
Jesus, the Supreme Leader.

by Eugene V. Debs

Originally published in *Progressive Woman*, March 1914. Reprinted in *Labor and Freedom: The Voice and Pen of Eugene V. Debs*. (St. Louis: Phil Wagner, 1916), pp. 22-29.

It matters little whether Jesus was born at Nazareth or Bethlehem. The accounts conflict, but the point is of no consequence.

It is of consequence, however, that He was born in a stable and cradled in a manger. This fact of itself, about which there is no question, certifies conclusively the proletarian character of Jesus Christ. Had His parents been other than poor working people — money-changers, usurers, merchants, lawyers, scribes, priests, or other parasites — He would not have been delivered from His mother's womb on a bed of straw in a stable among asses and other animals.

Was Jesus divinely begotten? Yes, the same as every other babe ever born into the world. He was of miraculous origin the same as all the rest of mankind. The scriptural account of his "immaculate conception" is a beautiful myth, but scarcely more of a miracle than the conception of all other babes.

Jesus was not divine because he was less human than his fellowmen but for the opposite reason that he was supremely human, and it is this of which his divinity consists, the fullness and perfection of him as an intellectual, moral, and spiritual being.

The chronicles of his time and of later days are filled with contradictory and absurd stories about him and he has been disfigured and distorted by cunning priests to serve their knavish ends and by ignorant idolators to give godly sanction to their blind bigotry and savage superstition, but there is no impenetrable myth surrounding the personal-

ity of Jesus Christ. He was not a legendary being or an allegorical figure, but as Bouck White and others have shown us, a flesh and blood Man in the fullness of his matchless powers and the completeness of his transcendent consecration.

To me Jesus Christ is as real, as palpitant and persuasive as a historic character as John Brown, Abraham Lincoln, or Karl Marx. He has persisted in spite of two thousand years of theological emasculation to destroy his revolutionary personality, and is today the greatest moral force in the world.

The vain attempt persisted in through twenty centuries of ruling class interpolation, interpretation, and falsification to make Jesus appear the divinely commissioned conservator of the peace and soother of the oppressed, instead of the master proletarian revolutionist and sower of the social whirlwind — the vain attempt to prostitute the name and teachings and example of the martyred Christ to the power of Mammon, the very power which had murdered him in cold blood, vindicates his transcendent genius and proclaims the immortality of his work.

Nothing is known of Jesus Christ as a lad except that at twelve his parents took him to Jerusalem, where he confounded the learned doctors by the questions he asked them. We have no knowledge as to what these questions were, but taking his lowly birth, his poverty and suffering into account, in contrast with the riches of Jerusalem which now dazzled his vision, and in the light of his subsequent career, we are not left to conjecture as to the nature of the interrogation to which

the inquisitive lad subjected the smug doctors in the temple.

There are but meagre accounts of the doings of Jesus until at a trifle over thirty he entered upon his public “ministry” and began the campaign of agitation and revolt he had been planning and dreaming through all the years of his yearning and burning adolescence. He was of the working class and loyal to it in every drop of his hot blood to the very hour of his death. He hated and denounced the rich and cruel exploiter as passionately as he loved and sympathized with his poor and suffering victims.

“I speak not of you all; I know whom I have chosen,” was his class-conscious announcement to his disciples, all of whom were of the proletariat, not an exploiter or desirable citizen among them. No, not one! It was a working class movement he was organizing and a working class revolution he was preparing the way for.

“A new commandment I give unto you: That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.” This was the pith and core of all his pleading, all his preaching, and all his teaching — love one another, be brethren, make common cause, stand together, ye who labor to enrich the parasites and are yourselves in chains, and ye shall be free!

These words were addressed by Jesus not to the money-changers, the scribes and the pharisees, the rich and respectable, but to the ragged undesirables of his own enslaved and suffering class. This appeal was to their class spirit, their class loyalty, and their class solidarity.

