

# The Matrix of Christianity

By  
David Wasdell

**Freud postulated a Graeco-Roman origin of the Christ-myth, but this paper firmly roots the new development in its Jewish Context. The dynamics of the Christian religion are exposed as a regressive complexification of Judaism under the traumatic impingement of imploding Roman power.**

Produced By: Meridian Programme, Meridian House, 115 Poplar High Street, London E14 0AE  
Hosted By: Unit for Research into Changing Institutions (URCHIN), Charity Reg. No. 284542  
Web-site: [www.meridian.org.uk](http://www.meridian.org.uk)

# THE MATRIX OF CHRISTIANITY

## CONTENTS

	<b>Page No</b>
<b>a) Historical Context</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>b) Torah and Talion</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>c) Pregnant Predicament</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Note 1: Stoning as Cultic Punishment</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>d) Myth of Mary</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>e) Conception and Interpretation</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>f) Poetry and Prophecy</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Note ii: Primal Journey</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>g) Intra Madona</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>h) Formation of Christ</b>	<b>28</b>

# THE MATRIX OF CHRISTIANITY

## **a) Historical context**

By the time of Jesus' birth the Jews had experienced some five centuries of more-or-less continuous political oppression at the hands of various foreign powers. The Babylonian exile, following the destruction of Jerusalem and its temple, had been terminated by Persian conquest of their captors. From BC 538 the exiles were able to return home and a slow migration began. By BC 516 the Temple was rebuilt, though the reconstruction of the city and its walled defences took another 70 years. By BC 400 Jerusalem had once again become the centre of Jewish national and religious life, even though the Jews were the political subjects of Persia.

When the Persian Empire fell to the Greeks under Alexander the Great, the Jews, like their other neighbours, welcomed him as a liberator. Their condition of political subservience with religious freedom remained largely unchanged through his reign and during the period following Alexander's death, first under the Ptolemies and then the Seleucids, until that is, the accession of the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV Epiphanes (BC 175 - 164). His oppression of the Jews may initially have been economically motivated but it very soon escalated into cultural, religious and finally military confrontation. In order to maintain their feud with the Ptolemies and to keep control of the vast Seleucid Empire in the East, Antiochus was under massive financial pressure. One of his major sources of funds was the Jewish people. To start with he increased taxes and began to auction off positions of responsibility to the highest bidder. Having deposed the High Priest, he appointed Jason in his place as one who not only offered large sums of money for the office but also agreed to support Antiochus in the Hellenisation of the Jewish nation. Cultural betrayal was enthroned at the heart of the cultus. It was in response to Jason's attempts to impose Greek cultural forms and customs in Jerusalem and throughout the country that the Hasidim (the pious ones) emerged as a strong religious opposition party. Antiochus realised that he could not maintain his authority over the Jewish people unless he first broke their religious culture. So in BC 168 the Jewish religion was proscribed. Under penalty of death all Jews were forbidden to circumcise, to celebrate religious festivals, or to observe the Sabbath. All copies of the Law were to be destroyed and anyone found in possession of it was to be punished. A Greek altar to Zeus was set up in the Temple in Jerusalem and swine were sacrificed on it. Heathen altars were erected throughout the land and the Jews were compelled to worship heathen gods. The edict was enforced by an army of occupation.

The Jews had learnt to survive political emasculation, becoming dependent for their national identity on the intensified religious cultus. The edict of Antiochus imposed the death penalty for carrying out precisely those rituals, the neglect of which incurred the death penalty under Jewish Law. The confrontation was total and the Jewish people were caught in an annihilatory double-bind between two opposed talion systems. The Hasidim refused to comply with the edict even though they were faced with martyrdom. Eventually the intense oppression generated a conversion-reaction within the Jewish defence construct and the Jews reversed out of their castrated political passivity into the revolutionary violence of the Maccabean era. Their religious zeal motivated the untrained militia to the point of martyrdom, which, married to skilful guerrilla tactics, eventually won a peace treaty. In

December, BC 165, Judas Maccabeus entered the Temple at Jerusalem, cleansed it and re-established the traditional Jewish worship.

With the basic aim of the revolt achieved the movement split into those who were content with sustaining religious liberty, while acquiescing under political oppression and those who wished to push on further towards the goal of political autonomy.

As Roman power increased in the West, Seleucid forces had more important matters to attend to than maintaining the control of a religiously fanatic and politically disruptive minor nation on the east coast of the Mediterranean. It was during this 'window', when the power of the Greek Empire was waning and Rome was not yet risen, that the Hasmonaean dynasty regained the political freedom of the Jewish people. The revolution was carried forward after the death of Judas Maccabeus, first under the leadership of his brother Simon, who was eventually appointed High Priest. Simon's son John Hyrcanus (BC 135 - 104) made notable strides toward his goal of restoring the boundaries of the former kingdom of David, an ambition which was even more nearly realised by his brother Alexander Jannaeus (BC 103 - 76), under whose leadership the original religious aims of the Maccabean revolt were all but obliterated and most Jews looked upon him as disloyal to the cause. Alexander's widow brought a certain amount of stability to the nation after her husband's death but when she herself died, the succession came into dispute between her two sons. Both sought Roman support from Pompey, then in Syria, while a third embassy, representing the Jewish people, requested that Pompey reject the monarchy altogether and restore the Jewish nation to its pre-Maccabean non-political status.

In BC 63 when Pompey arrived in Jerusalem, the political independence of the Jews was once more cut off. Roman rule was mediated through the representative governor in the territory of Syria. Pompey appointed Hyrcanus II (one of Alexander's sons) as High Priest. He faithfully carried out Roman policy with the assistance of his Idumean minister, Antipater. During the disturbed years in Rome at the end of the Republican period, Antipater and his son Herod managed to stay in power in Jerusalem, until in BC 40, Rome named Herod as ruler of both Judea and Samaria with the title of King. The appointment was confirmed by Augustus Caesar in BC 30. Herod was one of the most successful of Rome's puppet rulers and was still in power at the time of the birth of Jesus. In the fashion of a Hellenistic monarch he tried to foster Augustus' hopes for a common Graeco-Roman culture throughout the Roman Empire. Herod supported the imperial cult, built temples honouring the Emperor and generally encouraged the Hellenisation of the Jewish way of life. The Jews despised him for his Idumean ancestry, his betrayal of the cultus, his ambitious building programmes, and the heavy taxation required to support them. The scene was set for a re-run of the escalating confrontation between Jewish cultus and occupying power which had triggered the Maccabean revolt.

With increasing threat to the stability of his rule, Herod's style moved in the dictatorial paranoid direction. Secret police were widely deployed and any Jew who aroused the least suspicion of disloyalty was severely punished. He went so far as to have his mother-in-law, two of his sons and his favourite wife, murdered because he suspected their loyalty. In this climate any rumour of the birth of a new Jewish king, particularly one of the royal line of David, would have been extremely threatening and the massacre of the innocents fits understandably into context. The country was split into seething factions. Some urged cultural compliance with their overlords, even at the cost of the cultus, some sought religious

renewal and consolidation, while still others saw the future lying in the direction of armed revolution and were ready to follow almost anyone who declared himself prepared to lead an uprising. Herod attempted to pacify and stabilise the situation by initiating the construction of a beautiful new temple in Jerusalem, but when he died in BC 4 (2 years after the birth of Jesus), the Jews petitioned the Emperor not to implement Herod's will, which divided the Kingdom among his three sons, and riots broke out in Judea. Varus, the Roman governor of Syria, was sent to quell the riots and Augustus approved Herod's will.

The success of Herod's sons as governors was inversely proportional to the strength of the Jewish cultus within their territories. Thus Philip enjoyed a very successful rule over a mainly Gentile population to the north-east of Galilee. Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee was relatively successful in the eyes of Rome, but distasteful to the Jews, and it was under his rule that John the Baptist and Jesus carried out their ministries. Archelaus, on the other hand, had a disastrous time as Ethnarch in Judea. He was quite incapable of bridging the chasm between Roman and Jewish interests and effectively offended both. He was deposed and Jerusalem and Judea were placed directly under Roman rule, administered by a succession of Procurators.

Between 6 AD and 66 AD no less than 14 Procurators were sent to Judea. Lack of continuity, cultural insensitivity, and administrative incompetence contributed to a steady increase in the tension between Rome and the Jewish people. As pressure built up within the crucible, an increasing number of Jews were drawn into groups (Zealots) that openly or secretly favoured armed rebellion. Open hostility often flared up, until under Felix (51 AD - 60 AD), before whom the Apostle Paul was brought for a hearing, the Jewish reactionary groups became even more fanatical, and assassinations on both sides were common.

Felix's ruthless reaction to his opponents drove still more Jews to adopt radical ways of showing their hatred. Albinus, the next Procurator, (AD 62 - 64), was recalled by Rome because of his graft and his maltreatment of innocent people, but he emptied the jails of all prisoners before he left Judea, flooding the country with brigands who added to the confusion. He was succeeded by Florus, the last of the Procurators (AD 64 - 66), but by this time open fighting had become common. He added fuel to the fire by plundering the temple treasury, and then crucifying many of the people who demonstrated against his action. By AD 66 the situation had become so critical, and the promise of improvement so remote, that organised revolt against Rome finally broke out.

The success of the Macabbean revolt was not to be repeated. The Jews were no match for the trained and powerful forces under the Roman generals Vespasian and Titus. Although the last remnants of resistance were not wiped out until AD 73, the war was virtually over by AD 70. The city of Jerusalem suffered heavy damage during the fighting and the Temple itself, as symbol of the heart of the religious cultus, became a focus of resistance. Jewish defenders fought desperately to preserve the totem of national identity, yielding ground step by step with great carnage against the overwhelming power and armament of the encircling Roman forces. They would not yield the Holy of Holies and the High Altar until eventually the Romans fired the building, smoked out the last remnants of Jewish resistance and destroyed the temple. The overwhelming destructive power of E1-Shaddai imploded from circumference to centre.

With Temple razed, the almost impregnable hill fort of Masada became the last sign of hope for the survivors of the cultus. Its only access was by two snaking, mountain paths and up through an easily defended archway. Masada was well stocked with provisions and cisterns and deep wells provided an almost unlimited supply of water. The overwhelming Roman flood was halted, but only temporarily. With drafted slave labour, they began building a massive inclined ramp up the side of the hill. After 3 years the construction was almost complete and the military implosion of Masada was imminent. At this point, rather than suffer death or enslavement at the hands of the enemy, the survivors of the cultus entered on a mutual suicide pact, casting lots as to who would kill whom. The last living members of the garrison took their own lives. Under ultimate impingement, the talion boundary of the cultus turned in upon itself in mutual annihilation.

The political, religious and military implosion of Judaism was followed by a period of dispersion, oppression and scapegoating of the Jewish people throughout the Roman Empire. The underlying construct, religious cultus and adherence to the law, or Torah, focused around synagogue worship, sustained them as a distinct, alien entity wherever they went. Jerusalem itself was held in the tight grip of Roman rule for 6 centuries, only yielding as the boundaries of Empire finally broke and Roman jurisdiction gave way to Islamic occupation. The razed Temple site is today capped by the Dome of the Rock and the Omar Shrine, the third most holy place of Islam. The centre of the Jewish construct was broken. The boundaries of her people mirrored that destructive brokenness in the ghettos, the gas-chambers, the concentration camps and the social scapegoating of a world for which the broken defences of one culture threaten the breakdown of unconscious defences in every other. This century has seen the resurgence of political and military Zionism, fired by its intense religious core and seeking once again to repossess and cleanse the Temple site, so consummating the revolt against Rome in parallel to the Maccabean revolt against Greece. Current Middle Eastern dynamics cannot be understood unless account is taken of the deep unconscious forces unleashed at the boundaries of mutually incompatible defence constructs.

