Book Review: 'Jesus' by David Flusser

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David Flusser: JESUS*

IN THE last fifty years, an astonishing number of Jewish authors have written on Jesus. The most ambitious attempt is a learned study in modern Hebrew by the late Joseph Klausner, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem and at one time editor of a leading Hebrew Journal. Klausner's *Jesus of Nazareth—His Life, Times, and Teaching* ends on the uncommon note: "What is Jesus to the Jews?" For the Jews, he holds, Jesus can neither be the Son of God nor the Messiah, neither a prophet nor a pharisaic rabbi. Yet, he continues, for the Jewish people Jesus is "a great teacher of morality and an artist in parable. He is the moralist for whom, in the religious life, morality counts as—everything." Klausner even dreams of the day when, stripped of miracles and mysticism, "the Book of the Ethics of Jesus will be one of the choicest treasures in the literature of Israel for all time."

Another scholar, Claude Montefiore, founder of liberal Judaism in England, differed with Klausner by viewing Jesus as a prophet, the "last of the prophets," greater than any of the Hebrew prophets (*Jowett Lectures*). Whereas the other prophets of Israel were agitated about the righteousness and welfare of the nation as a whole, Jesus was concerned with the individual Israeliite. Unlike the prophets before Him, He bent down to the individual sinner, indeed, to the outcast, embracing him in love.

Other authors are less interested in Jesus' ministry among His contemporaries than in their personal relationship to Him. Edmond Fleg, for a long time France's leading literary interpreter of Judaism, recalls—in his little book *Why I Am a Jew*—how, in his youth, he could never look at the anguished face of the Crucified without breaking down in tears. Sholem Asch once professed: "Everything Jesus ever said has meaning for us today, and this is something you cannot say of any other man, dead or alive." I myself have heard him avow: "Christ is the fulfillment of all the prophets said. He is the Torah, he is the true Saviour, he is the Messiah."

Again: "Jesus is the last of the prophets, the great moralist, the true Saviour, the Messiah. What is Jesus to us?"

The best-known of all Jewish authors on Jesus is David Flusser, whose book *Two Types of Jewish Faith and the Christian* has been without parallel among Jewish literature. He writes: "Jewish faith and knowledge and the Christian faith are one; Judaism must claim." He is the true Saviour, he is the Messiah.

David Flusser: JESUS*

he is the true Sabbath.” And: “He is the great Need of our lives.”
Again: “Jesus is my happiness. Take him away, and I am nothing”
(personal recollections, J.M.O.). Victor Gollancz, the English writer
and publisher, calls Jesus in his My Dear Timothy the “Supreme Particular,”
whom to worship is to worship “both God and humanity.”
“Whatever may be the truth about the Gospel story,” he professes,
“Christ lives and reigns for me eternally, and whether or not I hesitate
to call Him Lord, I can surely call Him Master.”
The best-known personal testimony is that of Martin Buber:
“From my youth onwards I have found in Jesus my great brother.
That Christianity has regarded and does regard him as God and
Saviour has always appeared to me as a fact of highest importance
which, for his sake and my own, I must endeavor to understand”
(Two Types of Faith). I have no intention of making this “survey”
complete; still, it would be a culpable omission to ignore Leo Baeck,
The Gospel as a Document of Jewish Faith-History: “Since he lived; no time
has been without ‘him ...’.” For Baeck the Gospel is “a Jewish book
among Jewish books” because “the pure air that pervades it and in
which it breathes is that of Holy Scripture,” because it resounds with
“Jewish faith and Jewish hope, Jewish pain and Jewish distress, Jewish
knowledge and Jewish expectation, indeed, with them alone.” Hence,
“Judaism must not pass it by, must not misjudge it, nor renounce its
claim.”

