

In this review both Professor Cullmann's and Fr Durrwell's books have been considered from the point of view of their theological form, as it were, rather than their content, which in neither case is profitably to be summarized; I trust that readers of the review could no longer be satisfied with a summary.

Our Lady in Scripture—II: Oral Tradition

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Before the gospels were written, or rather before the gospel was recorded in writings which achieved stability in the four books we now have, there was an oral tradition. Before even the passion of our Lord, his sayings were circulated by word of mouth, handed on by those who had been present, to those who had not yet heard or seen him, stirring some to enmity, drawing others towards him. The apostles themselves were sent out by our Lord in his own lifetime to proclaim the coming of the kingdom of heaven and to set out the general lines of his teaching, a new teaching distinct from that of the rabbis, calling men to repentance and a greater purity of intention, to an inward purity of the heart deeper than outward purity before the law. They would have reported the actual words he used; perhaps he even gave them schemes to remember the outlines by and made them learn his sayings by heart; even so, Peter would have shaped them slightly differently from Matthew, Matthew from John, and when they were repeated from their audience to others they would have been slightly re-shaped again. This oral tradition certainly preserved the substance of our Lord's teaching accurately, whether it arose from the preaching of our Lord himself on the soil of Palestine or from the preaching missions of the apostles after the resurrection. It was concerned with allegiance to the person of our Lord, the kingdom he was to establish for his Father, the dispositions and conduct of those who were to make up the kingdom, the nucleus of the new Israel. It was a general message to the Jews first, and after their refusal to the Gentiles. This does not mean that there was nobody as yet to reflect more deeply

on the person of our Lord. It is possible that the devout circles into which he was born were already during his lifetime penetrating deeper into the mystery of his birth and the person of his mother. But in the general oral tradition, of which the bulk of the first three gospels is a written arrangement, our Lady is mentioned only incidentally to the main themes. These mentions are the family visit which occasioned a saying of our Lord regarding family ties, and his rejection by the people of his own country—Nazareth, which is the setting of another saying: ‘A prophet is not without honour save in his own country’. These stories were handed on not to tell us something about our Lady, but to lead up to an important saying of our Lord: nevertheless both preserve something about her, which is doubly valuable because it comes from so primitive a layer of the New Testament, and because, if we compare the versions of the first three evangelists, it can lead us into the mystery of our Lady and her life on earth.

‘*Who is my mother?*’—*Matt. 12. 46-50; Mark 3. 31-35; Luke 8. 19-21*

One aspect of our Lord’s teaching about the kingdom of heaven was that it demanded a love and loyalty to himself deeper and stronger than the love which exists between members of the same family. It did not of course destroy family ties—we have only to remember his condemnation of those who neglected their parents, his insistence on the commandments—but it might impose a choice on those who wished to be his disciples between following him and remaining in their own homes, it would even on occasion bitterly divide households. The person of our Lord himself would be a stumbling block, but the claims of the kingdom were over-riding; ‘he who loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he who loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me’. In this very connection the first Christians repeated an incident and saying of his, in which the claims of the kingdom were vigorously illustrated, since it concerned his own relation to his mother and family. That it was preserved primarily for the sake of the saying we can see from the fact that once that has been recorded we hear no more of the family visit that occasioned it. Each of the first three evangelists has the story, with slight but interesting variations. We can begin by discarding, for our purposes, the version of Luke. He has the saying in an abbreviated form in which it has become assimilated to the context in which it occurs. He has chosen to place the incident after the parable of the sower, and clinches the lesson of the parable by giving the saying in a form in which it echoes the

conclusion of the parable; the good seed represents those 'who *hearing the word* hold it fast', his mother and brothers are 'those who *hear the word* of God and do it'. This is successful as a literary and theological device, but the details of the story have been ironed out and the context tells us nothing about the family.

It is more rewarding to compare the versions and contexts of Matthew and Mark: here is Mark's version:

'And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him. And a crowd was sitting about him; and they said to him, "Your mother and your brothers are outside, asking for you". And he replied, "Who are my mother and my brothers?" And looking around on those who sat about him, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother".'