It was out of the seething crucible of mounting Roman oppression prior to cultic destruction that Christianity emerged. The deeper psychodynamic levels of the movement cannot, however, be understood without reference to the intensified observance of Jewish cultus, which sustained the national identity during the period of political oppression.

## **b) Torah and Talion**

The destruction of capital, temple and cultus by the Babylonian forces in BC 587 was a traumatic shock, challenging the Jewish defence construct to its core. As time passed, leaders and prophets in the exiled community began to interpret the Babylonian victory not as a sign of the weakness of Almighty God but rather the judgement of God exacted on his people for gross disobedience, idolatry and immorality. The process of rationalisation had two major effects. First, it led to the preservation of the fundamental defence construct of Judaism in the face of apparently paradoxical historic events. Secondly, it intensified concentration on the religious cultus in an attempt to avoid future implosion of the wrath of El-Shaddai. The development may be seen as an intensification of corporate obsessive neurosis in an attempt to resist defence breakdown under conditions of corporately traumatic impingement. The rituals of temple worship were complexified, codified and fixated. The canonisation of final forms of sacred writing into an authoritative corpus, eventually

designated as of divine origin and ultimately binding, gathered momentum. Ethical and ritualistic regulation of life and behaviour was intensified and the underlying taboo structure was more obsessively applied.

Insofar as further attacks on the sovereignty, or religious freedom, of the Jews were mounted from beyond her boundaries, so religious fanaticism increased. If such attacks were signs of the wrath and displeasure of Yahweh, then the best, and ultimately only, means of defence lay in more rigorous application of the religious demands of the cultus, so purifying the people of God, that God would defend the boundaries of his people.

In this context the maintenance of defences against the irruption of talion dread became ever more rigidly enforced. Relationships between Jews and non-Jews split further apart, since any Jew/Gentile contact threatened to contaminate the cultus. Hellenistic syncretism similarly threatened the construct and the resistance to idolatry, in any shape or form, was backed by the psychotic energy of terror and retaliation from the fundamental depths of primal and perinatal trauma. Infringement of the ritual codes of religious practice was treated in the same way as infringement of the legal codes of ethical practice and violently punished or repressed. The attempt was to purge Israel of anything that might, by any stretch of the imagination, offend the deity and therefore expose the boundaries of the group to talion, whether in terms of actual attack or paranoid phantasy.

Accurate knowledge of the will of God, together with its interpretation and application, became a consuming passion. The Torah (Law) of Yahweh ruled in Israel as a defence against talion and yet also, and paradoxically, as an incorporation of talion. It was a displacement of feared boundary impingement onto any internal element, which might in fact or phantasy generate the catastrophe.

The greater the pressure on the boundary of the cultus, the more intense and complexified became the defence construct at its core. Past eras, like that of the Davidic Kingdom, were idealised and hope was seen in regression to Davidic conditions, projected into the future as Messianic expectation and the emergent doctrine of the Kingdom of God. As hope of human holding of the boundaries by force declined, so the religious expectation of divine visitation and vindication increased.

Christianity did not emerge ex nihilo from among the mystery religions of the Graeco-Roman cultus as Freud would have us believe. It emerged out of the seething matrix of oppressed Judaism, a crucible undergoing violent historic process, in which transgressions of cultic taboos were met with violent talion, and yet whose fundamental levels of despair were displaced into intense Messianic hope. At this point in psychohistory, Christianity was conceived.

### **c) Pregnant Predicament**

When Mary became pregnant she was already betrothed to Joseph, although marriage itself had not yet been consummated. The institution of betrothal as the first stage in the formation of a marriage union had an important and formal role in contemporary Jewish culture. Partnership for marriage was normally arranged by head of household, rather than resulting from affection between the individuals concerned. The arrangement was sealed by the

payment of a dowry by the family of the prospective bridegroom to that of his bride-to-be, representing a price, ransom, or compensation for the loss to a family of a valuable member. In time the dowry, either as a whole, or in part, was set aside for the use of the bride herself, but however designated, the settlement of the dowry was the decisive act in betrothal. There were also additional ceremonies of a more-or-less formal kind. In the procedure sanctioned by the Talmudic authorities, which may well have been of considerable antiquity, the bridegroom handed to the bride an article of value, such as a ring or a written document adding: "by this ring, etc, may she be consecrated (or betrothed) to me". The presence of two male witnesses was required, so that the appropriate benedictions might be pronounced on the union. After the betrothal the bride was under the same restrictions as a wife. If unfaithful she was punished as an adulteress. Conversely, the contract could only be ended by divorce on the same grounds as those applying in full marriage itself.

Once betrothed, adulterous sexual intercourse, whether confirmed by subsequent pregnancy or by being 'caught in the act' by two witnesses, exposed the person concerned to dire consequences. Firstly, the husband-to-be could terminate the betrothal by sending her away with a bill of divorce. More significantly however, the charge of adultery, if confirmed, exposed the woman to the appropriate social and cultic punishment.

Death by communal stoning had long been used as the means of purging the community of the presence of those who broke its cultic taboos. It also served as a means of removal of corporate guilt by association. The horrific violence of the mode of execution is understandable in the light of the psychotic energy of repression vested in the defences of the cultus, namely its deity, taboo system and religious ritual. If El-Shaddai held by projection the overwhelming annihilatory and destructive talion rage and terror associated with common primal impingement, and overlaid with reaction to the pain of post-natal circumcision with its concomitant terror of castration, then anything which might offend El-Shaddai exposed the offender and, by corporate identification, the people as a whole, to the annihilatory, retaliating rage of the Godhead. The transgression of taboo threatened to crack the repressive defences of the community, so unleashing from the intrapersonal depths of traumatised unconsciousness the uncontrollable forces of psychotic talion. In order to sustain the social defences, maintain the repression of intolerable psychotic irruption, or in other words, to defend the people from punitive retaliation by their god, the offender had to suffer on behalf of the community precisely that which the community feared it might suffer because of the offence. The transgressor was therefore subject to unleashed communal psychotic talion, whose force reflected the penalty of disruption of common social defence, rather than simply punishment for the specific act of transgression itself.

In practice, the transgressor was evicted from the boundaries of the group and taken outside the camp, village, or city. They might be stripped naked and the whole community, led by the chief witnesses, had the responsibility of hurling stones and rocks at the offender until they died. The storm of retaliation might not end there. The group sometimes piled rocks over the battered remains of the body, so raising a great cairn as a warning sign for generations to come. In severe instances, the body was mutilated and hacked to pieces after death, with burning of home and possessions.

In this way the offensive element was evicted from the cultus, cut off from the people, declared no longer to be protected by El-Shaddai but conversely, to be a particular target of

his overwhelming, destructive, violent retaliation. The persecutory cervix of the cultus closed in crushing annihilation as primal talion was unleashed.

## **Note i) Stoning as Cultic Punishment**

In the Torah the death penalty was prescribed for a whole range of offences, both cultic and ethical. It is arguable that the normal mode of execution was by stoning, but this method was particularly stipulated for certain specific cases. For instance, stoning was the punishment for the violation of sacred space, so at the Lawgiving on Mount Sinai, Moses was instructed to cordon off the holy area.

"You must put barriers around the mountain and say, 'Take care not to go up the mountain or even to touch the edge of it'. Any man who touches the mountain must be put to death. No hand shall touch him; he shall be stoned or hurled to his death." [Exodus 19:12 f.]

The volcanic space within which the Decalogue originated was bounded by the fear of stoning. This may be a reflection of the activity of the volcanic Godhead himself, with the intense electrical storms, trumpeting sound of venting steam, rumbling, smoke cloud, fire, lava flow, and hailing showers of hot ash and pumice. There was a very real danger that if anyone did get too close that "the Lord may break out against them". The elements of stoning, burning and burial under a great heap of rock are all present here.

In even earlier material, however, it would appear that the Egyptian cultus also executed offenders against its ritual laws by stoning. So Moses offers fear of Egyptian retaliation by stoning as the reason why the Hebrews must go beyond the Egyptian borders in order to worship their God effectively.

"Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron and said to them, 'Go and sacrifice to your God, but in this country'. 'That we cannot do,' replied Moses, 'because the victim we shall sacrifice to the Lord our God is an abomination to the Egyptians. If the Egyptians see us offer such an animal, will they not stone us to death? We must go a three days' journey into the wilderness to sacrifice to the Lord our God, as he commands us. '" [Exodus 8:25 f.]

Similar cultic defences, backed by the punishment of stoning, applied within early Israelite religion, with particular respect to the offences of blasphemy, idolatry and sabbath-breaking. During one drunken brawl in the wilderness wanderings, a man had sworn using the name of God. Convulsive shock waves of consequential terror shook the community and

"The Lord spoke to Moses and said, Take the man who blasphemed out of the camp. Everyone who heard him shall put a hand on his head, and then all the community shall stone him to death. You shall say to the Israelites: When any man whatever blasphemes his God, he shall accept responsibility for his sin. Whoever utters the Name of the Lord shall be put to death: all the community shall stone him; alien or native, if he utters the Name he shall be put to death." [Leviticus 24:13 f.]

That account is particularly significant because of the "ordination of guilt" involved, by which members of the community who became associated with the blasphemy projected their guilt back into the blasphemer, thereby dissociating themselves from the punishment due. The sacrificial atonement became vicarious.

Any deviant worship was subject to the same annihilatory talion.

"If so be that, in any one of the settlements which the Lord your God is giving you, a man or woman is found among you who does what is wrong in the eyes of the Lord your God, by breaking his covenant and going to worship other gods and prostrating himself before them or before the sun and moon and all the host of heaven - a thing that I have forbidden - then, if it is reported to you or you hear of it, make thorough inquiry. If the report proves to be true, and it is shown that this abominable thing has been done in Israel, then bring the man or woman who has done this wicked deed to the city gate and stone him to death. Sentence of death shall be carried out on the testimony of two or of three witnesses: no one shall be put to death on the testimony of a single witness. The first stones shall be thrown by the witnesses and then all the people shall follow; thus you shall rid yourselves of this wickedness." [Deuteronomy 17:2-7]

This sense of the purging of the sacred space of anything that threatened to mismatch with the cultic defences was reinforced by applying the death penalty by stoning to anyone who tried to seduce the Israelite into deviant cultic behaviour.

"If your brother, your father's son or your mother's son, or your son or daughter, or the wife of your bosom or your dearest friend should entice you secretly to go and worship other gods - gods whom neither you nor your fathers have known, gods of the people round about you, near or far, at one end of the land or the other - then you shall not consent or listen. You shall have no pity on him, you shall not spare him nor shield him, you shall put him to death; your own hand shall be the first to be raised against him and then all the people shall follow. You shall stone him to death, because he tried to lead you astray from the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. All Israel shall hear of it and be afraid; never again will anything as wicked as this be done among you." [Deuteronomy 13:6-11]

Destructive export or projection of offensive material from within sacred space or cultus was matched by similar purging of sacred time.

