

The surpassing eminence of the character of [Jesus](#) has been acknowledged by men of the most varied type:

- [Kant](#) testifies to His ideal perfection;
- [Hegel](#) sees in Him the union of the human and the Divine;
- the most advanced [sceptics](#) do Him homage;
- [Spinoza](#) speaks of Him as the truest symbol of heavenly wisdom;
- the beauty and grandeur of His life overawe Voltaire;
- [Napoleon I](#), at St. Helena, felt convinced that "Between him [[Jesus](#)] and whoever else in the world there is no possible term of comparison" (Montholon, "Récit de la Captivité de l'Empereur Napoléon").
- Rousseau testifies: "If the life and death of [Socrates](#) are those of a sage, the life and death of [Jesus](#) are those of a god."
- Strauss acknowledges: "He is the highest object we can possibly imagine with respect to religion, the being without whose presence in the mind perfect [piety](#) is impossible".
- To Renan "The Christ of the Gospels is the most beautiful incarnation of [God](#) in the most beautiful of forms. His beauty is eternal; his reign will never end."
- John Stuart Mill spoke of [Jesus](#) as "a man charged with a special, express, and unique commission from [God](#) to lead [mankind](#) to [truth](#) and virtue".

Not that the views of the foregoing witnesses are of any great importance for the [theological](#) student of the life of

[Jesus](#)

; but they show at least the impression made on the most different classes of men by the history of Christ. In the following paragraphs we shall consider the character of

[Jesus](#)

as manifested first in His relation to men, then in His relation to

[God](#)

.

Jesus in his relation to men

In His relation to men [Jesus](#) manifested certain qualities which were perceived by all, being subject to the light of reason; but other qualities were reserved for those who viewed Him in the light of [faith](#) . Both deserve a brief study.

In the light of reason

There is no trustworthy tradition concerning the bodily appearance of [Jesus](#) , but this is not needed in order to obtain a picture of His character. It is

[true](#)

that at first sight the conduct of

[Jesus](#)

is so many-sided that His character seems to elude all description. Command and sympathy, power and charm, authority and affection,

[cheerfulness](#)

and gravity, are some of the qualities that make the analysis impossible. The make-up of the Gospels does not facilitate the work. At first they appear to us a bewildering forest of dogmatic statements and moral principles; there is no system, no method, everything is occasional, everything fragmentary. The Gospels are neither a manual of

[dogma](#)

nor a treatise on casuistry, though they are the fountain of both. No wonder then the various investigators have arrived at entirely different conclusion at the study of

[Jesus](#)

. Some call Him a fanatic, others make Him a socialist, others again an

[anarchist](#)

, while many call Him a dreamer, a mystic, an

[Essene](#)

. But in this variety of views there are two main concepts under which the others may be summarized: Some consider

[Jesus](#)

an ascetic, others an aesthete; some emphasize His suffering, others His joyfulness; some identify Him with ecclesiasticism, others with

[humanism](#)

; some recognize in Him the prophetic picture of the

[Old Testament](#)

and the monastic of the New, others see in Him only

[gladness](#)

and poetry. There may be solid ground for both views; but they do not exhaust the character of

[Jesus](#)

. Both are only by-products which really existed in

[Jesus](#)

, but were not primarily intended; they are only enjoyed and suffered in passing, while

[Jesus](#)

strove to attain an end wholly different from either

[joy](#)

or sorrow.

(a) Strength

Considering the life of [Jesus](#) in the light of reason, His strength, His poise, and His grace are His most characteristic qualities. His strength shows itself in His manner of life, His decision, His authority. In His rugged, nomadic, homeless life there is no room for weakness or sentimentality. Indecision is rejected by [Jesus](#) on several occasions: "No man can serve two masters"; "He that is not with me, is against me"; "Seek first the kingdom of God"; these are some of the statements expressing [Chri](#)

[st's](#)

attitude to indecision of will. Of Himself He said: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me"; "I seek not my own will, but the will of him that sent me." The authority of the Master does not allow its power to be questioned; He calls to men in their boats, in their tax-booths, on their homes, "Follow me", and they look up into His face and obey. St. Mathew testifies, "The multitude...glorified

[God](#)

that gave such power to men";

[St. Mark](#)

adds, "the

[kingdom of God](#)

comes to power";

[St. Luke](#)

says, "Thou hast given him power over all flesh"; the Book of the Acts reads, "and

[God](#)

anointed him...with power";

[St. Paul](#)

too is impressed with "the power of

[our Lord Jesus](#)

"In His teaching

[Jesus](#)

does not argue, or prove, or threaten, like the

[Pharisees](#)

, but He speaks like one having authority. Nowhere is

[Jesus](#)

merely a long-faced ascetic or a

[joyous](#)

comrade, we find Him everywhere to be leader of men, whose principles are built on a rock.

