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"FAITH HAS STILL ITS OLIVET AND LOVE ITS GALILEE"

by ERIC F. F. BISHOP

MR. BISHOP'S Palestinian meditations, in which Christian reflection and topographical knowledge mingle, are always fresh and command wide appreciation among our readers.

After I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee. . . . Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee, there you will see him, as he told you (Mark 14: 28; 16: 7).

After I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee. . . . Go quickly and tell his disciples . . . he is going before you to Galilee: there you will see him.

"Tell my brethren to go to Galilee and there they will see me". The eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had appointed them (N.E.B.) (Matt. 26: 32; 28: 7, 10, 16).

The Lord is risen indeed and has appeared to Simon (Luke 24: 34). Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? . . . they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet (Acts 1: 11, 12).

THE Mount of Olives is a watershed. The Prophet Zechariah some time before the Christian era knew it was on the earthquake line.¹ The *flora* on the western slope have been said to tend to be *Africana*, on the eastern *Asiatica*. If there is fascination for the geologist and the botanist, there is equal fascination for the Christian historian and the devoted pilgrim. Gethsemane nestles at the foot of Olivet on the western side. Bethany lies on the lower slopes towards the east. The summit has memories of inspiration and recall. Jesus sat there one day with two pairs of brothers overlooking the Temple Area. A dozen times or more He walked over the Hill. Once He rode in the middle of the pilgrim throng—Galileans many of them from the Northern Province—"Galilee of the Nations"; so Isaiah thought of it. It was that day too when, coming into sight of the City, He wept over her.² His view was much the same as ours these days.

¹ Zechariah 14: 4. Cf. D. Baly, *The Geography of the Bible*, xiv.

² The first President of the Hebrew University, Judah Magnes, would point to visitors the various views from Scopus, the end of the ridge of which is Olivet. It was the view from Olivet that must have been always most impressive.

Pilgrimages for years have followed a path from Bethany that winds past the Church of *Dominus Flevit*, the site unmarked till the Crusaders erected one of their churches. But this site can hardly have been the *katabasis* (descent) of which St. Luke has careful mention. For this there would seem to be but one place on the Mountain, where the whole "company of the disciples" could join in unison—hundreds perhaps abreast—for the praises of God. This spot today is part of the property of the Greek Orthodox Patriarch. Around the enclosing wall of the Church within the Olive Grove is the narrative of the Ascension: and over the Gate into the Grove is engraved the Greek text of Matthew 28: 16. It was in 1881 that the Church was built in the big enclosure with a surrounding wall.³ This spot has been known as *Viri Galilaei* from the words addressed by the two men to the apostles, "Ye men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven?" In his *Guide to the Holy Land* Eugene Hoade remarks: "How this place came to be called *Viri Galilaei* is not easily determined".⁴ This, however, was not the original name of the place, which was more simply *Galilee*, being the location of the Galilean pilgrims when they came up to Jerusalem for celebration of the national feasts. (It should be borne in mind in this philological connection that though "Galilee of the Nations" must ever remain *Galilee par excellence*, made eternal through the Greek Gospels, the Hebrew word from which *Galilee* is derived occurs in a dozen Old Testament contexts from Joshua and Kings to Canticles and Esther, variously rendered "region", "border", "country", "district" or "circuit"—the last being perhaps a happy rendering in this context.)

In his *We Saw the Holy City* Leslie Farmer recalls the occasions during the war, when he conducted groups of men over the Holy Places on the Mount of Olives and of this particular site being identified with the *Galilee* of Matthew 28: 16—"apparently because the early Christians found it difficult to associate that particular Resurrection appearance of Jesus with the Northern Province".⁵ But the further question arises as to whether the pre-Resurrection promises of going before to Galilee, confirmed in one case by our Lord Himself on the Resurrection morning, could also predicate the Northern Province as the promised rendez-vous on that great day.

Leslie Farmer also refers to a work of Meistermann published in

³ In this Church the Missionary Conference of 1924 was held under the chairmanship of Dr. John R. Mott. The male delegates were accommodated in tents among the olive trees of *Viri Galilaei*.

