figment of theological imagination. A man who was considered in his own time as a madman and blasphemer would not be likely to take an immediate grip on popular imagination. One can hardly imagine a crowd listening patiently while the logic of Jesus inexorably proved them to be hypocrites. The crowd makes judgements based on incomplete data of fallacious reasoning. Its very incapacity to reason energises its immediate and noisy decisions.

It does not seem to be to be generally appreciated that Jesus expected a slow and almost imperceptible spread of his teachings, an attitude consistent with the picture of a man whose principles are fixed, whose views are long and whose will is determined. The picture given by Josephus is just as one would expect it. Of the three references to Christianity contained in present editions of Josephus, two may be fairly summarily discarded. At the very least they may be regarded as foreign to the historian's normal line of thinking.

The reference to James, the brother of Jesus, in book 20/9/1, however, is in a different category. The situation described here belongs to a period with which Josephus was personally familiar. Where he would not venture to sift the melting and merging shadows of rumour and opinion of past events, he could, with perfect safety to his reputation, report an historical incident. The point of the passage is the misuse of authority by Ananus, which resulted in the death of a Jew. That the Jew was James is purely incidental. If it was Josephus' intention, or the intention of an interpolator, to push Jesus forward, then it seems strange that the point should be so completely understated, and that Jesus should be identified merely as the one "who is called Christ". In this instance the interpolator would have had to possess a higher degree of intelligence and more acute sense of historical foresight than one would perhaps care to attribute to any interpolator.

## **THE ABSTRACTION OF UNIVERSALS**

Rationalising does not consist merely of proposing negatives. I said earlier that principle is the essential thing and that time, place and personalities are only accidentals. Accordingly, we turn our attention to the methods by which universal principles may be abstracted from the New Testament record.

The core of church teaching is that Jews crucified Jesus for issues that were centred in him as a person. This localises the issues in both space and time. Rationalists assume that if they can prove that no such person as Jesus existed, moving in space and time, then they have also proved that the issues for which Jesus was crucified do not exist. But the position can be rationalised in exactly the opposite manner. If it can be proved that the issues for which Jesus was crucified are issues of everyday importance, of personal

character and thus of universal significance, then it can be supposed without injury either to logic or reason, that the principles involved were made explicit by a collision of opposing forces in a particular place at a particular time.

For the purposes of argument, let us consider that the New Testament is nothing more than an attempt to write a dramatic tragedy, which includes as an epilogue, the resurrection story. (For a number of reasons one is immediately reminded of the parallel construction of Shaw's Saint Joan).

The New Testament is constructed around the figure of a central sufferer. In tragedy on the classical pattern a flaw in hero always brings about his downfall. The fatal flaw in the downfall of Jesus was not one that existed in him, but the one already existing, and which he brought to consciousness, in others. According to Plato, Virtue is Knowledge. Jesus added to the virtue of the Jews by pointing out the logic which consequently flowed in particular cases, from their acceptance of certain general propositions.

In this way he brought about the situation whereby it was necessary for the Jews to kill him, or alternatively suffer the condemnation of their own virtue. His opponents attributed to him that discomfort of mind, which was actually brought about by their increased knowledge of themselves. Thus we have the tragedy of Jesus being killed by that part of himself, the virtue, which he himself instilled in the mind of the Jew.

Put bluntly, Jesus proved to the Jews that they were hypocrites. Instead of reanalysing their attitudes, they returned it upon his own head, calling him a madman and blasphemer.

The various writers of the New Testament impose order on their material according to their various purposes. The account that is by itself, most like a drama is that of John. He subordinates all incidental material. The doings in Galilee are a sideshow. He plays down the signs that were performed. It is in Jerusalem that Jesus is moving in the gospel as given by John. Within the limits imposed by factual accuracy, all the main characters are brought on stage at the time essential for dramatic impact and development. In the particular events and in the climax which John presents, the dramatist (as we are presently considering him), sees the outworking of universal principles - truth versus the lie, objective attitudes versus subjective attitudes, personal integrity versus institutional formalism, and so on. Instead of localising Jesus to the stage of Jerusalem of 30CE, he places him on the Stage of Eternity as a symbol of Everyman by identifying him with issues of principle.