(b) Poise

It may be said that the strength of [Christ's](#) character gives rise to another quality which we may call *poise*. Reason is like the sails of the boat, the will is its rudder, and the feelings are the waves thrown upon either side of the ship as it passes through the waters. The will-power of

[Jesus](#)

is strong enough to keep a perfect equilibrium between His feelings and His reason; His body is the perfect instrument in the performance of His

[duty](#)

; His emotions are wholly subservient to the Will of His Father; it is the call of complying with His higher

[duties](#)

that prevents His austerity from becoming excessive. There is therefore a perfect balance or equilibrium in

[Jesus](#)

between the life of His body, of His mind, and of His emotions. His character is so rounded off that, at first sight, there remains nothing which could make it characteristic. This poise in the character of

[Jesus](#)

produces a simplicity which pervades every one of His actions. As the old Roman roads led straight ahead in spite of mountains and valleys, ascents and declivities, so does the life of

[Jesus](#)

flow quietly onward in accordance with the call of

[duty](#)

, in spite of pleasure or pain,

[honour](#)

or ignominy. Another trait in

[Jesus](#)

which may be considered as flowing from the poise of His character is His unalterable peace, a peace which may be ruffled but cannot be destroyed either by His inward feelings or outward encounters. And these personal qualities in

[Jesus](#)

are reflected in his teaching. He establishes an equilibrium between the righteousness of the

[Old Testament](#)

and the

[justice](#)

of the New, between the

[love](#)

and life of the former and those of the latter. He lops off indeed the

[Pharisaic](#)

conventionalism and externalism, but they were merely degenerated outgrowths; He urges the

[law](#)

of

[love](#)

, but shows that it embraces the whole Law and the Prophets; He promises life, but it consists not so much in our possession as in our capacity to use our possession. Nor can it be urged that the poise of

[Christ's](#)

teaching is destroyed by His three paradoxes of self-reliance, of service, and of

[idealism](#)

. The

[law](#)

of self-sacrifice inculcates that we shall find life by losing it; but the

[law](#)

of biological organisms, of physiological tissues, of

[intellectual](#)

achievements, and of

[economic](#)

processes shows that self-sacrifice is self-realization in the end. The second paradox is that of service: "Whosoever will be the greater among you, let him be your minister: and he that will be first among you, shall be your servant." But in the industrial and artistic world, too, the greatest men are those who have done most service. Thirdly, the

[idealism](#)

of

[Jesus](#)

is expressed in such words as "The life is more than the meat", and "Not in bread alone doth man live, but in every word that proceedeth from the mouth of

[God](#)

." But even our realistic age must grant that the reality of the

[law](#)

is its ideals, and again, that the world of the idealist is impossible only for the weak, while the strong character creates the world after which he strives. The character of

[Jesus](#)

therefore is the embodiment of both strength and poise. It thus verifies the definition given by such an involved writer as Emerson: "Character is centrality, the impossibility of being displaced or overset...The natural measure of this power is the resistance of circumstances."

(c) *Grace*

But if there were not a third essential element entering into the character of [Jesus](#), it might not be attractive after all. Even

[saints](#)

are at times bad neighbours; we may like them, but sometimes we like them only at a distance. The character of Christ carries with it the trait of grace, doing away with all harshness and want

of amiability. Grace is the unconstrained expression of the self-forgetting and kindly mind. It is a beautiful way of doing the right thing, in the right way, at the right time, therefore opens all hearts to its possessor. Sympathy is the widest channel through which grace flows, and the abundance of the stream testifies to the reserve of grace. Now

[Jesus](#)

sympathizes with all classes, with the rich and the

[poor](#)

, the learned and the

[ignorant](#)

, the

[happy](#)

and the sad; He moves with the same sense of familiarity among all classes of

[society](#)

. For the self-righteous

[Pharisees](#)

He has only the words, "Woe to you,

[hypocrites](#)

"Unless you become as little children, you shall not enter into the

[kingdom of heaven](#)

."

[Plato](#)

and

[Aristotle](#)

are utterly unlike

[Jesus](#)

; they may speak of natural virtue, but we never find children in their arms.