"During the time that the Israelites were in the wilderness, a man was found gathering sticks on the sabbath day. Those who had caught him in the act brought him to Moses and Aaron and all the community, and they kept him in custody, because it was not clearly known what was to be done with him. The Lord said to Moses, 'The man must be put to death; he must be stoned by all the community outside the camp.' So they took him outside the camp and all stoned him to death, as the Lord had commanded Moses." [Numbers 15:32-36]

Parental authority was also backed by the ultimate sanction of stoning, since any fundamental disobedience of son to father threatened those deep-rooted defences, repressing the terror of

castration and its underlying retaliatory drives, which in turn handle the primal repressive energy itself.

"When a man has a son who is disobedient and out of control, and will not obey his father or his mother, or pay attention when they punish him, then his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of the town, at the town gate. They shall say to the elders of the town, 'This son of ours is disobedient and out of control; he will not obey us, he is a wastrel and a drunkard.' Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death, and you will thereby rid yourselves of this wickedness. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid." [Deuteronomy 21:18-21]

Stoning appears to have been an instantaneous reaction to anything which threatened the boundaries of the people. When Caleb and Joshua presented their minority report as members of the reconnaissance party, whose task had been initial exploration of Palestine, before attempted invasion, their perceptions were so out of keeping with the projected phantasies of terror held by the rest of the community that they were themselves threatened with stoning. Acceptance of their report would have exposed the community to the annihilating military defeat at the hands of the Anakim, which they all feared. As such, Joshua and Caleb became the representatives of threatening, destructive, power on the boundary of the people. If El-Shaddai protected that within his care but acted with retaliatory rage toward that beyond the boundary, then to cross the boundary into Palestine would be to step precisely into the area of Shaddai talion and forfeit his protection. Conquest of the Promised Land required a conversion reaction between outside and inside of the cultic boundary. Prior to that conversion, cultic reaction was to annihilate the representatives who had identified positively with the excluded territory. Following the conversion reaction, the Promised Land became the place of safety and the wilderness the place of destruction. The lives of the two men were preserved and they became key leaders of the nation. Those who had risen up to stone them were themselves condemned to die in the wilderness [see Numbers Chapter 14 passim]. This conversion reaction, in which elements facing talion annihilation are transformed into elements of safety, protection or salvation and the talion retribution is reflected outwards onto the originally threatening group, is not a unique occurrence. It represents the oscillation between projection and introjection of talion within the underlying field of primal defence.

Execution by stoning, circumcision and the ritual of the great Day of Atonement, all carry parallel functions at different levels of the cultic system. In each, the part is cut off and annihilated, bearing talion retribution of the wrath of God, as representative of the whole, which, in consequence, passes beyond the reach of talion into the place of safety and protection from the wrath of El-Shaddai. The ritual represents an anal activity, an excretion of unwanted material from the cultus, so purging or purifying the remainder. The unwanted part, be it foreskin or offender, sacrifice or scapegoat, blood, faeces or corpse, all are to be evicted from the congregation of the cultus as uncleanness whose polluting effect potentially exposes the whole people to the experience of both imploding and irruptive talion destruction.

At no point is the enforcement of cultic taboo more violent than in the realm of sexual morality. This is hardly surprising if we remember that both coitus and childbirth represent fundamental challenges to primal defence. Any disruption of the social management of these events threatens the primal defences with breakdown at their very heart. Capital punishment

for the transgression of sexual mores is the norm. Adultery is set firmly within the category of capital offences, thus "If a man commits adultery with his neighbour's wife, both adulterer and adulteress shall be put to death". [Leviticus 20:10]. The element of purging the cultus as well as punishment of the culprit comes out in similar material in Deuteronomy, "When a man is discovered lying with a married woman, they shall both die, the woman as well as the man who lay with her: you shall rid Israel of this wickedness." [Deuteronomy 22:22] The same passage gives specific legislation concerning adultery during betrothal: "When a virgin is pledged in marriage to a man and another comes upon her in the town and lies with her, you shall bring both of them out to the gate of that town and stone them to death; the girl because, although in the town, she did not cry for help, and the man because he dishonoured another man's wife; you shall rid yourselves of this wickedness." [Deuteronomy 22:23 f.] The wording is such as to distinguish carefully between adultery and rape since it is assumed that in the latter case the woman would have cried out for help and in the town her cries would have been heard. Any intercourse in the town is therefore judged adulterous, inferring compliance, or even seduction on the part of the woman. In the countryside where cries for help would not necessarily be heard only the male is executed and the woman is given the benefit of the doubt.

After the implosion of the national and cultic boundaries, and the destruction of Jerusalem and its Temple under the impact of the Babylonian invasion in BC 586, Ezekiel drew a powerful portrait of Israel as God's beloved, cared for from birth and eventually betrothed to her Lord with dowry of great value. Israel, however, turned harlot and worse, adulterous and worse, gave of her dowry in order to seduce lovers. So in her immoral rebellion, Israel, the betrothed adulteress became the object of the retaliatory wrath of the Almighty:

"Listen to the words of the Lord, whore that you are. These are the words of the Lord God: You have been prodigal in you excesses, you have exposed your naked body in fornication with your lovers. In return for your abominable idols and for the slaughter of the children you have given them, I will gather all those lovers to whom you have made advances, all whom you loved and all whom you hated. I will gather them in from all quarters against you; I will strip you naked before them, and they shall see your whole body naked. I will put you on trial for adultery and murder, and I will charge you with blood shed in jealousy and fury. Then I will hand you over to them. They will demolish your couch and pull down your high-stool; they will strip your clothes off, take away your splendid ornaments, and leave you naked and exposed. They will bring up the mob against you and stone you, they will hack you to pieces with their swords. They will burn down your houses and execute judgement on you, and many women shall see it. I will put an end to your fornication, and you shall never again give a fee to your lovers. Then I will abate my fury, and my jealousy will turn away from you. I will be calm and will no longer be provoked to anger." [Ezekiel 16:35-42]

Whether the passage is a prophetic warning of judgement to come, or a prophetic interpretation of judgement passed, is irrelevant. Its significance lies in the conversion of the direction of talion vested in the defences. In the first position, Israel is the betrothed virgin, her boundaries protected by the Almighty. All that offends her cultus is to be evicted and stoned, so preserving the purity of the socio-religious space. Her enemies are the enemies of El-Shaddai and his talion destruction is vectored toward them. In the second position, Israel is treated as an adulterous bride with cultic boundaries reversed. Her enemies are now seen

as executing judgement on behalf of God and have become his agents. So the cultic space is turned inside out while fundamental defences, or repressive dynamics are maintained and in fact reinforced.

As a result of the Babylonian experience, the Torah was even more ruthlessly applied within the post-exilic community. By the time of Mary's betrothal, the High Priest, meeting with the Sanhedrin as the supreme court of the cultus, possessed, and used, its powers of execution by stoning in the management of cultic and moral infringements. Blinzler, [Die Strafe für Ehebruch in Bibel und Halacha zur Auslegung von Joh. viii 5, *New Testament Studies* 4 (1957-58), p. 32- 47] has rather conclusively shown that stoning was still in practice in Jesus' time. Although the opinions of later Rabbis were divided and strangulation was regarded as the punishment intended when no other was specified, even in the Talmud a betrothed woman who committed adultery prior to marriage was still to be executed by stoning. "Filia Israelitae, si adultera cum nupta, strangulanda; cum desponsata tantum, lapidanda. Filia Sacerdotis, si adultera cum nupta, lapidanda; cum desponsata tantum, comburenda". (Sanhedrin, fol. 51.2 quoted in Ellicott, *New Testament Commentary*, Vol.I, p.444]

The power of the Sanhedrin to carry out capital sentences was withdrawn and the power of capital punishment was vested in the Roman authorities alone for about 3 years around the time of Jesus' death, but it was restored again soon afterwards. Certainly, Stephen was stoned to death for blasphemy after being called to stand trial before the Sanhedrin within a few years of the crucifixion. John 8:59 and 10:31 record earlier attempts to execute Jesus by stoning, while the disputed text of John 7:53-8:11 includes the threatened stoning of a woman caught in the act of adultery. The episode is presented as a test to Jesus and may well have been an attempt to put him in a double bind between the Law of Moses, which prescribed death by stoning in such a case, and the over-ruling Roman edict forbidding Jewish execution by stoning. Whichever way Jesus had decided he would have been guilty of breaking one set of laws or the other. In the event Jesus upheld the Mosaic law but avoided the execution by stipulating that the first stone should be hurled by someone without any sin at all. The episode is such a close parallel to the predicament in which Mary found herself that it is hardly surprising that the early editors had a certain amount of ambivalence about including the material in the canonical text of the Gospel accounts.

It is clear that Mary's presumed adulterous intercourse and subsequent pregnancy placed her in an intolerable position. To all accounts still a teenager, she faced social ostracism and the termination of betrothal by divorce. Beyond that loomed the terrifying prospect of cultic indictment, eviction and stripping, then, face-to-face with overwhelming psychotic communal talion, a traumatic death by stoning. The imminent prospect of such a death would have broken through all her own defences and thrown her into a position of primal abreaction. No longer was El-Shaddai her protector, he had become her prosecutor. If she were to survive a new level of defence was required.

#### **d) Myth of Mary**

Any attempt at historical reconstruction of the events surrounding the conception, gestation, birth and early childhood of Jesus is fraught with paradox, uncertainty and lack of information, as well as being overlaid by highly motivated later accretions.

Of the four Gospel narratives, Mark introduces Jesus in mature manhood at the beginning of his ministry. John does virtually the same, while providing a metaphysical introduction divorced from historic realities. Matthew and Luke both purport to provide historic accounts of the events concerned. There are very few points of agreement between the two narratives. Both concur that from quite early childhood to the start of his ministry Jesus was resident in Nazareth in Galilee. He was the son of Mary, though not sired by her husband, Joseph. Conception apparently took place by some other means during their period of betrothal. Both narratives place the birth in Bethlehem, but in view of the convoluted attempts to provide Jesus with a Messianic pedigree, some doubt must even be cast on that.

If Jesus was the Messiah it was vital to prove that he was descended from King David, whose lineage in turn was traced back to Abraham. Both writers went to great lengths to provide a genealogy, linking Joseph to David, though Luke takes 41 generations for the family tree as against the 26 in Matthew. The only names common to both lists are those of Shealtiel and his son Zerubbabel, who played such an important part in connection with the return of the Jews from their Babylonian exile. Apart from that, and the use of the same source for the genealogy of King David, the two lists have nothing in common. They cannot even agree on the name of Joseph's father. The somewhat implausible attempts to provide Davidic ancestry for the Messiah are then quite blatantly flawed by the assertion of the discontinuity of lineage between Joseph and Jesus himself. Only if Jesus was the natural son of Joseph, would the genealogies, however specious, have some point. Matthew, with his particularly Jewish concerns, links the Messianic figure to Abraham, while Luke, offering Jesus' mission as of more universal application, pushes back behind the tribal ancestry through the racial progenitors to Adam and ultimately God himself.