David Flusser is the most recent in this line of Jewish scholars and
poets who have written on Jesus of Nazareth; yet he differs from
them. The lyrical prose or almost ecstatic profession that characterizes
much of the writing of his fellow authors is not his manner. Hand
in hand with this sober style goes his matter-of-fact treatment of
Jesus’ Jewish roots. Recently, he wrote in another context: “Too often
is it forgotten today that Jesus was a Jew; and even if it is known
and acknowledged, the historical reality of his life and doctrines is not
always stressed” (The Jerusalem Post, 9/16/69, p. 13). The thrust
of his book is similar: The Jewishness of Jesus is something so plain
and powerful that it need not be underlined, that it would not be
helped by glowing rhetoric. Thus Flusser states simply that the image
of Jesus drawn by the synoptics is that of “Jesus, the Jew, [working]
among Jews and [wanting] to work only among them. Even Paul, apostle of the Gentiles, confirms this fact: Jesus was born ‘under the law’ (Gal 4:4); he was ‘a servant to the circumcised to show God’s truthfulness, in order to confirm the promises given to the patriarchs’ (Rom 15:8)” (p. 64).

This awareness does not lead Flusser to tailor the story of Jesus in order to fit it to the small measurements of the average man, nor would his perspicacity allow him a judgment as rash as that of another Jewish author:

There is no evidence that ... [Jesus] equated or identified himself with a messiah, or with the Messiah, or the Son of Man, or the Suffering Servant, or with a combination of all three figures. Jesus was a normal person—he was the norm of normality—and he neither identified nor equated himself with anyone except Jesus of Nazareth (Paul Winter, On the Trial of Jesus, p. 148).

Flusser holds the opposite view. "It is quite certain," he claims, "that in his own lifetime Jesus became accepted by many ... as the Messiah. Had it not been so, Pilate would not have written above the cross of Jesus: 'King of the Jews'” (p. 103). True, Flusser thinks that Jesus’ messianic consciousness developed:

At first [Jesus] had been awaiting another; but in the end, the conviction gained strength that he himself was the coming Son of man. Otherwise the conversation at Caesarea Philippi, Jesus’ words to Peter, and Jesus’ answer to the high priest would not make sense (ibid.).

He goes even further. In a meditation on Van Eyck's portrait of Jesus God-made-man, Ruler and Judge (see p. 101), he has this to say:

The one like a man who sits upon the throne of God’s glory, the sublime eschatological judge, is the highest conception of the Redeemer ever developed by ancient Judaism. Only one artist has captured it: Van Eyck. He depicted the Son of man, above the altar at Ghent, as a human being who is divine. Could Jesus of Nazareth have understood himself thus? Let us not forget that he felt he was God’s chosen one, his servant, the only Son to whom the secrets of the heavenly Father were open. This very sense of sublime dignity could have led him in the end publicly to dare to identify himself with the Son of man; and in Judaism the Son of man was frequently understood as the Messiah (pp. 103–104).
In order to grasp the true meaning of this passage, it must be read in a larger context. For all of Flusser’s rapport with his subject, the text must not be taken as a profession of faith. However close he feels to Jesus, Flusser does not speak as a traditional Christian; on the contrary, he is very much a Jew but one that baffles classification. He is a devout man but to call him a devout Jew would not be telling enough. He observes the practices that make up Orthodox Jewish life; still, to class him simply with observant Jews would not be doing him justice.

One of the anecdotes about him has it that one Friday evening, a Christian student of his, at the wheel of a car, spotted him on one of the streets of Jerusalem. In his eagerness to help, the student forgot that it was the eve of the Sabbath, nor did it occur to him that the professor was on his way home from the synagogue and would thus decline riding in an automobile. Flusser did indeed refuse the invitation but, to sweeten the refusal and ease the student’s embarrassment, he is said to have added: “Don’t you think the great Lord in heaven laughs at the small Flusser on earth who takes himself so seriously?” This is not a verbatim transcription; the words may bear the imprint of several narrators.

Do I read too much into this offhand remark when I think that it is an acknowledgment of the infinite distance between God and man, even God calling and man answering, God demanding and man complying. Ultimately, it is not what a man wants or how he runs that decides his fate but God’s favor: “It does not depend on man’s will or effort, but on God’s mercy” (Rom 9:16). Or could it be that the jesting was meant to conceal a sigh of grief at a world in conflict: that he had to reject a loving gesture in order to fulfill a commandment? In any case, observations of this kind can be found in Flusser’s book. Having spoken of Jesus as “a Jew faithful to the law,” he adds: “Of course, for Jesus there was something quite problematical in his relationship to the law and its commandments, as there is in the life of every believing Jew who takes his Judaism seriously” (pp. 44–46; translation slightly altered, J.M.O.).

