

logion 16

Jesus said:

“Perhaps people think that I have come to cast peace upon the world. They do not know that I have come to cast conflicts upon the earth: fire, sword, war. For there will be five in a house: there will be three against two and two against three, father against son and son against father, and they will stand alone.”¹

Commentary

Using parallel terms and incorporating a number of further points, this logion is to be found in the canonical Gospels and in the book of the prophet Micah.² In terms of the manifest meaning, Jesus seems to be speaking of the difficulties to which knowledge of the Good News can give rise within a family of five. However, closer study reveals that the intra-family division or warfare in question, with its surprising mention of the mother-in-law and the daughter-in-law, could never have had anything to do with the purpose of Jesus’ coming. Such an interpretation is unquestionably erroneous and more than puerile, and is therefore to be discarded.³

In terms of the *hidden* meaning, it will be noted that the five inhabitants of the household correspond to the number that Micah cited in the Old Testament, as does the identical breakdown in the family, so that this has nothing to do with the Jesus of the New Testament but relates to the *hidden*, eternal Christ, the Lord of every man since the beginning of time. The narrative seems to correspond to an analytical description of the whole man and of the process that takes place within him as

¹ *Monaxos*: one, alone, solitary

² Matt. 10:34-36; Luke 12:51-53; Micah 7:6

³ It is the ties that unite the spiritual family that count in Jesus’ legacy (see Matt. 12:48; Mark 3:35; Luke 8:21). But this does not mean that Jesus is deliberately sowing discord in the family of the flesh. Nor can Micah’s prophecy refer to any such divisive activity on the part of Jesus.

a result of the sowing of the Word, this man being the home or the single common dwelling place of a consciousness.

The logion speaks of three agents of division: fire, the sword, and war. As to the nature of this *fire*, it is none other than the spiritual knowledge that Jesus is spreading over the earth as a second baptism, as shown in the commentary on logion 10.⁴ *War* is simply the conflagration confronting the different forms of consciousness that are part of the fivefold make-up of the whole man. As for the *sword*, this is the only active agent of dissolution mentioned by Matthew, a factor that gives prominence to its active importance as well as to its antiquity, since to trace its meaning back to its origin, one must look to Genesis and to the *flame of a flashing sword* placed by God to guard the way to the Tree of Life.⁵

This biblical sword is no ordinary one, but a *flaming and flashing* one, as erect and as sharp as any sword—the living flame in which many mystics come to be consumed—as mentioned by the prophet Zechariah who, in passing, partly explains its function when he proclaims the oracle of YHVH: *Awake, sword, against my shepherd, and against the man who is my companion.*⁶

The sword is, of course, as Zechariah says, a two-edged weapon that could injure the shepherd. After singing psalms with his disciples, Jesus reminds them of this on his way to the agony on the Mount of Olives.⁷ Jesus' Passion is about to begin, that supreme act, transforming the tree of the cross of death into the way to the victory of the Tree of Life. But, before this step can be taken, the shepherd must needs be wounded by the blade of the flashing sword, for that is why God had in the beginning placed it to stand guard over the gates of Paradise.

⁴ Luke does not mention fire in his parallel logion, but shows that he is aware of it as a cause of division when he situates the logion as a continuation of its real direct antecedent which reads *I have come to bring fire to the earth, and how I wish it were blazing already!* (Luke 12:49)

⁵ Gen. 3:24

⁶ Zech. 13:7

⁷ Matt. 26:31

The Letter to the Hebrews compares this sword of the Spirit with the Word of God,⁸ and describes it as cutting *like any double-edged sword but more finely. It can slip through the place where the soul is divided from the spirit, or joints from the marrow; it can judge the secret emotions and thoughts.*⁹

As can be inferred from the precautions surrounding the rare figurative texts in which the matter is mentioned, this text touches on one of the best-guarded secrets kept by the Jewish people and by early Christians. That said, there is reason to be thankful that Matthew did not omit the sword from his version of the logion, since it is the most powerful divisive element in man's fivefold make-up. The Word of God, with its penetrating blade, fulfills a function that must invariably precede any crossing of the threshold of Paradise. The Word penetrates like an inner revelation, cutting along the divide between spirit and soul, thus defining the two higher inhabitants of the household, one of whom is the chosen one, and the other, the one who has been called. This pair are the son and the daughter in the text, or the Spouses in the mystic's long night when, on the soul's border, the bride seeks her Beloved *but does not find him*,¹⁰ longing and suffering from not knowing why he is absent or where she can find him.