It was vital to provide the Messiah not only with the record of Davidic lineage but also evidence that he was born in the city of David, Bethlehem in Judea, some 5 miles south-south-west of Jerusalem. So far as Luke was concerned, Nazareth was home for both Mary and Joseph. Conception occurred in Nazareth and the family were clearly natives of Galilee in spite of the alleged Davidic lineage, which would have made Joseph at least an hereditary Judean. As soon as she found she was pregnant, Mary was sent to stay with relatives in Judea, but returned to Nazareth with about 5 months of the pregnancy still to run. Luke then called to his aid the imperial imposition of a census as reason for Joseph's journey to Bethlehem with Mary at full term, but still betrothed to him (Matthew indicated that Joseph married Mary before the birth). The whole episode poses problems. Mary apparently conceived while Herod the Great was still King in Jerusalem. He died in BC 4. The birth coincided with the census imposed when Quirinius was Governor of Syria, but contemporary historians date that census as at 6 AD. Luke implies that the census required males to return to their town of lineage, wherever they might have made their home, while contemporary legislation for Roman censuses required people absent from home to return, but did not require people who had made their home at a distance from the town of ancestral lineage to move for the sake of census. The device may well have been a later construction intended to provide Jesus with a Bethlehem birth-place, just as the genealogy was an attempt to provide him with Davidic lineage.

Matthew, on the other hand, knew nothing of a Nazareth home for the family until after Herod's death. So far as he was concerned, conception took place in Bethlehem, the natural home of both Mary and Joseph. There is no record of Mary being sent away to relatives. Joseph married his betrothed soon after she became pregnant, the birth took place in

Bethlehem and was followed by the flight into Egypt, in an attempt to avoid Herod's paranoid pogrom. After Herod's death, the refugees returned to Nazareth in preference to Bethlehem only because Herod's son Archelaus, who might still have threatened them, was ruler in Judea (though why Herod's other son Antipas, who was Tetrarch of Galilee should have been any more sympathetic it is hard to say). The Egyptian saga may well have been a later construction in an attempt to match the mythical history of Jesus more closely to the prophetic prototype of the Messiah. Similarly Luke, attempting to establish links between the followers of John the Baptist and those of Jesus, had motives for postulating contact between the two prophetic figures while still in utero. If he could show that even before birth John the Baptist recognised the Messiah and then in later life pointed to him as the one who had come to fulfil his own ministry, it would give much support to the attempt in the cities of Asia Minor to incorporate the followers of John the Baptist into the nascent Christian church.

Matthew, for all his Jewish bias, does not mention the circumcision of Jesus, nor his presentation in the Temple after the ritually specified time of purification after childbirth. Whereas Luke, with his more Gentile concerns, paradoxically gives details of both events, including the poetic acclamation of the new-born Messiah by the resident Temple seers. For Luke, shepherds saw visions and came to worship, then when all the ceremonial was completed, Joseph and Mary took Jesus back home to Nazareth with them. For Matthew, the heavens were also disturbed, not by a heavenly host singing to watching shepherds, but rather by a wandering star observed and followed by wise men, whose innocent questing triggered Herod's paranoia and forced Joseph and Mary to retreat to Egypt as refugees in order to preserve the life of their son, while Herod desperately tried to secure his throne and succession by annihilating all possible claimants who might have been born within the royal city of David.

Decisions underlying any reconstruction are subjective in the extreme. The attempt to conflate both records into a coherent narrative has as little basis in historical fact as the decision to treat one account as more accurate than the other. We are left with a bewildering range of possible scenarios. Two contrasting suggestions may serve to make the point.

If we take the most complex, conflated account, then both Joseph and Mary were Bethlehemites (perhaps the two genealogies provide a Davidic lineage for both parents, that in Matthew referring to Joseph, while that in Luke referring to Mary). Betrothal took place in Bethlehem, after which Mary found herself pregnant, though not by Joseph (see below). Joseph reacting with initial shock, realised that public unveiling of the occurrence would lead to Mary's stoning, that formal divorce proceedings would also involve public conviction of adultery and could lead to the same fate, so decided to write a 'Bill of Divorce' without specifying reasons and put her away quietly. Mary's own family immediately sent her off to her cousin Elizabeth in the hills to avoid any possible threat to her life. Meanwhile, Mary, convinced that she was the mother of the Messiah, was welcomed by Elizabeth with so much excitement that the foetus she was carrying kicked out under the adrenal stimulation. Joseph was won round to belief in the supernatural nature of Mary's conception and after three months arrangements had been made for the marriage to be solemnised. The couple of newly weds then moved to Nazareth to avoid any social complications when the rest of the inhabitants of Bethlehem discovered that Mary was four months' pregnant when married.

Five months later came the time of the census (perhaps Quirinius was on his second term as Governor of Syria in AD 6 and there could have been another Roman census while Herod

was still King, although the event went unrecorded by contemporary historians). Joseph and Mary, very much visitors in Nazareth, were forced to return home to Bethlehem to register. Neither of their families were prepared to put them up, the villagers ostracised them, inn-keepers closed their doors, and with labour induced by the exhausting and uncomfortable jogging on donkey-back the couple in desperation took refuge in a rock-hewn stable, where the baby was born.

Over the previous nine months the grape-vine had not been idle and rumours had been circulating among the Essenes and other groups longingly looking for the coming of the Messiah. Mary's secret was out. Elizabeth had given the tip-off and various odd groups of hopefully excited people began to arrive with all kinds of stories to account for the origin of their journeys. Jesus was duly circumcised and presented at the Temple only to find a reception party waiting. Elizabeth's husband Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, was one of the Temple priests. John's birth had already stirred ripples of hope within the Jerusalem crucible of oppression. Now, six months later, news of the birth of Jesus had spread like wildfire through the unstable community. Simeon and Anna were the vocal representatives of this underground movement, designating the infant Jesus as the ground of their hope.

As rumours spread and travellers began to arrive from further afield, Herod's court was not slow to respond. He moved quickly with devastating cruelty in an attempt to nip in the bud what could well have been a usurping movement of revolution. Fortunately for Jesus, though not for the other male infants in Bethlehem, the Zealot community got wind of his plans and warned the family to flee for their lives out of the area of Herod's jurisdiction. Egypt was the only place to go. The Messianic community took good care that news of Herod's death got through to the refugee family, though the environs of Jerusalem were still deemed unsafe as a home for the Messiah-designate. Nazareth was chosen and here Jesus grew up, watched with excited anticipation by those whose hope he held. The annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem would be an occasion of covert celebration and reinforcement of the hopes and expectations focused around the child. Going to the Temple felt like coming home, so that by the age of twelve, when he stayed behind for three days after his family had left to return to Nazareth it seemed quite the most natural thing to be doing. The Temple was, after all, "his Father's house" and the place held a certain fascination for him in later life.

If that represents the most complex and conflated account, then at the other end of the spectrum is the possibility that Mary and Joseph were a couple of residents of Nazareth, whose first-born son Jesus was at the impressionable age of nine or ten years old when Quirinius the Governor of Syria imposed the Roman census for the purpose of regulating taxation in the area. The move met with violent opposition, spearheaded by Judas of Galilee, but the revolt was ruthlessly put down and many of the followers of Judas were crucified. Jesus, like many others of his time, was caught up in the seething instability of the Zealot and Essene movements within which his natural abilities of leadership and spiritual insight made him stand out. He was eventually singled out as leader of the Messianic movement by John the Baptist which triggered a period of intense ambivalence, wrestling with his motives in response to the call. He eventually responded positively to the incredible social pressures on him, seduced unconsciously to act out the role into which he was projected. The compressed, volatile and unstable community polarised and crystallised around him, elevating him, threatening him, seducing him, moulding him in his unconscious compliance into the Messiah 'destined to restore the fortunes of Israel'. The early legends were simply accreted

myths providing the Messiah with a mysterious origin and all the correct credentials of the Davidic or universal Messiah (the kind of origin that was appropriate obviously varied according to the community to which the nascent church was presenting their message).

Historical reality probably lies somewhere between these two extremes, but it is difficult now to tell how far the myth represents Mary's story at the heart of the church, or the church's story superimposed on the mythical Madonna.

## **e) Conception and Interpretation**

The historical investigation poses two remaining questions. The first concerns the actual mode of conception of Jesus and the second the origin of the interpretation of that event.

On several grounds it would appear unlikely that Jesus was the natural son of Joseph. There would have been no need to fault the attempts to prove Davidic lineage by disrupting the natural descent from Joseph to Jesus if Joseph had indeed been his father. Significantly, Joseph plays no part in the narratives and Jesus is presented as relating only to Mary, while looking back to a begetter, other than Mary's husband. Both Mary and the brothers of Jesus outlived him and would have been on hand to scotch any rumours of illegitimacy as they began to emerge if they were in fact untrue. Both Matthew and Luke are adamant that conception took place after betrothal, but before marriage to Joseph or intercourse with him. Joseph's reaction to the news of pregnancy appears quite transparently authentic. He is disturbed and shocked, recognising that what has happened brings deep disgrace on him by association, and rightly involved public presentation of his betrothed as an adulteress, a shame, a 'bosheth' or abomination, to be stoned in retribution for breaking one of the most fundamental cultic taboos. There are echoes of his inner struggle, his desire to save Mary's life, and his proposed compromise solution of a quiet divorce, with Mary sent unobtrusively away to stay with relatives in the remote hill country of Judea until she had had the child and the danger was passed.

But if Joseph was not the father, then how did Mary conceive? That the mother was still a virgin at the time of birth now seems out of the question in the light of current understanding of genetics. However improbable such a conception might be it could only lead to the birth of a female child from the XX chromosomes of a spontaneously developing and implanting ovum. A male foetus requires the fertilisation of the ovum and the presence of XY chromosomes, which can only be provided by sperm.

Recourse to the myth of divine insemination by direct creative act without human coitus would appear to be a tautological device, reading back into the conception from later developments of mythology that which justified the grounds of the mythology, which led to its development (for further treatment of the story of conception, see below).

We are left with the two possibilities of rape or intercourse by consent with someone other than Joseph. It would appear that Mary did not present herself as a victim of rape, either to Joseph or to her family. Although the experience evoked initial terror, Mary's confidence appears to have been won and she is timidly, tremblingly but joyfully yielding in awful wonder, rather than scarred, scared, forced and done to with violence. There is no trace of coitus by trauma in any of the material. In any case, if Mary had been raped, she would not

have been liable to be exposed as an abomination and Joseph's reaction would have been quite different. We are left, therefore, facing the probability that Jesus was conceived in an act of adulterous intercourse, with consent.

Perhaps the arranged marriage with Joseph was repugnant to Mary, who was already involved in a clandestine liaison with some other, more acceptable, man. The families went through with the betrothal arrangements and under the strains of imminent separation in a context of extreme social stress, the love-relationship was consummated. There followed all the emotions of guilt, fear, bewildering ambivalence, terror lest she should actually conceive and be found out, then as her first period failed, the truth that she was pregnant began to dawn on the distraught woman and with it the terrifying prospect of cultic stoning and death at the hands of her own neighbours, friends, and family. Out of that frightening experience, fighting for her life, emerged Mary's absolute denial of her adulterous liaison and in a moment of paranoid delusion, begotten of psychotic terror, the myth of the incarnation was formed. From there on, Mary's life and the life of the babe she carried depended on the maintenance of that myth and the persuasion of others to accept its truth. Joseph in particular would have been exposed to intense hysterical manipulation and very quickly underwent a conversion reaction, under the influence of unconscious presentation in dream form. From then on he joined in with the myth of Mary, as have countless millions of others since.

The violence of denial of Mary's sexual liaison presents as energy of defence against the overwhelming and intolerable terror and threat of the underlying truth. Maintenance of the myth over the centuries has required continuous accretion at this, its weakest point. The process began within weeks of conception and has continued into the modern era with the declaration of the sinlessness of the ever-virgin, her assumption into heaven, and her elevation to a point of reverence, which identifies her as para-deity.