⁴ *Guide to the Holy Land*, 260.

⁵ *We Saw the Holy City*, 135; E. W. G. Masterman, *Studies in Galilee*, 3.

Jerusalem in 1910—*La Montagne de la Galilée où le Seigneur apparut aux apôtres*, where it is stated that the "Breviarius of Hiorosolyma (c. A.D. 636) indicates that the apostles saw the Lord on the Mount of Olives, and that according to Theodosius (c. 530) the eastern gate outside which Stephen was stoned was called 'The Gate of Galilee'"⁶ This would mean almost opposite the *katabasis*, the approach down Olivet being the rough road of the centuries B.C. and A.D. The refusal to macadamize this road was credited to Sir John Chancellor, when High Commissioner, on the ground that it should remain as in the time of our Lord and His apostles.

There is thus a tradition for this *Galilee on Olivet* dating back to the sixth century; others taking the view that it arose in Crusading times. In a recent conversation a Bishop of the Orthodox Patriarchate in Jerusalem would place the tradition further back in history "because pilgrims from Galilee who came to attend the Temple worship used to come to this place known to them and all as *Little Galilee (Mikra)*".⁷ The first octagonal shrine marking the traditional site of the Ascension was Crusading work. Today on the same foundation is the Mosque of the Ascension—round which at Ascension-tide each year the different churches erect their booths and altars. The fact remains for always that on Olivet no one can be far away from the footprints of Jesus. The "cloud received him out of their sight"; but there are other memories besides the Mosque today—perhaps the most significant along with the great enclosure of the *Viri Galilaei* being the Church of the Lord's Prayer, which if rightly enshrined in the Sermon on the Mount may lend weight to the Tradition. There is possibly a hint of this identification, if unconscious, in the request of one of the disciples in a certain place to "teach us to pray" as John his disciples; for this is recorded in Luke immediately after the incident of Mary and Martha in the village of Bethany on the mountain's lower eastern slope.⁸

In effect there are twin traditions for this "Galilean" connection with Olivet—the *Viri Galilaei* originating with the question of the two men "in white apparel" in Acts, and *Galilaeum* with its basis

⁶ In a letter. "The idea that Karm es-Sayad received the name of Galilee because Galileans camped there seems to have originated with Quaresimus (1626)".

⁷ In a letter from the Reverend Rafik Farah, 15 January 1967, after a conversation with Bishop Basileos, who would regard the tradition as considerably antedating the 17th century.

⁸ The supposed last footprint of Christ is enclosed in a stone surround (Luke 10: 38ff.; 11: 4).

in the Matthean narrative of the gathering of the eleven disciples at "the mountain where Jesus had appointed them". Was this the place that took its name from being the spot, *Mikra Galilee*, where the pilgrims from the north encamped when in the Holy City for Passover and/or Pentecost? The theory has not been discounted out of hand in modern times and circumstantial grounds can be adduced in support. When the Galilean pilgrims to the Feasts went out of their way to avoid Samaria with its associations of Gerizim, and took the roundabout route, necessitating the final approach to Jerusalem over the summit of Olivet—no wonder the Mountain was included in the municipal boundaries at Passover-time. There was the obvious place to bivouac overlooking the Temple Area and calling national history to mind. St. Luke implies something like this when narrating the occasion of the last great Passover. It should not follow inevitably that, because a tradition does not have written authority before a given century, the oral source from which it sprang should be discounted as unreliable. In this case geographical plausibility is supported by historical probability. In any case it is difficult to associate the final appearance as recorded by St. Matthew with the Northern Province, "Galilee of the Nations". Is it any more reasonable to do so with the previous references whether in Matthew or Mark? Psychological reasoning should be allowed to enter the arena of debate. This seems one point where Synoptic records would express unconscious unanimity. In *When We Lived in Jerusalem* Miss Estelle Blyth quotes the tradition that it was so named "because it was the place in which the Galileans camped when they came up to Jerusalem for the Passover".⁹ Here on Olivet was a trysting-place for these Galilean apostles, the dialect of one at least noticeable in southerly Judaea.