[Jesus](#)

treats the

[publicans](#)

as His friends; He encourages the most tentative beginnings of moral growth. He chooses common fishermen for the cornerstones of His kingdom, and by His kindness trains them to become the light of the world and the salt of the earth; He bends down to St. Peter whose character was a heap of sand rather than a solid "foundation, but He graciously forms Peter into the rock upon which to build his Church. After two of the Apostles had fallen,

[Jesus](#)

was gracious to both, though He saved only one, while the other destroyed himself.

[Women](#)

in need are not excluded from the general graciousness of

[Jesus](#)

; He receives the homage of the

[sinful](#)

[woman](#)

, He consoles the sorrowing sisters Martha and Mary, He cures the mother-in-law of St. Peter and restores the health of numerous other

[women](#)

of

[Galilee](#)

, He has words of sympathy for the

[women](#)

of

[Jerusalem](#)

who bewailed His sufferings, He was subject to His mother till He reached man's estate, and when dying on the Cross commanded her to the care of His beloved disciple. The grace of the Master is also evident in the form of His teaching: He lays under contribution the simple phases of nature, the hen with her chickens, the gnat in the cup, the camel in the narrow street, the fig tree and its fruit, the fishermen sorting the catch. He meets with the lightest touch, approaching sometimes the play of humour and sometimes the thrust of irony, the simple

[doubts](#)

of His disciples, the selfish questions of His hearers, and the subtlest snares of his enemies. He feels no need of thrift in His benefits on the few as abundantly as the vastest multitudes. He flings out His parables into the world that those who have ears may hear. There is a prodigality in this manifestation of

[Christ's](#)

grace that can only be symbolized, but not equalled, by the waste of seed in the realm of nature.

In the light of faith

In the light of [faith](#) the life of [Jesus](#) is an uninterrupted series of acts of [love](#) for man. It was [love](#) that

impelled the

[Son of God](#)

to take on

[human](#)

[nature](#)

, though He did so with the full consent of His Father: "For

[God](#)

so

[loved](#)

the world, as to give his only begotten Son" (

[John 3:16](#)

). For thirty years

[Jesus](#)

shows His

[love](#)

by a life of poverty, labour, and hardship in the fulfillment of the

[duties](#)

of a common tradesman. When His public ministry began, He simply spent Himself for the good of His neighbour, "doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by the devil" (

[Acts 10:38](#)

). He shows a boundless compassion for all the infirmities of the body; He uses His

[miraculous power](#)

to heal the sick, to free the possessed, to resuscitate the dead. The moral weaknesses of man move His heart still more effectively; the

[woman](#)

at Jacob's well, Mathew the

[publican](#)

[Mary Magdalen](#)

the public sinner, Zacheus the

[unjust](#)

administrator, are only a few instances of sinners who received encouragement from the lips of

[Jesus](#)

. He is ready with forgiveness for all; the

[parable](#)

of the Prodigal Son illustrates His

[love](#)

for the sinner. In His work of teaching He is at the service of the poorest outcast of

[Galilee](#)

as well as of the

[theological](#)

celebrities of

[Jerusalem](#)

. His bitterest enemies are not excluded from the manifestations of His

[love](#)

; even while He is being crucified He

[prays](#)

for their pardon. The Scribes and

[Pharisees](#)

are treated severely, only because they stand in the way of His

[love](#)

. "Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you" (

[Matthew 11:28](#)

) is the message of His heart to poor suffering humanity. After laying down the rule,

"Greater

[love](#)

than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (

[John 15:13](#)

), He surpasses as it were His own standard by dying for His enemies. Fulfilling the unconscious prophecy of the godless

[high-priest](#)

, "It is expedient for you that one man should die for the people" (

[John 11:50](#)

), He freely meets His sufferings which He could have easily avoided (

[Matthew 26:53](#)

), undergoes the greatest insults and ignominies, passes through the most severe bodily pains, and sheds His blood for men "unto remission of

[sins](#)

" (

[Matthew 26:28](#)

). But the

[love](#)

of

[Jesus](#)

embraced not only the spiritual welfare of men, it extended also to their temporal

[happiness](#)

: "Seek ye therefore first the

[kingdom of God](#)

, and his

[justice](#)

, and all these things shall be added unto you" (

[Matthew 6:33](#)

).

Jesus in his relation to God

Prescinding from the [theological](#) discussions which are usually treated in the theses "De Verbo Incarnato", we may consider the relations of

[Jesus](#)

to

[God](#)

under the headings of His

[sanctity](#)

and His Divinity.