Naturally enough, there are minor discrepancies in the various accounts. There are also many variants of Shakespeare's scripts yet it is never claimed that Shakespeare fails to get his essential message across simply because every script is not word perfect. Much literary criticism is based on pedantry, and so too is much Bible criticism. One objection frequently met is concerned with how the speeches of men could be reported with verbal accuracy in the scripture. On this aspect - and reminding you that we are merely considering the Bible in this section on the same basis as a piece of drama - I would invite your attention to what Bernard Shaw said about Saint Joan: in order to make the issues explicit and intelligible, Shaw had the characters say what they really would have said if they had known what they were doing.

The Bible may be approached in a number of ways. It may be viewed as an historical record, or as a piece of literature or in one of many other ways; but from whatever way it is approached, the attitude of critics should be consistent.

Let us turn our attention now to the second aspect with which we have to deal.

## THE PECULIAR NATURE OF JESUS' MESSIAHSHIP

The base unit of the Kingdom of God is personal character. Each unit is a particular case of this Kingdom, and in the universalising of these particular instances on the basis of microcosm / macrocosm, we find the significance of Christianity. "**The Kingdom of God is within you**", said Jesus

Theological interpretations of the New Testament cover all cases of proving the wrong point.

In beginning at the beginning it should be pointed out that Jesus is not the only "christ" in scripture. The word is left **untranslated** only where it refers to him. There is a particular meaning attached to the word only in so far as Jesus was "anointed" for a particular purpose.

The hope of Israel, as expressed in the Old Testament, was the establishment on earth of the Kingdom of God under the kingship of an **Anointed** (messiah) at his **ONE AND ONLY** appearance. There was no thought of TWO comings just as there was no thought that the "anointed" would be crucified and resurrected. On the basis of the suggestions, shadows and prophecies of the Old Testament (i.e. the Jewish Bible) the Israelites expected:

1. The world to be cleansed by fire,
2. The scattered tribes of Israel to be gathered into one,
3. Israel to have dominion over Gentile nations,
4. The Kingdom of God to be established on earth.

These expectations constitute criteria, which the Anointed one had to satisfy on his appearance.

The New Testament proposes that a man who was crucified and resurrected satisfied these criteria in a peculiar way. The significance of crucifixion / resurrection - and of the peculiar messiahship of Jesus - lies in its practical and individual application.

A man is "born" into babyhood and he is "born" into manhood. He is "born" into regeneration by passing through a self-imposed crucifixion and resurrection. This involves the total personality but has nothing to do with pious mortification of the flesh. It is the same process as is unconsciously involved in turning over a new leaf.

Expressed simply, what the New Testament says is this: Before you can enter the Kingdom of God you have to turn over a new leaf ("born again"); before you can turn over a new leaf, you have to take stock of yourself - you have to be honest with yourself. There is this relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm: as a man thinks, so the world is. One man through his devotion to a principle brought an era to an end. All men through devotion to the same principle bring a new world into existence.

Acceptance of or faith in Jesus implies in its essence a belief in the peculiar nature of his messiahship. There is no such thing as faith without action, just as in drama there is no such thing as character without action. Faith must be energised through character in action. Unfortunately, men have associated with the party of Jesus who evidence through their sanctimonious self-righteousness all the principles of those who put Jesus to death. It is only too evident that if Jesus appeared amongst them - again basing his appeal on principle rather than on the working of signs - a great body of Christians would be in the forefront of those shouting "Away with him".

