

**‘My Lord and My God’
(Jn.20:26)**

**Twin said, ‘My God, it’s the Leader’
(Sources close pg.121)**

The words of Thomas/Twin to the risen Jesus are either the strongest confession of faith in the gospels, **or** they are something just blurted out in the heat of the moment. Thomas, whose name means ‘Twin’ was not a scornful doubter but an intelligent sceptic who had no intention of believing something outside the normal pattern of things, without adequate proof. But when presented with the evidence he gasps and enters a heightened state of wonder. Words do not express his emotions. ‘Good As New’ brings out the aspect of blurting, even swearing. More traditional translations bring out a theological statement that presumes a degree of reflection for which Twin did not really have leisure at that point. We should not choose between these two ways of translating. They should be held in tension; they are each part of the whole truth. Sometimes when someone says “My God” they are praying; sometimes they are swearing; sometimes they are doing both at the same time! Twin is his right name. We don’t know who his real twin was. But he himself has a twin character, swinging from honest doubt to robust faith, from depression to elation, from anxiety to blessed assurance.

It is difficult for us, as Christians, to get the measure of how revolutionary Twin’s words were for someone of the Jewish faith. The God of Israel was ‘ONE’, high and lofty, filling heaven and earth and all eternity. This God did graciously enter into communion with humankind under very special arrangements, and inspired humankind with thought and deeds, by the Spirit. But to appear in human flesh and to live a full human life, and to die as a human does, was inconceivable of the God of Israel. Pagan gods did that sort of thing, mostly for their own amusement. It was easier for Pilate or the Roman centurion at the cross to believe Jesus might be a god, than for Twin. However, Twin’s confession of faith took root among the early Christians and meant logically they could no longer stay in the Jewish faith, though this took some time to work out.

How is it the first Christians were able to make such a revolutionary leap from the idea of a god who is wholly ‘other’, to a god who is pleased to appear in human flesh and blood? They were driven to this belief by their experience of Jesus.

As Jews they knew that God and God alone could control the forces of nature. “Who is this? Even the wind and the waves do what he says!” (GAN pg 38) Who was this who got the blind to see, who cured the lepers, who walked life’s road with such confidence and trust and so little fear of the power of evil? The Messiah, God’s Chosen, at the very least. But Twin and the others experienced more than an inspired

wonder worker. Jesus rose from the dead. He was immortal, like God. It seemed also he could give life in all its fullness, with an eternal dimension, to those who trusted him. All this gets pretty close, but still falls short of a complete identification of Jesus with God.

Beyond the miracles, beyond even the rising from the dead, Jesus communicated the presence of God to Twin and Rocky and Thunder and Lightning, Mary, Martha, Maggie and Joan. They no longer needed the temple sacrifices to relate to God; they no longer needed priests. When Jesus broke the bread and the fish on the beach, they knew they were holding communion with God.

Important though this revolution was the first friends of Jesus, I'm going to suggest that its importance for us is different from its importance for them. Twin introduced the formula Jesus=God. The task of the first Christians was to work out what this formula did to their understanding of Jesus. Some of their answers may not be relevant or suitable for us today. The idea of a pre-existent 'Christ'; the story of a virgin birth. These were ideas thought up to express Twin's formula. They seemed essential at the time. For many people today they are barriers rather than aids to belief.

For us the importance of Twin's formula is the other way round. Not what Jesus=God means for our understanding of Jesus, but what Jesus=God means for our understanding of God. If Jesus is God, it means that from now on we can only understand God with reference to Jesus. Jesus is a point from which our ideas of God must change. What does Twin's formula do to our thinking about God?

1. GOD SUFFERS.

If Jesus is God, then God suffers. You may think this is obvious. But it isn't obvious to everybody, and for some it is heresy. The view of the Greeks in the fourth century was that in the Trinity only the Son suffers, not the Father. They didn't know about schizophrenia in the days when they worked that idea out. But what they were doing was producing a God with a split personality. Only recently we have been able to sing:

‘And when human hearts are breaking
Under sorrow's iron rod,
All the sorrow, all the aching,
Wrings with pain the heart of God.’

(Timothy Rees 1874-1939)

Archbishop Tutu reported God as saying, “I was at the holocaust, and I wept.” Twin’s words, “My Lord and My God” were addressed to someone with nail prints and a wounded side.

There is no clever argument or pat answer to drive away the problem of pain. Why does God allow suffering? It is not an answer, but the most important thing that has to be said in response to the question is that God suffers. It is not that God causes suffering, or allows it, or wants it. It is God who receives suffering and who suffers with us and alongside us.

2. GOD IS LOVE.

The words ‘God is Love’ are the most important words ever spoken in the human language. They are words which could never have been spoken without Jesus and they flow directly from the experience of Twin and his comrades. The words mean that there are limits to the way God operates. Before Jesus, God can only be understood as ‘almighty’. The church still uses that description of God. Some of its formal prayers begin that way. But God is not almighty, because love is not almighty. Love is all-vulnerable. God’s might is limited by God’s love. It means that when God chose the cross as the way of reconciling the world, if love doesn’t work, then God has no other way. Some Christians still prefer the God before Jesus. They see God’s offer through the cross as a sort of temporary offer, like a short-term sales gimmick. ‘Buy now while stocks last’ – accept God’s offer of love now, because next time God is going to come in judgement and retribution. A split personality god again! If God=Jesus, it is the God who ‘sent not his son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.’ God wishes to have friendship with us on a free basis and not on the basis of compulsion. It means that when the Church uses bullying tactics to get people to come to God, or to keep them onside, it denies the very God it preaches. We either attract people to God by demonstrating in our own lives the love shown in Jesus, or we don’t do it at all.

3. GOD IS OPEN TO CHANGE.

This is really stop-press. We are used to the belief that God is unchanging. But does this square with the experience of Twin, God=Jesus. As a human Jesus changed. He changed from a baby into a teenager and from a teenager into an adult. His moods changed. When the disciples came back from a successful missionary tour he said, “You’ve just knocked Satan off his pedestal!” On another occasion he said to those same men and women, “You’re an impossible lot. How long do I have to put up with you?” Jesus’ views changed and developed. He started by thinking he was called to serve only the people of Israel. A Syrian woman argued him into extending his ministry to other peoples. The God in Jesus is the God who learns on the job, who explores and adventures.

I was at an ecumenical conference in London when David Jenkins, a previous Bishop of Durham, was the speaker. He opened my understanding to the idea that God is open to change. His actual words (I wrote them down straightaway) were:

“God is so much love, he wills to be enlarged himself.”

You and I know that a relationship of love between two people changes both of them. Nothing can change a person so dramatically as a loving relationship. Love includes experiment, it includes risk, it includes being willing to change in order to accommodate the other. When God took on the risk of taking on human flesh, that in itself was change, a change that would inevitably lead to more change.

The idea that some Christians have that God has everything buttoned up from beginning to end, won't square with Twin's formula. God has no intention of leading such a boring existence. No wonder there are so many boring Christians. They have such a boring God! God has embarked on love's adventure, and where it will all end is as much in the hands of those God loves as in God's own hands.

When Twin blurted out, “My Lord and My God”, it was hardly more than an expletive, an expression of wonder and surprise. He couldn't have possibly known what he was saying. We are only just beginning to find out.