Sanctity of Jesus

From a negative point of view, the [sanctity](#) of [Jesus](#) consists in His unspotted sinlessness. He can defy His enemies by asking, "Which of you shall convince me of

[sin](#)

?" (

[John 8:46](#)

). Even the

[evil spirits](#)

are forced to acknowledge Him as the

[Holy One of God](#)

(

[Mark 1:24](#)

;

[Luke 4:34](#)

). His enemies charge Him with being a

[Samaritan](#)

, and having a devil (

[John 8:48](#)

), with being a sinner (

[John 9:24](#)

), a blasphemer (

[Matthew 26:65](#)

), a violator of the

[Sabbath](#)

(

[John 9:16](#)

), a malefactor (

[John 18:30](#)

), a disturber of the peace (

[Luke 23:5](#)

), a seducer (

[Matthew 27:63](#)

). But

[Pilate](#)

finds and declares

[Jesus](#)

innocent, and, when pressed by the enemies of

[Jesus](#)

to condemn Him, he washes his hands and exclaims before the assembled people, "I am innocent of the blood of this just man" (

[Matthew 27:24](#)

). The Jewish authorities practically admit that they cannot prove any wrong against

[Jesus](#)

; they only insist, "We have a law; and according to the

[law](#)

he ought to die, because he made himself the

[Son of God](#)

" (

[John 19:7](#)

). The final charge urged against Christ by His bitterest enemies was His claim to be the

[Son of God](#)

.

The positive side of the [sanctity](#) of [Jesus](#) is well attested by His constant [zeal](#) in the service of

[God](#)

. At the age of twelve He asks His mother, "Did you not

[know](#)

[G](#)

, that I must be about my father's business?"". He urges on His hearers the [true](#) adoration in spirit and in [truth](#) ([John 4:23](#)) required by His Father. Repeatedly He declares His entire dependence on His Father ([John 5:20, 30](#); etc.); He is faithful to the Will of His Father ([John 8:29](#)); He tells His disciples, "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me"; ([John 4:34](#)) . Even the hardest [sacrifices](#) do not prevent [Jesus](#) from complying with His Father's Will: "My Father, if this [chalice](#) may not pass away, but I must drink it, thy will be done"; ([Matthew 26:42](#)) .
[Jesus](#) honours His Father ([John 2:17](#)), and proclaims at the end of His life, "I have glorified thee on the earth"; ([John 17:4](#)) . He [prays](#) almost incessantly to His Father ([Mark 1:35](#)); [6:46](#); etc.), and teaches His [Apostles](#) the [Our Father](#) ([Matthew 6:9](#)) . He always thanks His Father for His bounties ([Matthew 11:25](#); etc.), and in brief behaves throughout as only a most loving son can behave towards his beloved father. During His [Passion](#) one of His most intense sorrows is His feeling of abandonment by His Father ([Mark 15:34](#)) , and at the point of death He joyfully surrenders His Soul into the hands of His Father (

[Luke 23:46](#)

).

Divinity of Jesus

The Divinity of [Jesus](#) is [proved](#) by some writers by an appeal to prophecy and [miracle](#) . But, though [Jesus](#) fulfilled the prophecies of the [Old Testament](#) to the letter, He Himself appears to appeal to them mainly in [proof](#) of His Divine mission; He shows the [Jews](#) that He fulfills in His Person and His work all that had been foretold of the [Messias](#) . The prophecies uttered by [Jesus](#) Himself differ from the predictions of the [Old Testament](#) in that [Jesus](#) does not speak in the name of the Lord, like the seers of old, but in His own name. If it could be strictly [proved](#) that they were made in virtue of His own [knowledge](#) of the future, and of His own power to dispose of the current of events, the prophecies would prove His Divinity; as it is they prove at least that [Jesus](#) is a messenger of [God](#) , a friend of [God](#) , inspired by [God](#) . This is not the place to discuss the historical and [philosophical truth](#) of the [miracles](#) of [Jesus](#) , but we [know](#)

that
[Jesus](#)
appeals to His works as bearing witness to the general
[truth](#)
of His mission (
[John 10:25, 33, 38](#)
) , and also for the verity of some particular claims (
[Matthew 9:6](#)
;
[Mark 2:10-11](#)
; etc.) They show, therefore, at least that
[Jesus](#)
is a Divine
[legate](#)
and that His teaching is
[infallibly](#)
[true](#)
.

