

*Have I been with you so long and you do not know me . . . ?*

In my day the question used to go the rounds at Catholic University's theology department: *If the early followers of Jesus Christ had not been called Christians, would they have been called Jesuits? And alternatively might the Jesuits of today have then been called Christians?* Naturally, the Jesuits, being the top ranked order of the Church, they had to expect catcalls like that from the back rows of the clergy. But speaking of followers of Jesus Christ, which Jesus do you follow? I mean, we have the Jesus of St. Paul, the Jesus of the Apocalypse, the Jesus of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The first three Gospels read like a theatrical play. Jesus strides across the stage like many a reformer in history. He is located within regions of ancient Palestine – within a political environment of Roman rule and puppet monarchs and interreligious rivalries. He is followed by a non-descript group of supporters, raising dust, dispensing cures, holding rallies on hilltops and beside lakes, upsetting commerce in the big city. He confronts authorities, speaks parables, is a celebrity, the focus of undercover agents. He is a public figure. His goal (they assume) is to restore the Golden Age of King David. Except for the miracles the first three Gospels read like our familiar world.

But of Jesus's followers there were some who, influenced by the philosophies of the age, were drawn to Jesus out of a deeper interest in his nature, his meaning. Matthew and Luke begin their story with the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem but John traces Jesus back to the beginning of the universe. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God . . . All things came to be through him . . . life . . . light . . .*

John's Gospel sees in Jesus, in his way, his grasp of the *truth*, his depth of *life*, an arrival from before the world began, the very Source of everything including you and me. They experienced him as a *spoken Word* that is so creative, so poetic as to display all that exists in time and space: trees, oceans, plankton, even buzzards, stars, you and me . . . ; and can be detected in the profound discourse of human beings, in our music, in our goodness (despite our nostalgia for primeval darkness).

Yet not only does John's Gospel reveal this Word articulating us into existence *since the beginning of time* but he also hears this Word, this creative Voice *calling us from out of the future* – so that this Word surrounds us all the time. The disciple Philip says, "Show us the Father. Show us God." Jesus says "Have I been with you for so long and you do not know me, Philip?" Jesus, the Word made flesh, asks the same of you and me. The Source of the whole history of humanity and nature is ever near, before us, ahead of us, beside us - as the poet says: *Turn but a stone, and start a wing!*

Gerard Manley Hopkins, a Jesuit, must have been influenced by John's Gospel when he wrote: *As kingfishers catch fire . . . / As tumbled over rim in roundy wells / Stones ring: . . . / Each mortal thing does one thing . . . / . . . Deals out that being indoors each one dwells; . . . // I say more: the just man justices; / Keeps grace . . . / Acts in God's eye what in God's eye he is - / Christ – for Christ plays in ten thousand places, / Lovely in limbs, and lovely in eyes not his . . . / through the features of men's faces.*