I pointed out previously that the theological interpretation of the New Testament covers all cases of proving the wrong point. On this occasion I leave the doctrine of the **VIRGIN BIRTH** untouched. Visitors to Centenary Park Forum will have heard all they want to about the mistranslation of Isaiah 7:14 which was known to the Gentile church leaders over 1,800 years ago. There was never any prophecy that a "virgin" would conceive, and the New Testament certainly does not say that Jesus fulfilled a non-existent prophecy. What it does say - for a very good reason known to the theologians - is that Jesus was not the son of Joseph. It is usual for people to read Luke's account of the angel's appearing to Mary in chapter one, without ever thinking to examine the next chapter to find out the significance of what has been narrated. Note, for instance, the significance of the words "**before**" (Luke 2:21, see 1:31) and "**holy**" (Luke 2:23, see 1:35) which throws a totally different complexion on the matter.

Space will not permit the pointing out of other theological absurdities. Take for an example indicative of the principle involved, the reference to Jesus as the "**only begotten**" and "**first born**" son of God. These are prophecies, which, according to the New Testament were fulfilled by the resurrection of Jesus (Psalm 2:7, Acts 13:33, Psalm 89:26/27). Jesus is the firstborn among many brethren by virtue of the individual application of the crucifixion / resurrection principle previously referred to. But the theologians tell you, without any basis, that the prophecies are connected with Jesus' birth and the begetting of other men is through the agency of the "Virgin Church".

The Jews condemned Jesus because they did not know that there were prophecies showing that the Anointed one would be crucified and resurrected. But if the churches today also do not know, or do not recognise the Old Testament resurrection prophecies, then where would they have been standing had they been present when the nails were being driven through the hands of Jesus?

The rationalist may object that the resurrection story is a fake, based on an afterthought. Even though it can be shown that it could not be an afterthought, the question of the veracity of the story is not here at issue. The question is the use to which certain scripture was put by the disciples of Jesus, and the use the same scripture has been put to by the churches. The Churches contradict the disciples!

As touching the principle of resurrection however, should the rationalist critic himself have ever turned over a new leaf, then his conscience has witnessed to him the principle of regeneration or resurrection.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN HEBREW CHRISTIANITY AND CATHOLIC CHRISTENDOM**

There are four main stages in the spread of Christianity. First the simple teachings of Jesus; second the growth of an organisation centred in his disciples; third the growth of a "catholic" church which was based neither on the teachings of Jesus, nor the teachings of the disciples, but the writings of the Fathers of the church; and fourth, the isolation of Rome by historical processes and the development of Roman Catholicism with its authoritarian claims.

That there is a difference between the primitive Hebrew Christianity and Catholic Christendom need hardly be demonstrated. The concept of catholicity is based on the fundamental fallacy of multiplying instances of particular believers to achieve a total unity of belief.

The disciples preached that a man who was anointed by the Supreme Being had been crucified by men, but resurrected by God from the dead, in accordance with Old Testament prophecies. When the Bible fell into Greek, and subsequently Latin hands, the teaching underwent a change in accordance with the predilections of those particular nationalities. Their minds were set in the key of a different structure.

They projected into the Bible their own prevailing national religions. Doctrines were crystallised by the disputes among the early Gentile Church Fathers who looked into the pool of Narcissus, the Bible, saw themselves imaged there, and then projected this, their own image, upon the world through the medium of ecclesiastical councils called by Roman Emperors from 325 CE onwards. Christendom bears the image not of the mind of Jesus and the character of the Supreme Being, but of early Gentile theology.

Let me conclude on a down to earth note. The name Jesus was reasonably common among the Jews. Today it is overloaded with extreme emotional connotations, which almost precludes rational discussion or analysis. Why then, for the purposes (and only for the purposes) of rational discussion do we not use a substitute term in place of this name? Thomas is a fairly common name amongst us; well then, for the purposes of argument, let's call him Tom!

This article – **“Let's call him Tom”** – originally appeared in **‘Aspect’** Magazine in 1962 as an answer to Rationalist objections to the historicity of Jesus. The article does not deal with Jewish objections to Jesus; such objections requiring an approach from a markedly different direction.