The references to Galilee in the Passion and Resurrection scenes must surely bear on the right identification of the site. "After I am raised up, I will go before you into Galilee". So Mark in words adopted by Matthew. This is corroborated in the angelic bidding: "Go, tell his disciples *and Peter*; he goeth before you into Galilee; there shall ye see him, *as he told you*." Matthew repeats the Markan phraseology, omitting the special allusion to Peter, with a change in the closing words, as if the messenger felt his mission completed. But Matthew may have been justified in curtailment and alteration; for the Risen Christ Himself soon after emphasized the message: "Tell my brethren to go to Galilee and there they will see me". The Markan inset "*and Peter*", if unforgettable in its pathos, is more

⁹ *When we lived in Jerusalem*, 38, 39.

vital still in Christian history for the Lukan confirmation, "the same day at evening", that "the Lord is risen indeed and hath appeared unto Simon". Luke has no Resurrection appearances outside the Jerusalem area even with the identification of Emmaus with 'Amwas (Nicomopolis).¹⁰

It used to be said that when he received the message Peter set off for Galilee—the Northern Province—but did not get very far!! Can such an interpretation really meet the case? The familiar surroundings of the Lake were the best part of a week's journey, even by the direct road through Samaria but longer still via Jericho and Jordan Valley—to get to Capernaum. In any circumstances is it credible that the Lord would have suggested the disciples making a rendez-vous somewhere in the north, the best part of 100 miles away? Impossible when Luke and John record appearances in Jerusalem the very Resurrection Day!¹¹ And equally impossible to suppose that our Lord would have been so heartless as to suggest it! Is there not ample ground for seeking the *Galilee* of these first appearances in the proximity of Jerusalem? There was some familiar trysting-place called *Galilee* where they knew instinctively the Master would meet them. Geography, pent-up emotionalism, the intuition of the women, the angelic messages (however "angels" be interpreted), and most of all the character of the Incarnate Christ share in the conviction that there was more than one place by Olivet, where Jesus "resorted with his disciples".

There is the distinctive Lukan contribution, with the message to the women "Remember what he told you, when he was still in Galilee"—about the foreshadowed suffering and resurrection. With no Northern appearance, and with no actual mention of the Ascension, like Matthew, beyond the phrase that "he was parted from them", Luke closes his account. But he does have the further reference to Bethany—ἐως πρὸς¹²—so that Olivet is once more in the picture. Is it too much to hazard the opinion that it was in Bethany where the women who had come up with Him were lodging—Joanna, Salome and the others—when the men climbed the mountain for the night vigil with the "Lord of glory"? We do not know who the two men were who accosted these women early on the Resurrection morning; they took it for granted that the women would remember what Jesus had said, even if it was a somewhat reproachful query. Arabic here has long had the second person feminine plural, thereby excluding the men. The women

¹⁰ See *Jesus of Palestine*, 265 and note 7 (269/70).

¹¹ Luke 24 and John 20.

¹² "As far as (Bethany)", RSV and NEB, Luke 24: 50.

should have remembered those occasions by the Lakeside in Capernaum or Bethsaida, when Jesus had been as outspoken over the impending tragedy and its breath-taking sequel as He was in converse with the disciples after "Caesarea Philippi", at the foot of Hermon, or on that last journey together on the road going up to Jerusalem. There is no reason for thinking that this Lukan note of Galilee is in reference to a possible connection with the Mount of Olives. On the other hand, however, Luke does state that during the tense days before the Crucifixion, when our Lord was daily teaching in the Temple Area, He used to spend the night "on the Mount called Olivet".¹³ Might not this lodgement have been where other Galilean pilgrims were accustomed to bivouac at Passover-time? A theory of this nature, involving the connection of the Northern Province with the Mount of Olives, is surely needed to explain these Resurrection allusions to Galilee. The apostles would hardly need to be "directed" to any special place—a specific detail of this nature hardly sounds like "Palestine"—they would have known intuitively just where to go. More important: this precludes the unthinkable thesis that for their *first meeting* with the Risen Saviour the disciples were bidden to start off on a return trek of 100 miles—the very thing the Gospels record that they did not do. St. Paul was able to corroborate that Oral Tradition that Jesus appeared first to Cephas—then to the "Eleven", in his Resurrection thesis.¹⁴