Alternatively, Mary may have been caught up naively in a movement of Messianic seduction. The appalling conditions of political oppression as Herod tried to maintain his authority under the realities of Roman rule were posing an acute threat at the heart of the Jewish cultus, reverberating the confrontation with Antiochus, with all the suffering, persecution, and bloody revolution that that had entailed. The greater the sense of oppression and despair, the more intense became the emotional displacement into Messianic longing and hope. The writings of the Essenes, discovered in the Qumran caves, indicate that whole communities were obsessed with Messianic longing. The sacred writings were searched meticulously for clues as to the time, place and manner of his appearing. The Messianic proof-texts were common knowledge. Bethlehem was the designated place. The Messiah was to be of Davidic lineage. A virgin should conceive, and so on. The nearer to crisis point Herod pushed the system, the more immediately imminent the appearance of the Messiah was believed to be.

The volatile matrix had already been deeply disturbed by Zechariah's vision in the Temple, and the conception by his aged and apparently barren wife. Zechariah was adamant that this was not to be the Messiah but the forerunner, the one who was to come first and prepare the way, whose role was vividly linked to that of the Messiah in contemporary belief. The despair, excitement and hope were intense. It is possible that out of this matrix, and quite unknown to Mary, arose the search for the designated virgin, betrothed to someone of Davidic lineage and resident in the city of David, Bethlehem. Once she had been identified, it is not beyond the bounds of possibility that some member of the fanatically motivated

Messianic community in Jerusalem, took it upon himself to announce to the terrified and bewildered girl that she was the one chosen of Almighty God to bear the Messiah who would deliver his people from their sins and by implication throw off the yoke of oppression under which they were all suffering so intensely. Once over her initial shock and overwhelmed by the intensity and certainty of the stranger it was but a short step between Mary's declaration of compliant and acceptance of the role and cultic coitus and impregnation in the hope of bringing about fulfilment of the expectations of Israel. So the messenger of the annunciation is received as the inseminator of the virgin and the myth of incarnation is conceived. His action would not have been without prophetic precedent.

As if that event had not been sufficiently traumatic, instead of responding with joyful acceptance Joseph reacted to her story with cynical disbelief. From Messianic mountain-top, Mary was plunged into the abyss of the terror of stoning, the threat of expulsion from family and the execution of speedy divorce proceedings. Her distress could have known no bounds. In this reconstruction also, Mary's integrity and survival depended upon the maintenance of her story and under her intense hysteric pressure, Joseph moved through a classical conversion reaction and joined in collusion with the myth, quite unable to sustain his rational position against the emotional blackmail involved.

However it happened, maintenance of the myth of the incarnation was an essential defence against the overwhelming implosion of cultic stoning and the pains of hell.

## **f) Poetry and Prophecy**

The promise of the Messiah emerged historically as a symbol of hope in the face of overwhelming political, military and cultic aggression. The Messiah represented that imploded, compressed nucleus of the cultus, that indestructible core, out of which the future could be regenerated. It was the phoenix of hope that even out of the shattering destruction at the heart of the nation, Israel would rise again. For the origin of the symbolic imagery used, contemporary Jews turned to the early chapters of Isaiah, addressed to a political situation having acute parallels with that in which they found themselves.

Ahaz was King of Judea in Jerusalem. In concerted attack came the united armies of Syria, under King Rezin, and of the northern part of Israel itself, under their King Pekah. Under threat of the combined onslaught, utter terror swept the capital. The panic was reaction to the expected annihilatory implosion of the boundaries of the state, the city and its cultus. In phantasy, Jerusalem faced at the hands of her enemies what the erring adulteress faced at the hands of the mob. The boundaries of defence against both imploding and irrupting psychotic terror had broken. It was to this situation that Isaiah addressed himself in order to reverse the imploding Shaddai boundary, to generate a conversion reaction out of terror back into hope, out of despair back into confidence, out of weakness back into strength. His first words were, "Be on your guard, keep calm do not be frightened or unmanned ...". [Isaiah 7:4] The fundamental agenda was the management of psychotic fear. All that followed represented a variety of means to that end.

First, there was a prophetic denial that the attack would be successful, with the codicil, "Have firm faith or you will not stand firm". Belief was a prerequisite of salvation.

Straight prophecy was not enough, so Isaiah offered a sign to confirm the prophecy, to establish belief and therefore to sedate and reverse the terror. Ahaz refused the offer, but Isaiah went ahead none-the-less:

"The Lord Himself shall give you a sign: A young woman is with child, and she will bear a son, and will call him Immanuel. By the time he has learnt to reject evil and choose good, he will be eating curds and honey; before that child has learnt to reject evil and choose good, desolation will come upon the land before whose two kings you cower now. The Lord will bring on you, your people, and your house, a time the like of which has not been seen since Ephraim broke away from Judah." [Isaiah 7:14-17]

The word for young woman, while not necessarily implying virginity, is normally used of an unmarried maiden. The tense of the verb is open to translation as 'shall conceive' or, as with the New English Bible, 'is with child'. The name of the son to be born (and in Hebrew practice, name expressed the fundamental nature or being of the person concerned) was an affirmation of the presence of God. El was with his people, for his people. At the point of their conception, at the very depth of their being, El-Shaddai the omnipotent reigned. Before this boy had come to 'years of discretion' the two attacking nations would themselves have been overwhelmed and destroyed. The Shaddai boundary would have reversed. Immanuel therefore represented that fundamental point of conversion from implosion to explosion. He was the symbol of the ultimate defence against the fear of death.

The next chapter brought dramatic development. After inscribing a tablet with the name Maher-shalal-hash-baz (meaning 'speed-spoil-hasten-plunder'), Isaiah called two reliable witnesses, probably to provide public confirmation of the purposeful act of sexual intercourse that was to follow.

"Then I lay with the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son; and the Lord said to me, Call him Maher-shalal-hash-baz. Before the boy can say Father or Mother, the wealth of Damascus and the spoils of Samaria shall be carried off and presented to the king of Assyria." [Isaiah 8:3 f.]

Whether the woman concerned was his wife or a young cultic prophetess is not clear. Certainly she stood in parallel position to the maiden mother of Immanuel of the previous chapter. In the first story the sign was to be fulfilled before Immanuel knew right from wrong, similarly in the second account, deliverance was to come before Isaiah's child could say his first words. It would appear that we have here an account of prophetic coitus, acting out the promise of Immanuel right in the heart of the Messianic traditions of Israel.

Prophetic word, prophetic sign, prophetic act: conception, birth and symbolic naming, established Immanuel as the ultimate ground of defence, the backstop beyond which Israel could not implode. Failure to treat him as their foundation exposed the nation to judgement. The Assyrian forces used by God as agents of destruction to fulfil his promise of the defeat of Judah's enemies were also summoned as the agent of judgement on Judah itself. Like floodwaters rushing across the land, they rose neck-high, purging out of the cultus all which was not faithful to Yahweh, until only the head remained. Against that the flood could not prevail because it was the land of Immanuel. However dark the prospect, however bitter the oppression, however apparently inescapable the impingement (Isaiah 8:22), Immanuel re-established strength and hope at the centre, reversing the darkness of death into light, transforming terror into joy, shattering the oppressive yoke, breaking off the constrictive

conqueror pressing down on their shoulders. For out of that symbol of utter foetal compression and crushing, the primal sign of hope emerged:

"For a boy has been born for us, a son given us to bear the symbol of dominion on his shoulder; and he shall be called in purpose wonderful, in battle God-like, Father for all time, Prince of Peace. Great shall the dominion be, and boundless the peace bestowed on David's throne and on his kingdom, to establish it and sustain it with justice and righteousness from now and for evermore. The zeal of the Lord of Hosts shall do this ." [ Isaiah 9 : 6-7].

Immanuel is that utterly pure core immune from the talion wrath of El-Shaddai. As such, Immanuel is God-in-the-midst, who is also guardian of the boundary. Immanuel is the new name for the totem of El-Shaddai, the ultimate defence against anxiety.

Three layers of historic material converge like the swirling of three waves which have overrun each other within the prophetic poetry of Isaiah. Immanuel is firstly the sign that Syria and Israel will not conquer Judah. Secondly, he is the sign that the overwhelming flood of Assyria will not utterly destroy Jerusalem. Finally, when even that traumatic event occurred, Immanuel is the sign that beyond exile a purified remnant will return to their cultic home within which Immanuel will reign. The shoot from the stock of Jesse, the promised Davidic King, springs out of the indestructible stump in Jerusalem, regenerating the nation and the cultus from its core. [Isaiah 11:1-2]. The promise holds even through the trauma of exile. There will come a day of deliverance when Immanuel will reign in Jerusalem:

"On that day a scion from the root of Jesse shall be set up as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall rally to it, and its resting-place shall be glorious ... Then he will raise a signal to the nations and gather together those driven out of Israel; he will assemble Judah's scattered people from the four corners of the earth." [Isaiah 11:10-12]

The talion of Shaddai is reversed, the wrath of God is turned back, Yahweh is refuge and defence, deliverance and resource to his people and their response is a shout of triumph:

"Cry out, shout aloud, you that dwell in Zion, for the Holy One of Israel is among you in majesty." [Isaiah 12:6]

Immanuel reigns. The Messiah, the Davidic King, God-in-the-midst, is the ultimate defence against that which is feared, whether it implodes from beyond the national boundary, or irrupts out of the deepest heart of man. He is the rock that cannot be moved:

"You shall not say 'too hard' of everything that this people calls hard; you shall neither dread nor fear that which they fear. It is the Lord of Hosts whom you must count 'hard'; he it is whom you must fear and dread. He shall become your 'hardship', a boulder and a rock which the houses of Israel shall run against and over which they shall stumble, a trap and a snare to those who live in Jerusalem; and many shall stumble over them, many shall fall and be broken, many shall be snared and caught." [Isaiah 8:12-15].

Like the Black Rock in the centre of Islam, or the Petrine promise in the core of Christianity, Immanuel is the indestructible adamant at the heart of Judaism. He holds the boundaries of internal collapse and on that foundation, enables the cultus to sustain its external boundaries against all threatening attack, provided the cultus itself is purified from all that which offends the Godhead.

The Messianic material sustained the hope of Israel in the face of Syrian, Assyrian and Babylonian onslaught, conquest and exile. It re-emerged as the core of the cultus under the Seleucid onslaught of Antiochus. It rose to new heights of crescendo under the intensified oppression of Herod and his Roman masters. It sustained the suicidal defence of the Jerusalem Temple and Massada hill-fort against overwhelming Roman might in AD 70-73. Today it still sustains the core defences of an Israel re-gathered in its ancient land, as it has sustained those defences over the centuries of Diaspora and persecution. It is the core construct that guarantees survival of the holocaust. It is the assertion that God is with humanity even though he break out in utter wrath and talion destruction of the same in Armageddon. Even that is tolerable because there is a nucleus of hope, an ultimate denial of the possibility of death, the guarantee of resurrection beyond the tragedy. Here lies the fundamental defence against the fear of racial extinction. But defence against anxiety represents a repression of reality. If the catastrophe is not feared, there is no motive to avert it. So the promise of life, the guarantee of Immanuel, the denial of psychotic talion in the depths of primal unconscious, surfaces today as the sentence of death for humanity. The most highly defended person is the most highly destructive. The most deeply defended society, denying most powerfully its negativities, projects them into its environment and responds paranoidly with escalating armament and exponential conflict. It seeks in vain a defence from those malign elements which perceived to be attacking from beyond its boundaries, are in reality are projected from the depths of its being.