I value this sentence because it shows Flusser’s greatness, his freedom of spirit, in admitting the perplexities a Jew encounters who seeks to live by the Torah. Conversely, for many Jewish apologists it is an indisputable premise of their thought that, in speaking about the tension created by the Law, Paul spoke as one whose spiritual
experience was totally atypical of a Jew. No professional apologist, Flusser is a loyal Jew who, in instance after instance, proves himself to be without bias.

When treating Jesus' disapproval of the pleasure many pharisaic scribes took in being addressed as rabbi, "my teacher," "my master," Flusser refers to the saying of R. Shemayah (first century AD): *Ebab et-hamla' chab usana ha-rabbahut* (Ab. 1, 10), usually rendered: "Love manual work and shun office." Often the second half of the sentence is understood as: "Hate arrogance." ("Arrogance" here means "lording it over others," a "magisterial attitude" in the pejorative sense, an "overbearing manner.") Flusser translates without scruple: "Love manual work and hate rabbinism" (p. 20). I cannot repeat often enough how I admire a man who holds that being true to his people demands that he be true to every facet of reality. I take my hat off to a man—if this unJewish image be permitted—who will not let his loyalty degenerate into a compulsory defense of the deeds and misdeeds of all the members of his group.

A perfect example of Flusser's fusion of detachment and devotion is his treatment of Jesus and the Pharisees. He does not hesitate to write that in the days of Jesus and the decades thereafter, "the term 'Pharisee' usually bore a negative connotation.... If one said 'Pharisee,' one immediately thought of a religious hypocrite" (p. 53). But at the same time he is careful to point out that the struggle between Jesus and the Pharisees was not, as is commonly thought, a deadly one. Some of them warned Him that Herod was seeking His life (see p. 42). Again, when the apostles were persecuted by the Sadducean High Priest, the pharisaic rabbi "Gamaliel took their part and saved them" (Ac 5:17-42)" (p. 58). When Paul stood before the high council in Jerusalem in fear of his life, he sought the help of the Pharisees, received it, and was spared (Ac 22:30-23:10) (see pp. 58–59). Finally, "when in 62 AD, the Lord's brother James, and apparently other Christians, were illegally put to death by the Sadducean High Priest, the Pharisees appealed to the king, and the High Priest was deposed" (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* xx, 199–203) (p. 59).

Flusser maintains that, in the eyes of the Pharisees, the persecution of the early Christians by the high priestly clique was one more proof of that clique's injustice. For them, the delivery of Jesus to the Romans was "an act of high priestly despotism" (pp. 59–60). Being generally opposed to the Romans, they themselves conciliated to their "stationary" government.

There was no such conciliation, no such personal identities, no such concern for maintaining their own supposed position. The Pharisees and their rabbinical clerical leaders were a "hymn" (CD viii, p. 71) (p. 59).

There are several reasons for this. First, the Sadducee leadership and the early Christians often saw eye to eye (pp. 58–59). They shared several common interests, and they opposed the Roman government and the power of the Pharisees. They should, therefore, have something in common. Flusser maintains that, in the eyes of the Pharisees, the persecution of the early Christians by the high priestly clique was one more proof of that clique's injustice. For them, the delivery of Jesus to the Romans was "an act of high priestly despotism" (pp. 59–60). Being generally opposed to the Romans, they themselves conciliated to their "stationary" government.
No professional apologist, after instance, proves himself the pleasure many pharisaic, "my teacher," "my master," Ehab (first century A.D.: Ἐκάβ), usually rendered: Often the second half of the phrase. ("Arrogance" here means "proud attitude" in the pejorative: it renders without scruple: "m"") (p. 20). I cannot repeat holds that being true to his facet of reality, I take my hat permitted—who will not let story defense of the deeds and 1 of detachment and devotion pharisees. He does not hesitate to decades thereafter, "the term annotation... If one said a religious hypocrite" (p. 53). point out that the struggle be-t, as is commonly thought, a that Herod was seeking His osties were persecuted by the ibbi "Gamaliel took their part (p. 58). When Paul stood before of his life, he sought the help spared (Ac 22:30-23:10) A.D., the Lord's brother James, illegally put to death by the appealed to the king, and the (Mt 23:4) (pp. 54-55). The hymnbook of the Qumran community accused the Pharisees of keeping the well of knowledge from the thirsty and giving them vinegar instead (IQH iv, 11). This denunciation reminds Flusser of Jesus' outcry: "Alas for you lawyers! You have taken away the key of knowledge. You did not go in yourselves, and those who were on their way in, you stopped" (Lk 11:52) (p. 55).

