

Jesus was fully human and fully divine – both man and God. This had to be so because the creature cannot redeem the creature and God has no need of redemption. Redemption is accomplished only by God in creaturely form. Or as the Prologue of John’s gospel says: “The Word became flesh and dwelt amongst us.”

To a Hindu or a Mahayana Buddhist, this would come as no surprise, because the Hindu believes that God is ceaselessly assuming form for our sakes – and the Buddhist that enlightened beings return to the world again and again for the sake of our liberation. On the other hand, the idea that God could be a man – or rather, that a man could be God – is a shocking blasphemy for Judaism and Islam, for whom God is God, man is man, and never the twain shall meet.

Except, of course, for the Jewish and Muslim mystics. It is a case of ‘*always* except for the mystics’ because they are the beating heart within the outward structure of the rites, rules and regulations of every faith. And whatever their religious tradition may be, the mystics all speak the same language. To illustrate this, here is a compound quotation from the writings of Jalal Rumi, a 13 century Muslim mystic and poet:

“Never feel lonely, for we are all one. Everything in the universe is within you and we are all the same, all the same, longing to find our way back, back to the One, the only One.”

And from a contemporary Jewish mystic we have this:

“There is only One. This is the great truth of all religious mysticism. That One embraces, surrounds, and fills all the infinitely varied forms that existence has taken and ever will take. Our daily existence of variety, separation and alienation of self from others renders an incomplete and misleading picture of reality. The one Being is clothed within each being. For reasons we do not begin to understand, that One dressed itself in this ‘coat of many colours’ we call the universe. It is present within each unique form of existence that has come to be in the universe, and yet remains One, in and through them all.” (*Rabbi Arthur Green*)

This is probably one of the most beautiful expressions I have come across of the oneness of all life embodied in the God-man Jesus Christ, who himself said:

“I tell you solemnly, whenever you did this to the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me.” (*Matthew 25:40*)

The implication of Jesus’ self-identification with his ‘brothers and sisters’ is unambiguous. Jesus, as God, was in every way like us as a human being, except in sin. Did the Lord laugh? Of course he did; only a damaged or inadequate human being is incapable of laughing. There are some who point out

that the gospels do not mention Jesus laughing or smiling – only weeping. The shortest in all the gospels is: ‘Jesus wept.’ Nevertheless, his humour comes across very clearly in many places. He used puns, he gently poked fun. Of course he did: we do, so he did.

Did he prefer some people to others? Uncomfortable though it may be to say so, yes he clearly did – because personal preference is a human characteristic; but it did not interfere with his mission on earth. For example, he did not entrust the beginning of the Church to the disciple he loved, but to Peter. Knowing both very well, he probably thought that Peter would make a better job of it.

Did Jesus get angry and lose his temper? Yes, of course; and we finally get round to today’s gospel reading, which is a perfect example of that. He drove the money-changers and pigeon-sellers out of the Temple with a whip. Jesus’ anger was what we would call *righteous* – that is, it was justified because it was in the cause of right.

There is a big difference between becoming angry and losing one’s temper. Jesus didn’t lose his temper in the Temple – he became angry. To lose one’s temper is an act of egoism; to be righteously angry is an impulse of the soul. Unrighteous anger is equally ego-based – it is a far more destructive version of losing one’s temper. Righteous anger seeks to restore, unrighteous anger wishes only to destroy;

righteous anger is aroused by what is wrong, unrighteous anger comes from whatever wounds human pride. In other words, like all other human energies, anger must be properly directed towards an appropriate object and end. If we have anger within us – whatever its psychological cause – let it be used for the right reasons; righteous anger can drive massed protests against unjust legislation, for example, and can get such legislation changed. Righteous anger eventually succeeded in abolishing slavery. In today's gospel reading, it rid the Temple – the house of God – of money-changing, buying and selling.

The Victorian image of 'gentle Jesus meek and mild' is a complete falsity, created to encourage children to be likewise and, therefore, compliant. There is still an aberrant idea that Christians – or anyone of faith and belief – must be milksops, doormats for all and sundry, plaster saints, total pushovers; but this is ridiculous. One of my favourite sayings of the Lord is in Matthew 10:16:

“Be as cunning as a snake and as gentle as a dove.” And in Luke 16:8 he tells us exactly why:

“For the children of this world are more astute at dealing with their own kind than are the children of light.”

Jesus instinctively knew, from his understanding of human nature, that it takes far more guts and

strength to cultivate righteous anger in the name of justice, equality and compassion – which are all instruments of love – than to give in to unrighteous anger, which is the easiest option.

It would probably be a very interesting experiment to sit down and reflect on exactly what might drive us to righteous anger – the kind of very special anger that we feel God inspires in us. For me, it would be the mistreatment of animals; I'm certainly not saying that this is the only – or even the first – cause of righteous anger in me, but it does spring to mind. Mahatma Gandhi said that we may judge a civilization on the way it treats its animals, and I believe this is so. The lesson of today's gospel is surely that we can lose our temper from now to kingdom come, but it won't make a jot of difference to anything except our blood pressure. On the other hand, properly directed and hand-in-hand with God's grace, righteous anger has the power to change the world.