The soul, the daughter, is the voice that speaks day and night to man's consciousness, until it seems to become identified with the man himself; the spirit, the son of God, coming from above, is indeed the eternal essence, is indeed the true man *in all his nakedness*, and yet, for most mortals, he remains utterly unknown. It has been said that the Son always seeks the light, or always dwells in it, since the light is his very substance; while the soul is always drawn towards the call of justice. These two ways are parallel and so cannot meet until the Word of God has been received and welcomed with such love that it is able like a flaming sword to penetrate *to the very joints and bone marrow* that persist in the soul. When this takes place—and the sword manifests as a living, burning blade—it

⁸ Eph. 6:17

⁹ Heb. 4:12

¹⁰ Song 3:1

makes a decisive division within the soul: on the one hand, that of the son, there remains what in the soul loves justice, already *refined as silver is refined*.¹¹ On the other, well rooted in consciousness despite their mortality are the feelings and thoughts that come from the heart and the flesh, clothing the soul like a fine garment of desire. All souls are predestined to undergo this in accordance with God's plan. Hence old Simeon's prophecy concerning Mary as the soul of all beings, when he said to her: *And a sword will pierce your own soul too*.¹²

The dividing of the soul means the grain is placed on one side and the chaff on the other; but since consciousness is not aware that the chaff is chaff, only that it receives feelings and thoughts, it tends to identify totally with these and cannot see them as mere chaff. This identification is so strong, so very intense that it manages to change all the straw into a bastard sister whom it confuses with its very identity, taking her for that identity.

Bear in mind that this idea of two sisters or women living together in the same soul, like the waters of the psyche above and below in the shared subjective firmament, is a metaphor frequently to be found in the New Testament. This includes the two women milling together at the same mill, one of whom will, on the Day the Lord chooses, *be taken*, drawn to justice, ready to accept the Son and thus to *become a child of God* according to the scriptures,¹³ while *the other will be left behind*, representing the chaff that has been winnowed and will now be burned.¹⁴

Clearly, both sisters have in common their confrontation with their mother, who has from the beginning sustained the soul's bodily, material demands; but one daughter draws away from her mother when the need for justice grows within her. On the other hand, the bastard sister, whom the logion calls

¹¹ Zech. 13:9

¹² Luke 2:35

¹³ John 1:12

¹⁴ Matt. 24:41; Luke 17:35

the *daughter-in-law*, has only one thing in mind: to rob the mother who, for her, is the *mother-in-law*, of all the temporal and natural goods in her possession. She takes these goods for real treasures and that provokes her envy.

There remains the fifth person in the house, the father. It will be remembered that the son, the Word, is the true light. It is written that the Word *came to his own domain and his own people did not accept him*.¹⁵ Hence, the confrontation of the son with all that is unwilling to receive the light, represented by the earthly father, the temporal essence of worldliness. In the house, consciousness receives messages from the son, messages that are sparks of light; but these sparks are death to the temporal plans of this usurper of a father. There is, however, a tendency for consciousness to misconstrue these plans as being predestined, for they closely match temporal responses to all the soul's inclinations, taking a form that looks as though it were divinely ordained.

This, then, is a first review of the ancient division of *three against two* that Jesus spread on earth. On the one hand, the daughter-in-law, the mother-in-law and the father, representing in the household everything that is transient, so that, being subject to death, *a man's enemies will be those of his own household*.¹⁶ On the other, the son and the daughter, henceforth united and, in the end, made one at the wedding feast of the eternal Life of Light.

¹⁵ John 1:11

¹⁶ Matt. 10:36