There are other parallels between the attacks by the Qumranites and the criticism by Jesus, yet there is one great difference between them. Whereas the men of Qumran sharply rejected the doctrine of the Pharisees, Jesus declared that they "sit in the chair of Moses." One should, therefore, follow their teaching, not their practice: "for they say one thing and do another" (Mt 23:2-3) (p. 55). That Jesus saw in scribes and Pharisees "contemporary heirs of Moses," that their teaching should serve as model of His disciples' and the people's lives, is not astonishing when one keeps in mind that Jesus "was basically rooted in universal non-sectarian Judaism" and that
the philosophy and practice of this Judaism was that of the Pharisees. Yet it would bewrong to describe Jesus simply as a Pharisee in the broad sense. Even if his criticism of the Pharisees was not so hostile as was that of the Essenes, nor so contradictory as that of the contemporary [rabbinical] literature . . . he did view the Pharisees with detachment, as it were, and refused to identify himself with them (p. 56).

I have recorded Flusser's treatment of Jesus and the Pharisees so extensively, because it is an important topic on which there is misunderstanding galore. But apart from this, it is a reviewer's first duty to acquaint his readers with the book and the author he reviews and to give them some opportunity to judge for themselves. The readers of this review ought to experience Flusser, as much as possible, the way he gives himself and not the way I see him. I trust that my presentation has been lucid enough to illumine his balanced judgment Jesus as well as his passionate devotion to fairness. The same could be shown by a summary of the chapters on love, on morality, and on the Kingdom, but I have room only for the treatment of one, that on love.

Flusser shows that, a considerable time before Jesus, a "change in intellectual and moral atmosphere . . . had taken place in Judaism" and that this "new and deeper sensitivity . . . was an important pre-condition for the preaching of Jesus" (p. 65). As evidence he cites the saying of Antigonos of Soko (about 175 B.C.):

*Be not like slaves who serve their master for the sake of reward.*

*Be like slaves who serve their master with no eye on reward.*

*And may the fear of Heaven be upon you!*

*(Ab. 1, 3)*

Our author continues:

The black and white morality of the old covenant was clearly inadequate for the new sensitivity of the Jews of classical times. Having now recognized that men are not sharply divided into righteous and sinners, it was practically impossible for one to love the good and hate the wicked. Because it had been difficult to know how far God's love and mercy extended, many concluded that one ought to show love and mercy toward
one's neighbor, thus imitating God himself. Luke 6:36 puts this saying into the mouth of Jesus: "Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful." This is an old rabbinical saying (p. 66).

A number of parallel teachings on love by Jesus and the rabbis discloses the direction of Flusser's argument. Other witnesses to this common fund could be added, for instance, the strong, simple injunction of the pseudoepigraphical Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, an injunction that Jesus may well have been aware of. On the origin of The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs, two schools oppose each other. One sees it as a Jewish book, written in the second century B.C., but tampered with by later Christian interpolators. The other considers it a Christian book, written in the second century A.D., whose author incorporated Jewish material. Obviously, Flusser's opinion that Jesus was familiar with the oral tradition deposited in The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs is tenable only if the first school is correct. I am inclined to share his view that it is an authentically Jewish work. After this necessary digression, I would like to give the injunction I have referred to:

Love the Lord and your neighbor.
Have compassion on the poor and the weak.

