

logion 78

Jesus said:

*“What brought you out into the country?
Was it to see a reed shaken by the wind?
Or to see a man dressed in soft clothing
like your kings and your great men?
They wear fine apparel and cannot recognize truth.”*

Commentary

Quite apart from Jesus' comments on John the Baptist in the Gospels of Saints Matthew and Luke,¹ with which this logion seems to be connected, it seems easier to interpret this in its plain sense as a definition of the *visible* man, the man *whom people can see*.

Man's visible body is described, then, as a reed—a hollow one—shaken by the wind, perhaps by the passions.² Certainly, we are not used to seeing this primal reed—man's body—naked, unclothed, and often, when a man fulfils high functions on earth, we see such personages arrayed in costly, even complicated and colorful apparel. That in no way alters their condition of being mere reeds shaken by the wind. Whatever its outward appearance, a reed cannot know the truth.

Here is the *realist* definition of the *visible* man, as expressed and explained by Jesus in the Gospel. We stress the words *visible man*.

Many commentators were subsequently to affirm that the *complete* man, now and always, is an inseparable conjunction of the passions (invisible but perceptible) and the *reed*, both raised to immortality and to knowledge of the truth.

Others, however, are convinced that what the eyes can see is the greatest, even the only reliable reality. Consequently, they

¹ Matt. 11:7-8; Luke 7:24-25

² Gr. *Anemos*, meaning both wind and strong passion.

believe that what we call *man* is simply and solely the *visible* reed and its experience of the wind (*anemos*), a corollary of the reed.

Nevertheless, when Jesus sets out in the fourth Gospel to describe the complete twice-born man, man first born of woman and subsequently born of the Spirit, he does not separate the visible man from the invisible, the reed from the wind, but speaks of the functions and characteristics of both: *the wind* ³*blows wherever it pleases; you hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going.*⁴

The wind (*pneuma*) blows on the visible reed, which is acted on by all winds: the first wind (*anemos*), the wind of passion, and the second wind (*pneuma*), the Spirit whose aims are unknown, for the Spirit *is not of this world*.

In both cases, the reed is visible and mortal, flesh born of flesh, but *what is born of the Spirit is spirit*,⁵and as such, immortal and invisible.

This and only this is the Mystery in Christ, for the spirit, born of the Spirit, knows the truth that was destined for it from the beginning of time.

³ Gr. *Pneuma*, spirit.

⁴ John 3:8

⁵ John 3:6