Centuries later Karl Marx embodies the appeal in his famous manifesto and today it blazes forth in letter of fire as the watchword of the worldwide revolution: “*Workers of all countries unite: you have nothing to lose but your chains. You have a world to gain.*”

During the brief span of three years, embracing the whole period of his active life, from the time he began to stir up the people until “the scar-

let robe and crown of thorns were put on him and he was crucified between two thieves,” Jesus devoted all his time and all his matchless ability and energies to the suffering poor, and it would have been passing strange if they had not “heard him gladly.”

He himself had no fixed abode and like the wretched, motley throng to whom he preached and poured out his great and loving heart, he was a poor wanderer on the face of the earth and “had not where to lay his head.”

Pure communism was the economic and social gospel preached by Jesus Christ, and every act and utterance which may properly be ascribed to him conclusively affirms it. Private property was to his elevated mind and exalted soul a sacrilege and a horror; an insult to God and a crime against man.

The economic basis of his doctrine of brotherhood and love is clearly demonstrated in the fact that under his leadership and teaching all his disciples “sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, *as every man had need,*” and that they “had all things in common.”

“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart.”

This was the beginning of the mighty movement Jesus had launched for the overthrow of the empire of the Caesars and the emancipation of the crushed and miserable masses from the bestial misrule of the Roman tyrants.

It was above all a working class movement and was conceived and brought forth for no other purpose than to destroy class rule and set up the common people as the sole and rightful inheritors of the earth.

“Happy are the lowly for they shall inherit the earth.”

Three short years of agitation by the incomparable Jesus was sufficient to stamp the proletarian movement he had inaugurated as the most

formidable and portentous revolution in the annals of time. The ill-fated author could not long survive his stupendous mischief. The aim and inevitable outcome of this madman's teaching and agitation was too clearly manifest to longer admit of doubt.

The sodden lords of misrule trembled in their stolen finery, and then the word went forth that they must "get" the vagabond who had stirred up the people against them. The prototypes of Peabody, McPartland, Harry Orchard, et. al., were all ready for their base and treacherous performance and their thirty pieces of blood-stained silver. The priest of the Mammon worshipers gave it out that the Nazarene was spreading a false religion and that his pernicious teachings would corrupt the people, destroy the church, uproot the old faith, disrupt the family, break up the home, and overthrow society.

The lineal descendants of Caiaphas and Judas and the pharisees and money-changers of old are still parroting the same miserable falsehood to serve the same miserable ends, the only difference being that the brood of pious perverts now practice their degeneracy in the name of the Christ they betrayed and sold into crucifixion twenty centuries ago.

Jesus, after the most farcical trial and the most shocking travesty upon justice, was spiked to the cross at the gates of Jerusalem and his followers subjected to persecution, torture, exile, and death. The movement he had inaugurated, fired by his unconquerable revolutionary spirit, persisted, how-

ever, through fire and slaughter, for three centuries and until the master class, realizing the futility of their efforts to stamp it out, basely betrayed it by pretending conversion to its teachings and reverence for its murdered founder, and from that time forth Christianity became the religion, so-called, of the pagan ruling class and the dead Christ was metamorphosed from the master revolutionist who was ignominiously slain, a martyr to his class, into the pious abstraction, the harmless theological divinity who died that John Pierpont Morgan could "be washed in the blood of the lamb" and countless generations of betrayed and deluded slaves kept blinded by superstition and content in their poverty and degradation.

Jesus was the grandest and loftiest of human souls — sun-crowned and God-inspired; a full-statured man, red-blooded and lion-hearted, yet sweet and gentle as the noble mother who had given him birth.

He had the majesty and poise of a god, the prophetic vision of a seer, the great, loving heart of a woman, and the unaffected innocence and simplicity of a child.

This was and is the martyred Christ of the working class, the inspired evangel of the down-trodden masses, the world's supreme revolutionary leader, whose love for the poor and the children of the poor hallowed all the days of his consecrated life, lighted up and made forever holy the dark tragedy of his death, and gave to the ages his divine inspiration and his deathless name.

Edited by Tim Davenport.

Published by 1000 Flowers Publishing, Corvallis, OR, 2005. • Free reproduction permitted.