(Test. Iss. 5, 2)

The parallel sayings quoted by Flusser reach their climax in an utterance of R. Chanina (second half of the first century A.D.) who taught that the commandment to love one's neighbor was

A saying on which depends the whole world,
_a mighty oath from Mount Sinai:_
If you hate your neighbor
whose deeds are wicked like your own,
I, the Lord, will punish you as your judge.
But if you love your neighbor
whose deeds are good like your own,
I, the Lord, will be faithful and have mercy on you.

(Ab. de R.N., 26, second version; translation not Flusser's)
Flusser does not stop here. R. Chanina believed, he writes, "that one ought to love the righteous and not hate the sinner, but Jesus said: 'I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you' (Mt 5:44)" (p. 70). Flusser could have given in this context the apocryphal "Exhortation of Joseph to His Sons," also found in The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs:

If anyone seeks to do evil unto you,
doi well unto him
and pray for him;
and you shall be redeemed from all evil.
(Test. Jos. 18, 2)

Flusser may have found these words less powerful, less direct. "The commandment to love one's enemies is so much [Jesus'] definitive characteristic that his are the only lips from which we hear the commandment in the whole of the New Testament. Elsewhere [this I assume, includes "Joseph's Exhortation," J.M.O.] we hear only of mutual love and blessing one's persecutors" (ibid.).

It has been said that there is nothing new in the teachings of Jesus; everything He taught was taught before, and better. But it also has been stated that Christ's teaching is altogether new or infinitely surpasses the teachers that preceded Him. Both simplistic views are wrong. Flusser's stand is much more sophisticated. He holds, first, that the commandment to love one's enemy is, indeed, a revolutionary one. Second, he maintains that the great commandment to love God and neighbor was also taught by the scribes; it was, no doubt, part of the oral tradition which Jesus "saw as important for his own message" (p. 71). Third, Flusser thinks that he could write another gospel that Christians would consider genuine though he used only material from the time of the Second Temple. Fourth, he realizes that "this could only be done, . . . because we do in fact possess the gospels" (p. 72).

Flusser treated this complex of problems at the Harvard Divinity School Colloquium on Judaism and Christianity in October 1966. (See his paper "A New Sensitivity in Judaism and the Christian Message," Harvard Theological Review, 61, April 1968.)

Even then, these points were not exactly new with Flusser; some of them he made before. In 1964, he lectured on Jesus of Nazareth over
Jesus said: 'I will persecute you' than stood his ground. There were those who objected to a dialogue between Christians and Jews, for Jews had nothing to gain, nor could they engage in a dialogue with those who killed millions of Jews or permitted their murder. Flusser countered: "We must forget the persecution complex engendered by our experiences at the hands of paganism and Christianity and must try to return to the spirituality of Hillel and the Second Temple which preceded the persecution" ("The Shield and the Cross," interviews by Philip Gillon, in *The Jerusalem Post Weekly*, 11/27/64). In support of dialogue, Flusser said: Christians can learn about their origin from Judaism and thus understand their religion better. "Jews can learn from Christians that some concepts of the Second Temple are not sufficiently stressed in modern Judaism." Again, Christianity can help Jews in bringing them "back to [their] own sources," in leading them to "a rediscovery of values which have been driven into the background by excessive formalism" (ibid.).

I fear Flusser's style, its remarkable calm, its unstudied simplicity, may deceive some readers; at least, several reviewers do not seem to know what to do with the book. Among them is Edmund Wilson, the literary critic of great fame, whom the blurb quotes as follows:

Simultaneous in David Flusser's mind are the Bible, the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha, the Talmud and other rabbinic literature, the Fathers of the Church, as well as modern biblical scholarship and the philosophy and belles-lettres of classical and modern Europe.