But to return to the birth of Jesus. It is a truism of biblical studies that material in poetic format often represents the most primitive stratum of the text and it is in the poetic symbolism of songs and prophetic utterances surrounding the conception and birth of Jesus that the most potent Messianic images abound. The material comes out of the heart of Messianic expectation in the cultus of later Judaism. In no way is this a construct of the later Hellenic church, influenced by the Graeco-Roman mystery religions. The initial experience is one of terror, the initial message the calming of fear and its reversal into joy. The means of the conversion reaction is the message of the Messiah. So Mary's terror when faced with the Messianic messenger is overcome with the promise that she is to be the mother of Immanuel. The as-yet unborn is identified as the expected Davidic king, restoring unending and indestructible sovereignty to the heart of Israel. Just as in the primitive totemic cultus from which the material ultimately sprang, the king and the deity are identified. He is to be Son of the Most High (E1-Elyon). It is the potency of the Godhead (the power of El-Shaddai) which is interpreted as initiating conception. Then, as Mary and Elizabeth meet in ecstasy of Messianic expectation, Luke puts the ancient song of the mother of Immanuel on the lips of the pregnant Mary. The poetry is shot through with motif drawn from Isaiah Chapters 7 to 10: the powerful are brought down, the humble exalted, Yahweh is identified as the Mighty God whose defence of those who fear him is omnipotent. It is this God who is for Israel. Here is the covenantal faithfulness of El-Shaddai in his Abrahamic promise, rock-like and immovable in the fundamental heart of the cultus.

It is the song of the triumph of the people of God encapsulating the emotion of Abraham in the joy of fatherhood, of Moses in the escape from Egypt, of Hannah delivered from the curse of barrenness, of Israel the servant of God rescued from her enemies, of the mother of Immanuel bearing the hope of her people.

The same material lay behind the song of Zechariah at the birth of John the Baptist. God has turned from being persecutor to deliverer. His overwhelming power (Shaddai) is to be vested in the Davidic Messiah. Here the High God of Israel keeps faith with his covenant to Abraham, to deliver his people from their enemies and their fears, converting the night of psychotic terror and darkness into joy as dawn brings hope of a new day. The coming of Immanuel is as the return of the Sun God after the darkness of night, or the depth of winter. Here is the light of Isaiah 9:2 dawning on those who have dwelt in the darkness of death. He is the lamp on the stand, the city on the hill, the signal to the nations, the unassailable sign of the triumph of El-Shaddai. Just as the ancient gods served as reifications of defence against the fundamental terrors of primal being, whether irrupting from the unconscious heart of man or imploding from beyond the communal boundary, so those primitive defences compacted, purified and intensified through the experience of national and cultic implosion and suffering, exile and persecution became focused into the Messianic ideals of Immanuel. Corporately, the repressive intensity of the defences served to eliminate the fear of death in the face of overwhelming power. Individually they were able to convert the terror of cultic stoning into the joy of Messianic expectation. Such is the context of the conception of Jesus, the womb of the church, the matrix of Christianity.

## **Note ii) Primal Journey**

That life begins at birth is an outmoded myth. It is, however, a perception of life which persists in our language and has been particularly dominant in the field of the philosophy of psychology, and education. The new-born is a tabula rasa, innocent, whose first learning experiences occur at the breast and in attachment to the nursing mother. First experiences of loss are represented by the withdrawal of the breast or the absence of the mother. Learning is assumed to start slowly and grow from birth onwards. The word 'birth' is used consistently to indicate the start of something. That which exists at the point of birth is given, part of the very nature of things, innate.

Today that myth has been seen through. Continuity across the birth channel is recognised and the focus on the origin of human life now rests at conception. The word 'innate' covers a multitude of sins. Prior to the joyful/dreadful event of birth lies the 9 month primal journey from fertilisation to parturition. It is not all that long ago that the idea of people being able to 'remember' material from these deeply primitive areas was dismissed as being too incredible for words. But that was precisely the point. Credibility was limited to verbal recall and the understanding of memory was limited to impressions, relationships, happenings which could be reconstituted in language. Memory in this sense is dependent upon the prior programming of the language centres of the brain, but such processes of data storage and recall constitute only a minute proportion of human memory. Even at the verbal level we are now well accustomed to the idea that certain areas of recall may be blocked by associated anxiety and repressed. Such material indicates its presence in many subtle ways, emerging as distortions of association, cracks in memory down which similar experiences tend to drop, projection onto the environment and distortion of the world view with which the given person operates.

Memory, however, does not simply consist of conscious and unconscious post-verbal impressions, pre-verbal memory is even more powerful. The deep hungers, satisfactions, threats, anxieties, comforts of touch, feeding, excretion, body relationships, deep emotional imprints - all these too may constitute recall in body language, non-verbal retrieval of imprinted data. The earlier the experience the more profound is its long-term effect. Traumatic disturbance of feeding is reflected in the breast-seeking adult, obsessively requiring something to suck, from thumb to pencil, cigarette or cigar, always anxious lest the perceived source of sustenance be removed, paranoid in relationships, dependent on others yet paradoxically seducing dependence on the self. If attachment to the nursing mother is not adequately established soon after birth, the person may have later difficulties in making deep relationships with other people. The premature infant, isolated in an incubator, distanced from human touch, becomes a distant person, maintaining all relationships beyond arms length, meeting people as through glass walls. Loss of maternal attachment once formed presents in later life in hysteric search for missed mothering, matched in ambivalence by mistrust and commitment anxiety. The grief is unresolved and the absent but unmourned mother stands at the boundary of all relationships. The babe whose pram overturned, burying it beneath blankets, becomes the adult terrified of driving, perceiving the world as a potentially unstable place, liable at any moment and for no apparent reason to collapse in topsy-turvy chaos.

The question is often asked, 'At what point do events begin to have significance for the human organism to the extent that they become learned data affecting its subsequent behaviour?' To give the answer as co-incident with birth is quite arbitrary and no longer sustainable. As understanding of brain processes has deepened, it has become clear that the number of nerve cells, or neurons in the brain, is virtually complete by the time of birth. The development of synapses and the process of myelination does continue beyond birth but is already advanced prior to parturition. Recent research has shown that neurons subjected to high levels of repeated stimulation or information input respond by developing extra synapses. The capacity to handle information appears to be generated in response to the stimulus of information received. Such sophisticated devices now appear to be yet another level of memory, existing as a comparatively superficial stratum over an underlying proto-conscious field of information imprinting which may be at the level of the organism as a whole, or at the intermediate level of the cell, and probably even as deep as the protein molecular structure within the cell protoplasm. In this field, neurology emerges into intracellular biochemistry and ultimately into fundamental particle physics in which the energy forms and wave patterns of the most elementary constituents of space-time represent an encoding of all information about the universe available at that point from the origin of time up to the here-and-now. Man is part, albeit a very complex part, of the space-time energy continuum. As such, memory is not dependent upon the development of sensor neurons, but represents a cellular imprinting or engram of chemical/physical transactions between cell and environment which constitutes the fundamental data-base to which later and more sophisticated neurological developments begin to gain access.

This is a comparatively new field, and one in which much research is currently concentrated. Advances in understanding of brain process are matched by the developments of technique in deep regression analysis, whereby subjects are apparently enabled to gain conscious access to, and subsequently neuro-muscular and verbal-articulate expression of, proto-conscious

information, originating from very deep in the intrauterine field, with indication in some instances of residual imprinting from prior to fertilisation.

The human being is a complex psycho-biological organism, in which cause and effects are deeply inter-related. Emotions and psychological processes in response to event's, relationships and information (real or imagined, recalled from the past, experienced in the present or anticipated in the future), all have effects upon hormone balance and body chemistry. Conversely, changes in the biochemistry of body and brain pattern out as shifts in the psychological/emotional field. The chemical hormonal balance at any given time is a map of the psychological condition of the organism. It encodes the same data and continuously interacts through various levels of feedback loop with the organism as a whole. It is in this sense that it is possible to speak of the intra-cellular chemistry of ovum or sperm as carrying a map of the parental emotion at the time of coitus. At the point of fertilisation the two maps, more or less different, are confused, bringing not only the incredibly complex biological coding of the DNA molecules with its complex developmental programme, but also the biochemical imprint of parental emotion, joy, fear, dread, rage, loss, love, terror, acceptance, rejection, looking forward to consummation and conception, or dreading it as a catastrophe which could disrupt social standing, suffuse the being with guilt and even threaten its survival.

To speak of human existence beginning at conception is itself only an arbitrary point of reference. If this is taken as the origin then it must be recognised as the boundary of an open system, across which come incredibly complex information inputs, out of a continuum of existence that reaches back into the origin of time. After conception, the confusion develops in symbiotic relationship with a maternal environment. The effects of interaction with that environment decrease in significance for the organism as the organism increases in size and complexity and independence. If by 'learning' we now understand the encoding of information within the human organism, then we find the range of learning to be at a maximum at the point of conception, declining, albeit somewhat erratically, from there on. As new information is superimposed upon the old, so its significance in comparison to the total data field reduces. The fact that the comparatively superficial areas of verbal and skill learning peak at different points between the ages of say 2 and 18, has tended to blind us to this underlying characteristic of human learning.

Another factor which has rendered this lacuna so persistent and even now generates the most violent levels of denial of such material stems from the fact that the most acute threats to the survival of the human organism are commonly experienced during this primal period. After fertilisation, the free-floating zygote, rapidly developing into a spherical multi-cellular blastocyst, can so easily pass out of the uterus into destruction. Some of the deep and common anxieties associated with putting down roots, or getting established in a new environment would appear to emanate from this period. Once implantation has occurred, the developing embryo is comparatively secure, though even here conditions may arise in which the maternal environment seeks to abort the developing organism, whether consciously or unconsciously. In this case, the embryo is experienced and experiences itself as a foreign body under threat from that very environment on which it depends for its survival. Abortion is the extreme or terminal end of a whole spectrum of interaction, stretching from beatific mutual adoration and support to the limits of toleration of mutual incompatibility. The infinite range of psycho-chemical interaction between maternal environment and developing embryo constitutes a potent developmental matrix, or learning experience, which lays down

foundations for future responses to environmental transaction of support, succour, threat and deprivation.

As the embryo develops, separating its functions into the implanted placenta, communicating umbilical and developing foetus, so the interaction which was originally perceived as totally environmental becomes focused in the umbilical. The hormonal chemical balance, reflecting the mother's emotional and physical status, defuses across the semi-permeable membranes of the placenta into the foetal blood stream, generating within the foetal being a mirror of the maternal position. As the various organs develop, so signals passed across the placental boundary may in turn generate reinforcing or countering hormone chemical reactions within the foetal system, which are in turn communicated back across the placental boundary via the maternal blood stream and interact with the psycho-biochemical mechanisms of the mother. These primitive biochemical feedback loops lay the foundations of the communication process within the symbiotic pair of which later body language, symbols, sounds and articulate conscious interchange represent the superficial epiphenomena. Emotional response and interrelationship are thus grounded in the biochemical interactions of hormone exchange. If the mother is anxious, the foetus is anxious, with maternal adrenaline permeating the foetal blood stream and in turn triggering production of foetal adrenaline. Maternal experiences of distress, anger, fear, loss, grief, love, joy, contentment, security, well-being, in short the whole gamut of maternal experience, is mirrored across the placental membrane into the developing foetal being, reinforced or resisted in complex patterns by the foetal reaction as the organism matures. By the time the sensor and motor neurons link up with the developing musculature and skin boundary and the babe quickens, the underlying scripts are already deeply in place.

