SUPERHUMAN LIFE (6)

IS THERE SUPERHUMAN LIFE?

By Ernest O'Neill

We've been discussing on this page the question "what is life about?" Why are we here? What's it all in aid of? We've been particularly concerned with the question of whether there is any life beyond this one that we are all experiencing here on earth. We have concluded that there must be something higher than us and the earth if we are to explain the existence of thinking, complex creatures like ourselves and a world that contains so much evidence of deliberate design. But, if such life exists out there beyond space, has it ever communicated with us? Have we ever heard from outer space--apart from the bleeps we may get on our radio-telescopes?

We've answered "yes." There appeared on our planet about 1950 years ago a remarkable human being. The documentary evidence for his historicity exceeds anything we have for either his contemporaries or the classical Greeks and Romans so the records we have of his life in the Bible are strongly corroborated by secular histories like Livy's and Pliny's. Today's question is this--was this man Jesus of Nazareth any different from the rest of us? Was he any MORE than a man?

When you look at his life as it's outlined in a book like the gospel of Mark in the Bible, some simple facts stand out. He talked like God's son! Even though his earthly father was an ordinary carpenter, he said to his parents once when he was just twelve and they found him in the temple, "Did you not know that I would be about my Father's business?" His mother, of course, knew her husband had no business in the temple. In a very natural way, he identified himself with God, saying things like, "If

you knew me, you would know my Father also" and "He who has seen me has seen the Father also." Indeed, where prophets like Mohammed avoided claiming a unique kinship with God, this man made it the focal point of his teaching. He would confront his followers with the question, "Who do men say that I am...who do you say that I am?"

However, probably all of us can think of people who make all kinds of wild claims as long as they will benefit from them; but this man was pointed and blunt about it even when he was on trial for his life about this very question of his identity. He was being tried for his life and the presiding official asked him, "Are you the Christ, the Son of the Blessed?" He replied, "I am; and you will see the Son of man seated at the right hand of Power, and coming with the clouds of heaven."

When I read that as a sceptic, I thought, "That explains it right there -- the man was a lunatic. The mental asylums are full of crazy people claiming to be anything from Napoleon to God's Son. That's what he was--just another mad demagogue!

Was He a Lunatic?

But this man called Jesus didn't act like a lunatic! The insane people in asylums not only make insane claims for themselves, but they ACT insanely--they produce other symptoms of mental imbalance. But this man Jesus does not have the abnormalities or extremes of a madman. Indeed, the opposite is true. When anyone in the world--whatever their religious or nonreligious background--wishes to set forth an example of a perfectly balanced and integrated personality, Jesus of Nazareth is the one who is presented as the model to follow. "His zeal never degenerated into passion, nor his constancy into obstinacy, nor his benevolence into weakness, nor his tenderness into sentimentality. His unworldliness was free

from indifference and unsociability or undue familiarity; his self-denial from moroseness; his temperance from austerity. Such are the opinions of most of the behavioral experts of our time. If this man was a lunatic, then all of us are hopelessly insane. As C.S. Lewis pointed out, "No one has yet explained how such deep, moral teaching could come from the lips of a megalomaniac!"

Was He a Liar?

But perhaps this man was simply a con man, a simple liar. Maybe he knew he wasn't God but deliberately deceived his hearers about his true identity in order to lend authority to his preaching. But he is universally regarded as the teacher of the highest ethical ideals the world has ever seen; moreover, his life is looked upon as the outstanding example of a perfect, faultless expression of his teaching. If he is a liar, then the whole world of logic crumbles in our hands, and our ability to make even the simplest observation with our five senses becomes questionable. It is nonsense to say that the greatest moral teacher and example the world has ever seen lied--about the focal point of all his teaching--his own identity! If Jesus was a liar, then the world is a "tale told by an idiot."

Perhaps He is just a legend! Lets look at that possibility next month.

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