Did [Jesus](#) teach that He is [God](#) ? He certainly claimed to be the [Messias](#) ([John 4:26](#)), to
fulfill the
[Messianic](#)
descriptions of the
[Old Testament](#)
(
[Matthew 11:3-5](#)
;
[Luke 7:22-23](#)
;
[4:18-21](#)
) , to be denoted by the current
[Messianic](#)
names, "king of
[Israel](#)
" (
[Luke 19:38](#)
; etc), "Son of David" (
[Matthew 9:27](#)
; etc), "Son of man" (
passim
) , "he that cometh in the name of the Lord" (
[Matthew 21:9](#)
, etc.). Moreover,
[Jesus](#)

claims to be greater than

[Abraham](#)

(

[John 8:53, 56](#)

), than Moses (

[Matthew 19:8-9](#)

), than Solomon and Jonas (

[Matthew 12:41-42](#)

); He habitually claims to be sent by

[God](#)

(

[John 5:36, 37, 43](#)

; etc.), calls

[God](#)

His Father (

[Luke 2:49](#)

; etc), and He willingly accepts the titles "Master" and "Lord" (

[John 13:13-14](#)

). He forgives

[sin](#)

in answer to the observation that

[God](#)

alone can forgive

[sin](#)

(

[Mark 2:7, 10](#)

;

[Luke 5:21, 24](#)

; etc). He acts as the Lord of the

[Sabbath](#)

(

[Matthew 12:8](#)

; etc), and tells St. Peter that as "Son" He is free from the

[duty](#)

of paying temple-tribute (

[Matthew 17:24, 25](#)

). From the beginning of His ministry he allows

[Nathanael](#)

to call Him

["Son of God"](#)

(

[John 1:49](#)

); the Apostles (

[Matthew 14:33](#)

) and Martha (

[John 11:27](#)

) give Him the same title. Twice He approves of Peter who calls Him "the Christ, the [Son of God](#)

" (

[John 6:70](#)

), "Christ, the

[Son of the living God](#)

" (

[Matthew 16:16](#)

). Four distinct times does He proclaim Himself the

[Son of God](#)

; to the man born blind (

[John 10:30, 36](#)

); before the two assemblies of the

[Jewish Sanhedrin](#)

on the night before His death (

[Matthew 26:63-64](#)

;

[Mark 14:61-62](#)

;

[Luke 22:70](#)

). He does not manifest His Divine Sonship before

[Satan](#)

(

[Matthew 4:3, 6](#)

) or before the

[Jews](#)

who are deriding Him (

[Matthew 27:40](#)

).

[Jesus](#)

does not wish to teach the

[evil spirit](#)

the mystery of His Divinity; to the

[Jews](#)

He gives a greater sign than they are asking for.

[Jesus](#)

, therefore, applies to Himself, and allows others to apply to Him, the title

["Son of God"](#);

in its full meaning. If there had been a misunderstanding He would have corrected it, even as Paul and Barnabas corrected those who took them for gods (

[Acts 14:12-14](#)

).

Nor can it be said that the title ["Son of God"](#) denotes a merely adoptive sonship.

The foregoing texts do not admit of such an interpretation. St. Peter, for instance, places his master above

[John the Baptist](#) ,

Elias, and the Prophets (

[Matthew 16:13-17](#)

). Again, the

[Angel Gabriel](#)

declares that the Child to be born will be "the Son of the most High" and

["Son of God"](#);

(

[Luke 1:32, 35](#)

), in such a way that He will be without an earthly father. Mere adoption presupposes the existence of the child to be adopted; but St. Joseph is warned that "That which is conceived in her [Mary], is of the Holy Ghost" (

[Matthew 1:20](#)

); now one's being conceived by the operation of another implies one's natural relation of sonship to him. Moreover, the Divine Sonship claimed by

[Jesus](#)

is such that he and the Father are one (

[John 10:30, 36](#)

); a merely adopted sonship does not constitute a physical unity between the son and his adoptive father. Finally if

[Jesus](#)

had claimed only an adoptive sonship, He would have deceived His judges; they could not have condemned Him for claiming a prerogative common to all

[pious](#)

[Israelites](#)

. Harnack (Wesen des Christentums, 81) contends that the Divine Sonship claimed by

[Jesus](#)

is an

[intellectual](#)

relation to the Father, springing from special

[knowledge](#)

of

[God](#)

. This

[knowledge](#)

constitutes "the sphere of the Divine Sonship", and is implied in the words of

[Matthew 11:27](#)

: "No one knoweth the Son, but the Father: neither doth any one

[know](#)

the Father, but the Son, and he to whom it shall please the Son to reveal him". But if the Divine Sonship of Christ is a mere

[intellectual](#)

relation, and if Christ is

[God](#)

in a most figurative sense, the Paternity of the Father and the Divinity of the Son will be reduced

Jesus of Nazareth

Written by W.J.Pais

to a figure of speech. (

See

[CHRISTOLOGY](#)

.)

[New Advent Org](#)