As regards the words of our Lord, Matthew gives them in a form virtually identical with that of Mark: the exception is that where Mark says: 'the will of God', Matthew has: 'the will of my father who is in heaven'; the phrase has a more semitic ring and is perhaps closer to the actual expression used by our Lord. It is usually said that Matthew, as we have it now, abbreviates Mark, cutting out the vivid details which Mark remembered from the preaching of St Peter, but that is not entirely borne out by this passage; here he has a rather different detail - our Lord does not merely look round the circle of listeners sitting on the ground, he stretches out his hand and points to his disciples. It is possible that we have two eyewitnesses behind the accounts. Nevertheless - and here at last we are coming to the point - at the beginning of the story we seem to have a more primitive tone in Mark than in Matthew. Mark says, 'And his mother and his brothers came; and standing outside they sent to him and called him'. This sounds imperious compared with Matthew's 'stood outside asking to speak to him' and is in keeping with Matthew's general practice of toning down expressions which seem contrary to the dignity and independence of our Lord. And it is confirmed when we look at the wider context of the story.

In Matthew and in Mark it occurs after our Lord's dispute with the Pharisees, the dispute provoked by the Pharisee accusation that our Lord worked his miracles by the power of the devil. It is difficult to understand why it occurs here in Matthew, for one of the main features of that gospel is that it collects together sayings which were originally given on different occasions but which are connected thematically; an

example is the discourse in chapter 10 where Matthew has synthesized our Lord's teaching on discipleship, and included the sayings which emphasize the priority of loyalty to the kingdom of God over family ties, the very theme which is illustrated by his saying here. Why does Matthew not use this story to clinch the discourse as Luke has done with his version of it at the end of the discourse about the seed? It can only be because he found it here in Mark or in some source on which they both depend. But there is a good reason for its appearing here in Mark, for in his gospel, dependent as it is on the preaching of Peter, we find that the dispute with the Pharisees, alarmed by the strange new preaching and the miracles which appear to authenticate it, has been preceded by a general alarm of his friends at his conduct: 'And when his friends heard it, they went out to seize him, for people were saying, "He is beside himself"' (Mark 3. 21). Mark, it seems, is telling us that his family were moved by the general alarm to go and look for him, and when they found him to try to summon him back to a more regular and quiet life. We know from elsewhere (John 7. 2-9) that our Lord maintained some relations with his family during his public ministry, but that they did not at first support and believe in him. What in all this of his mother? Judging from this text alone we would say that she shared in the family's alarm even though we know from other passages that she had also a far deeper knowledge of and insight into her son's messiahship. But on an earlier and similar occasion (Luke 2. 50), our Lady had not understood a saying of our Lord. We must be careful not to assume that our Lady from the beginning comprehended perfectly and exactly what her son was saying and doing; it is not impossible that she too had to grow in understanding and suffered as she did so.

'Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary?' - Matt. 13. 53-58; Mark 6. 1-6; Luke 4. 16-30 (and cp John 6. 42).

A difficulty that faced the first Christians was that the messiah in whom they themselves rejoiced had been rejected by the leaders and the majority of his own people. His teaching and his miracles had failed to convince Israel of his divine mission and had instead aroused an opposition so violent that it led to his death. He himself had experienced the opposition, foreseen its end, and tried to prepare his followers to accept it when it fell on them in their turn. In the conversations with the Jews of Jerusalem which are recorded by John, our Lord had tried again and again to open the eyes of his opponents and force them to

recognize the deeper causes of their hostility. The more general tradition preserved sayings and incidents which illustrated the attitude of the rabbis, incidents which occurred mainly in Galilee and which were early made into a little collection of their own and went to the making up of the Synoptic gospels. An example is the five controversies which follow one another in Mark 2.1-3.6. The motive which led to their being preserved in this form was the desire to illustrate our Lord's practice and to encourage the disciples when they found themselves facing the same hostility. Related to these is the story of our Lord's rejection at Nazareth, the village where he had been brought up and where his family still lived. It is the occasion of a saying which is recorded by all four evangelists, though John alludes to it without repeating the story (John 4. 44) and places it in a context in which he appears to call Judaea the 'country' of our Lord. For the moment we can leave aside the version of Luke. It is much fuller than those of Matthew and Mark; it apparently contains certain internal contradictions which have led scholars to suppose it to be made up of items from two, or even three, different visits to Nazareth, and it is placed by Luke at the beginning of the public ministry, earlier that is than in the other two gospels. It seems therefore to have been manipulated by Luke for narrative and theological reasons and though it probably enshrines a genuine memory of an eyewitness, the actual words of the Nazarenes have been cut down to a minimum, omitting all reference to our Lady.