I wonder whether Wilson and I have read the same book. I wonder, too, what kind of emotion compels him to transform this thoroughly Jewish book into a "global" one. Not being clairvoyant like Wilson, I do not know what is in Flusser's mind but I do know that Wilson's extravagant description does not fit the book. To speak only of the final category on his list, I do not think the passing references to Buber, Gupta, and Nietzsche, to Kafka, Flaubert, and Lessing warrant Wilson's omnibus characterization. To appreciate the book's unique quality, one must hold it next to the authors I mentioned at the beginning of this review. Again, to give it the proper place in the history...
of religious thought, one need only compare its unruffled spirit with the nervousness of the late Marburg philosopher Hermann Cohen, who is said to have written:

In dealing with the personality of Jesus the greatest caution and reserve is necessary. A young man—a so-called philosopher—told me that he had allowed himself to be baptized, because he revered the personality of Jesus. I could only reply, that I was unable to admire his onesidedness in his knowledge of Jewish historical characters. It was useless for me to give him my opinion about using that legendary person [i.e., Jesus] as an exemplar of moral conduct. With no show of reason can we, in any case, allow our children to imbibe any sympathetic leanings towards this most involved personality of mythology and legendary history.

(I am taking this passage from Gerald Friedlander's *The Jewish Sources of the Sermon on the Mount*, Ktav, 1969, p. xlvi, where it is given without a reference to Cohen's works.)

Flusser's courage—or what I have called his unruffled, his sovereign spirit—is revealed in other ways as well. He is convinced that Jesus had brothers and sisters and says so unequivocally; the only bibliographical reference, however, is to "the excellent book by the Catholic scholar J. Blinzler, *Die Brüder und Schwestern Jesu,*" in which the view is propounded that "Jesus' brothers and sisters were, in fact, his cousins, or children of Joseph by a previous marriage" (p. 138, note 1). Another instance of Flusser's independent mind is the book's purpose. He writes:

The main purpose of this book is to show that it is possible to write the story of Jesus' life. True, we have fuller records about the lives of contemporary emperors, and some of the Roman poets; but, with the exception of the historian Flavius Josephus, and possibly St. Paul, among the Jews of post Old Testament times Jesus is the one about whom we know most (p. 7).

I do not think that Flusser succeeded in giving us the story of Jesus' life. As the original title, *Jesus in Selbstzeugnissen und Bilddokumenten* ("Jesus in His Self-Testimonies and in Pictorial Documents"), as well as most of the chapter headings (for instance, The Law, Love, Morality, The Kingdom, The Son, The Son of Man) show, Flusser's empirical and partial failures in the portrayal of the psychological facts and the carelessness in the critical evaluation of the modern apologetic. Our knowledge of the personality of Jesus is, according to history’s best informed historical narrator, far from one of the facts on which we could base neither our judgment about this personage nor our knowledge of the facts involved in the personality of mythology and legendary history.

As a method of salvation the text testimony is assiduously professed to be the most reliable, and the historian's arguments are based only in one instance on the criteria of certainty, and that is on the testimony of Jesus himself.

He adds that one would expect his disciples to proclaim salvation and to live a real life. But Flusser closes his book with an affirmation of the possibility of writing the story of Jesus' life.
emphasis is on the teaching, on the good news, of Jesus. But this failure—if it is one—is not a matter of great moment. What is important is that Flusser explodes that miserable subterfuge of "Jesus, the most legendary figure" of Jewish history. What is important is the fact that Flusser, well aware of the solid findings of New Testament criticism, is never the prisoner of its vagaries. It is the consensus of modern exegetes that it is impossible to write a biography of Jesus. Our main sources, the Gospels, are not day-by-day or year-by-year accounts of His life; they do not comply with the scientific requirements of a biographical narrative—they were never meant to. All historiography is interpretative—a mere enumeration of dates and facts would produce a chart, never a history book—but New Testament history, for that matter all biblical history, is especially so. Had one of the evangelists told nothing but the naked fact that Jesus died on the cross, he would have turned Jesus' death into an ordinary, though sad, phenomenon and thereby falsified the event. Only by indicating, in one way or another, that the event had an unseen, salvific dimension, was he a true witness and—ultimately—a good historian.