Changes in the mother's world, internal and external, continue to affect the developing babe until that next and massive life crisis, the onset of birth is reached. The symbiotic decision to part company is a response to a complex set of interchanged hormonal signals, which may themselves be triggered by shock, illness, placental failure, or a host of other factors. By nine months the babe is highly conscious, aware of touch, taste and sound, and sensitive to light. In this condition the process of birth constitutes one of the most fundamental and common life-threat learning experiences of humanity. As labour commences, the mother moves into a condition of heightened anxiety and anticipation, with adrenal release in two-way interaction with the babe. As the waters break, levels of cushioning and lubricating go down and sensitivity to skin contact within the womb increases. During the succeeding minutes, hours, or days, the babe and mother expose each other to more-or-less excruciating levels of pain, crushing, rupturing, pushing, evicting, and struggle for life. Modern anaesthetic techniques may reduce pain levels in various ways and in certain cases. The experience is nevertheless more-or-less traumatic and can easily reach into those devastating areas of hyper-stress for the sensitive and vulnerable babe, which lay the origin of reaction to all future boundary transactions, changes, problem-solving and loss in terms of threatened irruption of primal angst with its associated defences.

Birth is a caesura, a tunnel period between two worlds. It marks the change from umbilical dependency to oral dependency for nutrition. It marks the shift from utilising the oxygen taken in through the mother's lungs and transferred across the placental membranes to the foetal blood stream to that condition of intra-dependence in which the babe has to breathe or die. Oxygen lack during the period of transition may itself become acute, or even traumatic. Placental failure, umbilical constriction, or strangulation by the birth cord may compound the

over-compression of the chest cavity so that every little breath is a reminder of primal anoxic trauma, abreacting in later life with bronchial asthma and a sense of intolerable suffocation at every experience of anxiety which resonates the primal material.

However painless and quick a birth may be, it is still an intensely significant transaction as the organism, after a period of battering its head on a brick wall, begins to make headway and is eventually delivered (so birth becomes the psychodynamic core of symbols of salvation). At this point the old world is lost, the new is entered. Birth is a proto-death. In so far as the birth experience or early nursing environment is too stressful, the lost and never-to-be-recovered-wombworld is reinstated as the idealised goal of life, recovery of which, in flight from all boundary transactions and changes becomes the dominant drive of the religious.

The new-born babe has indeed already lived once. It is little wonder that cultures which perceive birth as the starting point of life develop mythologies of pre-existence to handle the intrauterine primal unconscious field. An appropriate analogy of the whole process can be taken from the field of cybernetics. The computer system is essentially a projection of man. It is a human construct, mirroring in some dim way the being which brought it into being. So the computer consists of hardware: the components and circuitry which determine its characteristics, its capacity, what it can and cannot be programmed to handle, its speeds of data processing, etc. Secondly, there is the software: the programmes, some of which may be written in by the manufacturer, others by professional programmers, more by the user during later operations. Then there are the peripherals. The data input devices, printers, means of communication, video display units, electro-magnetic data stores, or memory banks. Finally, there is the data itself, representing the transaction between the computer system and the user. The human organism has certain genetically coded DNA transmitted hardware characteristics inherited from generation to generation, yet also with almost infinite variation within certain system limits. The software, or programme, is written in to this basic being throughout its history of environmental transaction from conception to death. All skill-training, education and 'learning' represent the writing or modification of software programmes, laying down reaction patterns by which future data inputs will be handled. The communication peripherals of body language, muscle response, sound, smell and visual signals, enable each module to interface other such beings within their shared environment. Data flow, problem-solving, processing and response are continuous at various levels of consciousness. The old myth that saw learning as essentially post-natal and all characteristics which came as 'given' with the new-born as innate and unlearned established a major confusion between hardware and software. Reactions, defences, experiences, taken up within the intrauterine field or during the birth process were seen either as part of the 'instinctive' genetic coding, or at least were seen to have 'write-protect' signals rendering them inaccessible to future modification or user access. Current breakthrough in understanding of the human learning process, together with developments in primal analysis, have opened up the possibility of learning, i.e. 'programme modification', even in these previously inaccessible areas. The significance of this advance is immense, since it is from these very areas that the most massive and common unconscious behaviour of man is generated. [This section of the paper is being written as Pope John Paul II celebrates the first Mass of his visit to Britain at 11 a.m. on Friday 28<sup>th</sup> May 1982. Meanwhile, 8,000 miles away British forces have just engaged the land forces of the Argentinean occupying garrison on the Falkland Islands in the attempt to retake Goose Green and Port Stanley. Splitting and centre-periphery projection are supremely open for examination.]

## **g) Intra Madonna**

Reconstruction of the prenatal development of Jesus, whose post-natal existence proved to be so significant is not easy. Detail is irrecoverably lost. Major strands of the process are, however, available for examination and, with cross-reference to contemporary analytic case-studies, indicate a coherence between intrauterine experience and post-natal acting out in word and action, life and death of the Messiah.

The context of conception was one of imploded political power, emasculated sovereignty and Roman occupation. The religious cultus itself was under increasingly severe threat, and it was becoming clear that Roman annihilation of the heart of Judaism was imminent. In this context of crushed impotence and despairing terror in the face of overwhelming threat to the centre of being itself, Messianic hope seeking deliverance through the as yet unborn, represented a defensive regression from intolerable reality into the idealised womb of the maiden. Coitus, fertilisation and blastocystic free-floating stage, leading to implantation and very early development are characterised by this intensely split field of ultimate terror and dread, held at bay, denied, repressed, split off in the overwhelming trembling hope of divine deliverance. The intense splitting of this primal field, mapped into the blood chemistry and intra-cellular molecular balance of sperm and ovum, is a reflection of the social process at the devastated heart of Judaism. The intensity of hope, longing, faith, love, desire, at a pitch beyond words to express was focused in cultic coitus and gave permission to transgress the most fundamental taboos of the cultus. In normal circumstances the act would have resulted in annihilatory retaliation being enacted on the transgressors. Under these circumstances the proscribed becomes the prescribed. The conversion reaction transforms despair and dread into hope and joy. It reverses impotence and implosion into sovereignty and power. The task is nothing less than the reversal of the boundaries of God, turning Him from the enactment of talion annihilation of His people into once more becoming their protector, so sustaining their boundaries against all enemies.

The early stages of the primal journey for Jesus are thus lived in this manic, euphoric, idealised heaven of hope, whose antithesis, split off and denied, is projected to the ends of the earth, with a great gulf (that is yet only a hair's breath across) fixed between the two.

At some point within the first three months, however, the dreaded antithesis re-emerged from the repression. Joseph initially did not believe the myth. His realistic response was to label the pregnancy 'adulterous' and as a deeply faithful Jew, he faced the terrifying conflicted dilemma between love and mercy and cultic justice. From the emotional mountain peak of Messianic idealism, Mary was plunged into the despair of imminent divorce, social ostracism, and that ultimately dreaded possibility of cultic stoning. Alienation and potential annihilation threatened her with talion dread. Whether the reversal occurred before or after her stay with Elizabeth (if she did actually visit her) is not significant. The point is that within the first three months of development the maternal/foetal symbiosis underwent a conversion reaction in which overwhelming joy and hope were replaced by overwhelming fear and dread. Far from being the source of life, the implanted embryo was now potentially life-threatening to its maternal environment. In that closely inter-linked symbiotic relationship, the threat was mutual. What Mary experienced on her boundary was transmitted across the intrauterine membranes to the foetal being. The reversal was total. In symbolic anticipation, Mary stood at the centre of the stoning mob, subject and victim of psychotic

rage and terror, as from all sides in life-destroying projection hurtled the violence of the denied unconscious parts of the community. Deep within her womb the foetus mirrored her dread, as if the whole surrounding world had gone wild in omnipotent, overwhelming, destructive, malignancy. The terror of death, the pains of hell, emerged as the dominant pole of experience, splitting off, denying and repressing, the antithetical hope and joy of heaven.

By all accounts the reversal was comparatively short-lived. Joseph underwent a conversion reaction of his own position and action was taken to protect Mary from what would otherwise have been inevitable social talion. Messianic hope was restored, but the seeds of death, the awareness of that against which the Messiah was looked to for deliverance, waited ever-present in the wings. The stresses on Mary must have been acute. She apparently married during this period, possibly moved home and settled, newly-wed and pregnant, in a strange village, where she had to set up home in some way among people with whom she felt she did not belong (that is if we accept that conception took place in Bethlehem with residence in Nazareth being taken up some time after the third month. These historical details do not, however, deeply affect the psychodynamic analysis ).

If Luke's account of the birth is to be believed, then the perinatal crisis recapitulated the deep intrauterine script. It would have been madness to expect the mother-to-be at full-term to undertake the hazardous journey by donkey from Nazareth to Bethlehem. The fact that it was undertaken (if undertaken it was) indicates the dominance and authoritarian rule of the Roman regime. Joseph was trapped in a position of subservient compliance, to challenge which for the sake of his wife's health and the safety of the babe would be to face summary execution himself at the hands of the occupying forces. In this position of numb despairing impotence, the couple travelled south. Political oppression under threat of death provided the context for birth, as for conception.

That journey, if it happened, must have been hell for Mary. With all the extra weight of full-term pregnancy, enduring hour after hour of steady, slow, stumbling jolt on a donkey-back must have pushed her to the limits of endurance. By all accounts they arrived late in Bethlehem. All the other travellers who had had to return to that particular city for the census were already there. If it was the family home for her and Joseph, she faced the added dread of social ostracism. She came back to the very community from which she had fled for her life. This sense of journeying to the place and time of destiny and a meeting with the events and struggles of life and death which constitute the primal drama, were recapitulated 33 years later in the journey to Jerusalem and the terminal trauma of crucifixion.

Knowing the deep impotent despair of the refugee, Joseph and Mary found themselves unable to gain access to the homes or guest houses of the town. Cast out of the community they eventually took refuge with the animals, probably in a rock-hewn cave, used as shelter. Here, exhausted, possibly with waters already broken, Mary gave birth. In that symbiotic mutual communication just prior to parturition, the signals of dread, of fear, of beatness and impending doom may well have re-arisen. Then the abdominal musculature took over in evicting pressure, forcing the foetal head down through the dilating cervix, with the experience of head crushing, oxygen deprivation, body eviction, breakdown of the life-support system and initiation of alternative means of survival. The caesura, the gap between the worlds, was crossed. [At this point, Pope John Paul II came to the climax of the Eucharistic prayer in Westminster Cathedral. The sacrifice was made.]

After the disturbance of the journey and the trauma of birth, the recovery, resting in the coolness of the cave, with its deeply comforting attachment to the newly nursing mother gave some respite. Like the hopefully adoring supportive womb, it provided some form of sanctuary, disturbed only by some strangely awe-inspired comings and goings as news of the birth sent a wave of trembling hope through the Messianic grape-vine. Circumcision, possibly at the hands of Joseph, constituted a brief but traumatic interruption, whose dynamics have already been treated in depth. Four-and-a-half weeks later the nursing babe was presented in the Temple, another awe-filled sanctuary, replacing cave and womb, in which Jesus again became the centre of Messianic hope and attention. The yearning and dread, hopes and fears of his people were focused expectantly on the person this babe was to become, yet his being had already been patterned in his coming.

