



January 29

## THE NEW SHOFAR

**The glory of God is a human being fully alive; and to be alive consists in beholding God. Irenaeus of Lyons**

### *Have we tamed Jesus?*

The Jesus of the Gospels is, among other things, a prophet. When we pass over the significant parts of the Gospel speaking of judgment to talk mostly about Jesus the loving and tender Son we tame Him. We tame Jesus when we pass over His sharp words. Take for example His warnings to the rich – *It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!* Is this not true also of the way we tiptoe around the matter of divorce and remarriage when the words of Jesus on this are clearly attested. Add to this the powerful attraction for many of Social Justice warriors on matters of human sexuality: same gender marriage, confusion of gender with sexuality (remember there are at least 68 ways of speaking of gender). However we choose to deal with these issues on a pastoral level, Jesus' teaching is absolutely clear, as are His expectations. Despite this, often led by those who are supposed to be our shepherds, we whitewash Jesus' demands or find a way around them.

Our post-world war Christianity has tamed Jesus in so many ways. We want to turn him into some kind of sympathetic prophet, a prophet who is mighty in word and deed who preaches charismatic sermons to vast multitudes of people. I have even read of him being the first feminist teacher, a radical revolutionary set on transforming the world by any means possible and grew up in an atmosphere where He was more a social worker than an End Time prophet. As Gerhard Lohfink writes, in these attempts to rewrite the Gospel, *Jesus is shrunk, distorted, twisted into shape, planed smooth, disempowered and accommodated to our secret desires.*

### *Sorry (not really) , I am a conservative, a traditionalist*

I prefer to wear above tags as positives – a conservative being someone who believes in the value, relevance and power of that which has been handed down, those teachings which are faithful to the traditions of the apostles. It is not about liturgy, or morality, or methods of “being” church. It is about what the apostles have declared to have been the teachings and witness of Jesus passed on to them as treasures.

That is not the same as holding onto traditions. To repeat a favourite saying: *traditions are like lampposts. They light the way we are supposed to follow but only drunkards hold onto them.* It should be read in conjunction with the insights of the Polish Philosopher Leszek Kolakowski – *There are two circumstances we should always keep simultaneously in mind: First: if the new generations had not continually revolted against inherited traditions we would still be living in caves. Secondly, if revolt against inherited tradition should become universal, we would soon be back in the caves...A society in which traditions becomes a cult is condemned to stagnation; a society that tries to live entirely through revolt against tradition condemns itself to destruction.* This is so relevant for today's Church. To abandon our traditions – those collected, concentrated and inherited experiences - is to destroy ourselves. While we must continually clarify, renew them and deepen them, to cast them aside because they are no longer

a part of the broader set of views promoted and accepted by our surrounding cultures, is to deny all that Jesus came to do and to be.

### ***What then is our standard for renewing the Church of today?***

One thing that should be clear from our reading of the scriptures is that the standards on which we build our renewal cannot be the ever-changing priorities of society. Those “values” might appear to be like some fast moving, bright red sportscar, but in reality they are a hearse. While we need to listen to the authentic secular prophets (e.g. Nietzsche, Marx, Sartre, Chomsky, Peter Singer, etc.) that does not mean they shape the content of our Scriptures and the Teachings of the Apostles. The only true measure by which we pursue our lives as disciples remains Christ Jesus our Lord, Jesus as presented to us in the gospels. He must be the centre of the life of the Church. Renewing the Church thus requires coming closer and closer to Jesus.

Jesus is the final and ultimate word spoken by God. He is the Word in which God has spoken. Jesus Christ is the total self-revelation of God Himself and it is only in and through our intimacy with Jesus that we can come to God and know God in any genuine way. This demands that we refrain from modelling His figure on contemporary standards, understandings that correspond more to our own ideas than biblical realities. Is it there in the Bible?

The only way to come to an intimate relationship with Christ is to strive to follow Him. It is only when we are in a constant life of discipleship, one lived out within the Church, alongside our many brothers and sisters can we ever hope to experience Him at work within us and through us. We know and experience Christ in our act of following after Him.

### ***Revelation’s “Beast from the Land” works through societies shifting values***

This is never going to be easy because we are children of our own time. As such we are knowingly and unknowingly influenced by the images, ideas and influences of what is happening around us. It is then so easy for these to shape how we perceive Jesus. Lohfink offers the example of the self-help industry. Any bookshop will have shelves of books promoting the importance of accepting ourselves, being kind to ourselves, forgiving ourselves and the one I love most of all – accepting ourselves unconditionally.

Of course, there is a truth in all of these, but disciples need to read them in the light of what God has revealed to us in Christ. We must accept ourselves, but as creatures of a loving and merciful God, children who have had their guilt forgiven by the God who loves us. I am a child of God, someone who is loved, called and led. The Bible speaks not of self-acceptance and being reconciled with who we feel we are. The Good News of Jesus is the invitation to reconciliation with God and with our neighbours. The clear call of scripture is “Repent!” “Turn your life around!” It is enough that Jesus taught this. It matters not whether the world likes the message or not. We need to be gentle, respectful and inciteful when we preach these messages and when we apply them pastorally. In the end though, it all comes down to what Jesus taught and lived out as the Son of God, the Saviour and Messiah of all. Fortunately for us the Magnificat offers a reassurance...*He has scattered those whose hearts are filled with pride...He has cast down the mighty from their thrones* (Luke 1:49ff). It is never going to be easy being a disciple today, but we can renew if we allow ***the Light*** to lead our way and celebrate with a joyful acceptance the chance to pick up our cross and follow Him.