

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Jesus Son of Joseph

This is a very simple phrase, and the habit of naming people *by naming their father* is common to a lot of societies. In Icelandic every surname is made by adding *son* or *dottir* to the name of one's father, so that, I suppose, Magnus Magnusson's sister would be Miss Magnúsdóttir. Poor love.

Heredity

It's a deep business, a mystery, the way we inherit from our parents. Our body comes to us, with all its special characteristics; we recognise the family shapes recurring, and the physical capacities: we also discover the family weaknesses and shortcomings, and often the particular inheritance of death. I think the jury is still out on the subject of spiritual qualities; can you inherit those? And if so, are spiritual qualities really just a different sort of physical quality - part of the package of genes, and therefore of no special moral value? Could we modify our genetic mechanism to *install* kindness, nobility, devotion, artistic genius, and affection? Most of us feel uneasy with such thoughts. Some people would be happy to reduce humanity to a series of mechanisms, and many have attempted to programme our nature to be predictable, acceptable; many systems of education are attempts to force the untamed abundance of creative variety into some sort of common coin. But deep down, we know that there are wild cards in the human pack, and that *we depend on them* precisely because they introduce that newness we would never choose, that wonderful virgin freshness that stops us in our tracks. Meeting humanity is the most wonderful thing. We stop living a human life when we find it predictable, when we find peace in our ability to contain the others about us, when we think we have humanity sewn up or safely caged. We do this, I suspect, for the majority of our time, and to the majority of those we might have met. When you consider the overwhelming effect of the ones we *really* encounter, and especially the ones we learn to love, this is a very sad fact. What a waste...what a *desert* we make of our lives, by this wretched shell which prevents us from meeting each other, from seeing the image of God in which we claim to believe!

We Know His Father And Mother

The famous irony of John is speaking here: the fact is that, by refusing to accept Jesus, by

refusing to accept that *he has come down from heaven*, they show that they do *not* know his Father. Here, in its fullest form, is the inability to meet humanity, the inability to acknowledge the image of God in the one of whom Paul said: *He is the image of the unseen God, and the first-born of all creation*. In this context, the phrase *son of Joseph* becomes almost a term of abuse. They are reducing him to a known quantity, defining him, categorizing him out of existence. Worse still, they are simultaneously rubbishing the word *know*; as if knowledge inevitably leads to contempt. The contrast is with the awed voice that speaks in the first lines of John's epistle: *Something which has existed since the beginning, that we have heard, that we have seen with our own eyes, and that we have watched, and touched with our hands: the Word, who is life - this is our subject!* This is the voice of someone vibrantly alive, with eyes wide open to wonder, illuminated with all truth. Not for him any delusive, chemically-induced state of euphoria; he is in love with the reality that he has sensed, and he can say *We saw his glory, the glory that is his as the only Son of the Father, full of grace and truth*. It is not ordinary seeing, that perception of the glory of God. It is a revolutionary way to look on the world, a religious change; to see the Son of God turns our world from chaos into creation, and gives us power to become children of God, and co-heirs with Christ.

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