New annihilatory threats were not slow to develop. Not this time from the cultus offended against the transgressing adulteress, but now from the threatened puppet king, terrified of being toppled by a new Davidic claimant to the throne. If the Matthean accounts hold any historical validity it was a triad of wandering astrologers who first raised the suspicions of Herod the Great that a potential usurper had been born. His paranoid rage in terror of losing power triggered reactions like those of a newly emergent queen bee, whose first action is to locate and destroy all possible rivals to her position in the hive. Herod despatched his executioners to Bethlehem and for the first, but not the last, time the effect of the coming of the Messiah was the murder of the Innocents. Joseph and Mary had apparently been warned of the impending pogrom and managed to escape to Egypt (or was that simply a literary device to reinforce the sense of prophetic fulfilment?). Preservation of the potential Messiah required flight from the life-threatening, persecutory environment. It necessitated yet another terror-driven journey in search of sanctuary. The powers of darkness ruled in Jerusalem and in so ruling surrounded the children of light, forcing their flight, enforcing their repression, like the boundary walls of a crucible.

If the murder of the Innocents was indeed an historical response by Herod to the birth of Jesus then the concrete historical responsibility for the event rests with Mary, not with the monarch. Her original adulterous act was culturally death-deserving. The mythical construct developed to preserve her own life sustained the offence but deflected the consequence. The event in which Mary was caught was death-deserving and the context was death-dealing whatever the pressures upon her and whatever the original motivation for her adulterous intercourse. The event invited talion annihilation from the cultus, whether social, political or religious. Protected by the Messianic myths surrounding the conception of her son, Mary herself was safe. Her punishment was displaced, to be borne vicariously in the death of others. At one level she would have known herself blood-guilty for the babes of Bethlehem. Other mothers suffered the devastating bereavement that should have been hers. Other babes were butchered in place of hers, just as later her own son was to die in her place. Denial of responsibility and repression of guilt walk hand in hand in the heart of the Madonna.

## **h) Formation of Christ**

Conception took place within a cultural context of extreme military, political, social and religious oppression. The intensity of Messianic hope mirrored the depth of contemporary despair and was a defence against the anxieties generated by the perceived threats in the environment (whether real or phantasy). Coitus, fertilisation, and implantation therefore took

place in a field which was already subject to intense idealisation, splitting off the intolerable persecutory, malign, idealised bad, field, denying it and taking refuge in the pseudo-security and hope of its idealised antithesis. This fundamental schizoid defence, holding together intense hopes and fears, was mapped in the biochemical constitution, the hormone balance of sperm and ovum and in the subsequent maternal field of implantation.

At some stage within the first three months of pregnancy it would appear that Mary underwent a period of traumatic reversal in which the previously denied, idealised bad threatening environment irrupted into consciousness, triggered by Joseph's initial reaction to her conception. At this point the idealised field of intense love, joy and hope, which had formed the ground of embryonic development, reversed into one of terror, rage, depression and fear for life as the idealised bad field became dominant and the idealised good field was repressed. On her own personal boundary, Mary faced not only the common cultural oppression of the Jews under Roman rule, but also the terrifying prospect of the reversal of her own Jewish culture itself in overwhelming talion enactment against her. Her previous action and present condition exposed her to separation from husband, ostracism from family, and violent death by stoning at the hands of her community. At the symbiotic boundary between womb and implanted foetus these conditions were mirrored. The foetus was subject to the same imploding reversal of negativity from the mother's body, its cosmos changed from the idealised communion of heaven to the perfect persecution of hell. In a very real sense Mary's predicament externally was due to the foetal presence internally, so that the persecutory world of the mother's external environment was mirrored into the malignant persecutory presence of the contents of her womb. So, by the now familiar processes of introjection and projection, the foetal being became an idealised bad self within an idealised bad environment. If the condition had persisted, the end would have tended towards either spontaneous abortion and death of the foetus or annihilation of the symbiotic pair.

Under the intense pressures, both of the Messianic hopes of his community, and the fear of death of his betrothed, Joseph himself underwent a conversion reaction, irrupting from the depths of his own unconscious through the dream world. This effectively re-reversed Mary's holding environment from idealised bad and persecutory to idealised good, hopeful and supportive, so triggering a conversion reaction within her own defences. Concomitantly within the transaction across the placental and womb-world boundary, hope was restored and terror banished. Intensely supportive nurture replaced the sense of intolerably antagonistic life-threat. The result of this kind of reversal is the intensely polarised idealised field of the intrauterine being, absolutely split into good and bad, with the bad field fundamentally denied for both self and environment, resulting in a perfect person in perfect communion with a perfect environment. The perfection of goodness indicates the presence of its perfect antithesis, against fear of which the idealised good field was a defence.

The mechanism is common, but the intensity and depth within the intrauterine field at which the splitting occurred was virtually unique. From that point on until the next series of disturbances at full-term, the foetal Messiah lived, moved and had his being in the heaven of an idealised good holding environment, immaculate, sinless, devoid of negativities, timeless, ageless, eternal, supportive, nurturing, worshipping and centring all hope and love upon the foetal being, who in antithesis to that dark experience of being ultimately malignant, was enthroned as Lord of the intrauterine cosmos. Here was the ultimately safe space, totally protected from the talion dread of El Shaddai, the new Eden, not simply of innocence before the split into good and evil, but rather of utter holiness, held completely on one side of the

split in an idealised good condition. The Kingdom of God, the new Eden, was one with the idealised intrauterine space of the Madonna.

The denied antithesis of omnipotent and annihilatory negativity was never far away, held out of consciousness by primitive defence, whose intensity belied the power of the negative field which it constrained. In this idealised holding environment, placental interactions formed the ground of communion. Incorporation of resources was not oral, but umbilical. Attached in this way there was no hunger - no need for food; there was no thirst - no need for drink. The idealised foetal being experienced the perfect nurture of the Tree of Life, streaming through the umbilical, becoming in his belly a spring of living water, providing nurture and sustenance for the timelessness of idealised being in eternal bliss.

Eternity was, however, temporary, being disrupted by the deliverance of birth. If accounts of the exhausting cross-country donkey trip are to be believed, then the event was prefaced by a major shift in maternal emotional make-up. The impotent, but embittered, compliance with the requirements of the occupying power laid the grounds of the later separation between Kingdom and political activism. The long journey from the north to the city of David, ass-borne to the "kairos" of constriction provided the proto-conscious foundation for another journey, another "kairos" and a second death.

We know nothing of the process of this birth itself. Tradition has it that the mother was not exactly comfortably provided for within the context of a familiar home. No medical aid, local or general anaesthesia, just the normal, naked struggle for life as the womb-world reversed from supportive heaven into the evicting, crushing, life-threatening environment, with its increasingly powerful periodic waves of muscular constriction, eventually forcing the helpless contents of the womb down through the cervical opening, with its painful grip around the compressed cranium, moulding the soft bone, encircling, crushing, forcing through, past the bony pelvic girdle and then down, down, down, kicking, writhing, pushing through this interminable tunnel into the relief, decompression and welcome of the world to come.

After the fall, work was essential for survival. Lack of oxygen could only be overcome by breathing as the little lungs inflated and the neonate cried out in the suddenly noisy world. Nutrient was no longer supplied through the umbilical, another source was sought as suckling commenced. The dependency within the nursing pair replaced the symbiotic dependency of the womb-world.

The trauma of birth is the deepest and most fundamental life-threat common to man. It represents the most intense common experience of anxiety against the intolerable subsequent irruption of which the innate defences are brought into play. For some, those defences in even more primitive form have already been patterned, formed into learned response in reaction to earlier experience of intrauterine life-threat. In which case the anxieties of birth itself are handled by defences already in place. Pain, distress, the negative elements of the experience in early labour before the climax is reached, tend to trigger the resurgent, overwhelming distress of the phantasised, idealised bad environment, with its persecutory omnipotence. In defence the negative field is denied, cut off, repressed, split out of being, time is reversed and the babe in psychic regression backs off the imminent impingement into the idealised safe space of its immediate past. With these defences in place the babe passes through the trauma of parturition as if it were not really happening, as if birth were as

painless as baptism. The experience, however, serves to reinforce and reify the defences, confirming the learned pattern of response in the face of impingement, whose repetitive re-enactment was so significant in later life and death. He knew no fear, for his defences were so deep, the damage so fundamental, the existential field so split, and the negativities so deeply denied. Out of such a matrix are born the leaders of that common social neurosis we know as religion.

In so far as the idealised intrauterine world persisted as the phantasy environment, through and beyond the trauma of birth, just so far was the neonate also defended from the devastating experience of perinatal separation and loss. Movement across the birth matrix, however traumatic, inevitably marks loss of the womb-world, with all its safety, security, nurturing protection and support. It signals the emergence into a new world, an unknown place with unfamiliar noise, light, smell, taste, touch, body stimulus, activities like sucking, excreting, breathing, crying, and strange objects - nipples, breasts, hands, with new body coverings, shifts in routine and the change of light and dark. In this transition is the archetypal experience of change, loss, and adaptation to the new. Here is the birth of grief. In so far as the event is traumatic and the loss intolerable, just so far is the grief itself repressed, the change denied, the future environment projected out of the phantasy of the past, creating an unreal world, an eternal island of no change within some heavenly womb, protecting the being from the devastating bereavement of birth. For Jesus the intrauterine space was already intensely idealised, with its negativities denied. Loss of such a haven was as deeply intolerable as the negativities of perinatal impingement itself. With time reversed, the idealised womb-world persisted as the phantasy environment and loss did not happen. Cushioned by primitive defences the neonate emerged, encapsulated forever within the phantasy womb of his mother. Her defences were his defences, her boundaries contained his boundaries. His dying happened within her living.

The neonatal trauma of circumcision would have further reinforced the fundamental defences. The painful attack on the penis administered by the father, which formed the ground of Freud's analysis of castration anxiety, leading to the specifically Jewish characteristics of anxiety-defence would not have had the same effect on Jesus. The painful cutting of the foreskin, symbolic of previous encircling, crushing of the cranium and pattern of the later crown of thorns, triggered once again anxieties associated with the devastating persecution of the idealised bad environment, leading to the splitting off of pain, the repression of anxiety. He passed through the ceremony as if it had not really happened. Jesus lived on, psychically fixated within the idealised womb of the Madonna, ever virgin, ever young, undying, the mother of God. In this position, the neonatal trauma of circumcision did not lead to the normal displacement of negativities into the figure of the father, with the idealised good holding environment polarised and focused on the mother, which is the distinctive hall-mark of the defences of Judaism. For Jesus the splitting was much more fundamental. Division of the world occurred before circumcision, before birth, cleaving the very ground of existence into light and darkness, heaven and hell, with the negative field split off, externalised and yet in spite of the defences, always threatening.

If the cultus looked to the myth of the Messiah as defence against the anxieties generated by the threatened impingement and implosion of its enemies (themselves already symbolic displacements of common intrapersonal phantasy), then Mary depended upon those myths about her first born for protection from the cultus itself, while Jesus depended on the myths for defence from the pains of hell. Only the experience of death itself could break down the

defence and interface him in utter dereliction with the devastating destruction of the perfectly malignant cosmos. Caught at the tragic centre of a collusional web made up of intrapersonal, familial and social defences, the Christ was formed.

D. Wasdell  
May 1982