As the name tells, each Gospel—the good spell, the happy tale, of salvation—is more than the work of a chronicler; it is the evangelist's testimony to his faith in Christ or, rather, the Church's witness and profession. This is the virtue of the Gospels, not their weakness. On the basic fact—the theological character of the Gospels—there is no argument; the arguments revolve on what can be asserted about Jesus with certitude. There is one or the other who says that all we can be sure of is that Jesus lived and was crucified, and that His very words are so buried under interpretations, accretions, and so on, that their original sound can never be recovered. But Flusser is not a man to be frightened by a sacred cow. Boldly he goes about his task, convinced that the "Jesus portrayed in the [synoptic] gospels is . . . the historical Jesus, not the 'kerygmatic Christ'" (pp. 8-9).

Here, "kerygmatic Christ" can only mean a Jesus different from the one who walked the earth, one who lived in the imagination of His disciples, in the experience of His followers and, therefore, in their preaching, in the kerygma. A Christ who exists but in the mind or in a realm of ideas, but never walked the earth, never lived in that enclosed space where things clash and bodies collide, is a Greek concept
and thus could not have been proclaimed by His Jewish followers. The real Jesus—unique though He was—was a Jew and can be understood only within the living milieu of His people. In this context, Flusser has tried to place Him and has, I venture to say, succeeded to a high degree. There are a hundred details, or more, on which I disagree with Flusser; yet, they pale before his integral vision. Hence I like the book and admire its author.

There is, however, a major point on which I disagree with Flusser. The expression "kerygmatic Christ" can also mean the risen Lord as proclaimed by the apostles. Obviously, I, as a Christian, believe in Jesus transfigured and glorified. Though in his other writings, Flusser treats the resurrection as a reality of early Christian life, in this book he is silent. But this silence does not prevent him from loving Jesus and honoring Him, as he has done by this book. Similarly, a Christian would be a fool and an ingrate, did he shove it aside because it ends with these words: "Then a cry was heard from the cross. Some of the bystanders thought he was calling upon Elijah. Others thought that he had called out in despair: 'My God, my God (Eli, Eli), why hast thou forsaken me?' And Jesus died" (p. 132).

Though this is the way Flusser concludes his narrative, the abrupt ending is not the end he envisions. Toward the beginning of his book he writes:

This book does not set out to build a bridge between the Jesus of history and the Christian faith. With no ax to grind, but at the same time without pretending to submerge the author's own personality and milieu—for how can one do that when writing a biography—this book seeks merely to present Jesus here and now to the reader. The present age seems specially well disposed to understand him and his interests. A new sensitivity has been awakened in us by profound fear of the future, and of the present. Today we are receptive to Jesus' reappraisal of all our usual values, and many of us have become aware of the questioning of the moral norm, which is his starting point too. Like Jesus, we feel drawn to the social pariahs, to the sinners. When he says that we must not resist evil because, even by our denial, we only encourage the intrinsically indifferent play of forces within society and the world at large, we men of today at least can understand. If we free ourselves from the chains of dead prejudice, we are able to appreciate his demand for undivided love, not as philanthropic weakness, but as a true psychological consequence.
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The enormity of his life, too, speaks to us today: the call of his baptism, the severing of ties with his estranged family and his discovery of a new, sublime sonship, the pandemonium of the sick and possessed, and his death on the cross. Therefore, the words which Matthew (28:20) puts into the mouth of the risen Lord take on for us a new, non-ecclesiastical meaning: "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age" (p. 12).

An extraordinary book, Flusser's Jesus deserves a host of attentive readers. I say "attentive readers," for Flusser's style is of a deceiving simplicity and, at times, of a not transparent irony. His own narrative, for instance, is followed by reflections of "great men" on Jesus. These opinions are presented as if they were the book's climax, as if the author sought reinforcement for his own thoughts, or wanted to make Jesus palatable to some of his weak-hearted readers. The opposite is true. These reflections are a jest. A few are profound, many are trivial—they often contradict each other. They tell little about Jesus and much about the authors. They are thus more than irony. They are a climax; they are Flusser's final word: In the presence of Jesus, there is no pretense; a man's real self is disclosed, his inner thoughts are laid bare (cf. Lk 2:35). Unless I mistake him thoroughly, Flusser wishes to conclude his book with the conviction that Jesus is a revealer of men.

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