When we compare the versions of Matthew and Mark, it seems certain that here Matthew is dependent on Mark. Matthew is shorter, stripped of inessentials; it uses the same words as Mark but they have been re-written, partly for the sake of greater clarity and elegance and partly for another reason which will become apparent. This is the story as told by Mark: 'He went away from there and came to his own country; and his disciples followed him. And on the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue; and many who heard him were astonished, saying, "Where did this man get all this, and what is the wisdom given to him, and the mighty works that are done at his hands? Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?" And they took offence at him. And Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honour, save in his own country, and among his own kin, and in his own house." And he could do no mighty work there, except that he laid his hands upon a few sick people and healed them. And he marvelled at

their unbelief'.

When we set Matthew beside this we see that certain changes have taken place: (a) our Lord is no longer called the carpenter, but the carpenter's son; (b) he works few miracles there because of their lack of faith, but Matthew does not say he was unable to; (c) he is not said to have marvelled at their lack of faith at all. It is evident that in Matthew a reverence for our Lord has led to the toning down of those expressions which laid what seemed to the author-translator too much stress on the humble occupation of our Lord, or tended to diminish the divine power and foreknowledge which were his. The people of Nazareth were amazed that the carpenter - one who had lived among them and worked as a carpenter—should have this wisdom and these miraculous powers; they knew very well that he had not attended the rabbinical schools, he had been busy among them. But to be surprised that a carpenter's son should have this wisdom makes less sense; it was perfectly possible for a carpenter's son to become a rabbi, and there was nothing of itself derogatory in being the son of a carpenter; it was only that they were too familiar with his relatives to be able to credit what they saw and heard. This was certainly so. But that there was a more hidden and less pleasant cause for their disbelief is suggested by the change which Matthew has made in the phrase which follows; 'the son of Mary' becomes 'is not his mother called Mary (Miriam)?' It is possible that Matthew has made this change for a literary reason, since he has just called our Lord 'the son of the carpenter', and thus alluded to Joseph. But in Mark there is no mention of Joseph at all. This is usually explained as being due to the fact that Joseph was already dead. The explanation is not sufficient, for Luke, writing later, reduces the words of the Nazarenes to 'Is not this Joseph's son?' A Jew took his name from his father, and his father's death made no difference. Only if he was illegitimate would he have been described as his mother's son. Thus it looks as if the words of the Nazarenes as given in Mark carry this imputation. We are led back to the mystery of our Lord's birth; for Matthew and Luke, and it can hardly be doubted for Peter and Mark also, it is certain that our Lord was conceived miraculously by the overshadowing of the Holy Spirit, but here, in the malicious words of the Nazarenes, we have the other side of the picture and the first instance of a theme dear to anti-Christian polemics. Matthew and Luke give their accounts of our Lord's mysterious conception and have eliminated the malicious imputation from the words of our Lord's fellow-townsmen. But it was there.

In both these stories from an early layer of the New Testament we find our Lady linked to a family, a group who are described as the brothers and sisters of our Lord. The brothers are even named. Who were they? The dispute began centuries ago and can hardly be solved here. It is probable that they were cousins on one or other side of the family. It is more important to notice that they were for some time out of sympathy with our Lord; they were workers living perhaps in Nazareth itself or close by, leading quiet lives and afraid of the disturbance and scandal which the enthusiasm of other Galileans for their cousin's teaching might and indeed was bringing in its wake. They certainly gave protection to our Lady, by now a widow, but it may not have been a particularly sympathetic protection. If, despite their inner family knowledge of the mystery implicit in their cousin's birth, they themselves doubted though without going as far as the more hostile neighbours, it cannot have made our Lady's position any easier. She had been accepted by the family of Joseph, she must have been since she was accepted by Joseph himself; but the revelation in which his doubts were overcome and the truth of the mystery made known to him may not have had so convincing a repercussion in his own family. That it was known to them we cannot doubt; they must themselves have been the source of the information worked up into the infancy narrative of Matthew, told as it is from Joseph's point of view. But the facts of Joseph's marriage may well have been known more generally without the explanation being disclosed, or if disclosed accepted. The facts would have been overlaid by time and familiarity, but remembered again when Mary's son began to attract attention to himself. Thus even in her son's lifetime the person and the role of our Lady were a source of difficulties; on the one hand there were those who knew and accepted the revelation of the divine origin of her son, though even they may have conceived it and his messiahship along conventional and worldly lines, but on the other there were those who added scandal, in our modern sense of the word, to the hostility her son was rousing. It cannot have been easy for her; and when her son separated from her to give himself entirely to the work his Father had set him, himself preaching the claims of the kingdom above family ties, it must have occasioned her a fresh suffering. But in order to understand the place of her motherhood in her son's work, and of her suffering through that motherhood, as well as her own dispositions and insight, we have to turn to other passages of the New Testament.