In his second book St. Luke seems to emphasize that "Jesus presented himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing to them (disciples) during forty days". Thus neither the Johannine Lakeside scene nor a return visit to Jerusalem some days before Pentecost are ruled out. In any case it may be apt to note that John calls the Lake the "Sea of Tiberias" without the alternative description as in chapter 6.¹⁵ Is there any valid reason against the implication of the Lakeside manifestation taking place half-way between Passover and Pentecost? Are there not too many differences in detail for the incident to be regarded a doublet of the story of the Call of Peter in Luke 5? Can it have been "invented" to record a Northern Galilean appearance to match those in Jerusalem? Is it not more likely that there was a return once more to the Holy City and the customary Galilean encampment on Olivet—this time with Pentecost in the offing—and then came the

¹³ Luke 21 : 37; I Cor. 15 : 4.

¹⁴ I Cor. 15 : 4.

¹⁵ If the Johannine Appendix was later than the Gospel, it might be taken for granted that "Tiberias" was known well enough.

expected night-vigil with their Master before He bade farewell in the early morning haze on the summit of the mountain—"that part which borders on Bethany"? It was then on this second occasion that they had their last talk about the things that concern the Kingdom of God. Is it not rather arbitrary to date the Ascension actually on the fortieth day after the Resurrection? It may well have been only a day or two before "the Feast of Pentecost was fully come". In an article in the *Expository Times* C. F. D. Moule, dealing with the "forty days" problem, wrote:

The next most likely occasion (after Passover) for men of Galilee to be in Jerusalem, is of course the next, namely Pentecost. And Pentecost about fifty days after Passover, or about forty days after the octave of Passover (at the end of the Feast of Unleavened bread), fits the forty days appearance plus a short period of waiting. Where would the Galileans have been meanwhile? Surely in Galilee.¹⁶

The appearance to the Five Hundred Brethren at once recorded by St. Paul in 1 Corinthians would also be fitted in during the return visit to the Northern Province,—surely the ideal centre for that all important revelation.¹⁷

One of the tragedies of religious history is that when the Arabs burst into the Fertile Crescent in the latter half of the seventh century, they did so in the belief that Jesus had not suffered persecution and crucifixion at the hands of the Jews, but that God took him up to Himself—the same Arabic root being used for the "Ascension" in New Testament and Quranic contexts.¹⁸ The Resurrection of Jesus for Muslims naturally never occurred; but it was on *at-Tūr* that "God highly exalted him". So does it remain till now that on the traditional spot where the disciples received their commission, which sent them into their world with "the imperishable message of eternal salvation",¹⁹ the sanctuary of the Ascension is in the care of the Islamic world. Olivet was not covered with buildings in the time of Christ and, adds Dalman, "there is nothing against the assumption that this was the scene of His last meeting-place with His disciples". So there is a rebuke on

¹⁶ *Expository Times* lxxviii (1956-7), 205ff.

¹⁷ See *Apostles of Palestine*, 174ff.

¹⁸ Ath-Tha'alabi, however (961-1038) in his *Stories of the Prophets* has it in reverse with the Quranic word used of the "Ascension" (Mi'raj) of the Prophet referred to that of our Lord. It seems questionable whether he knew of the location on Olivet.

¹⁹ From the shorter ending to Mark—N.E.B. (between Mark 16: 8 and 16: 9).

Olivet as well as remembrance. The Mount of Olives remains a watershed in monotheistic history and in human relationships. The question-mark remains.

“Ye men of Galilee, *why* stand ye gazing up into heaven?” May it not have been that standing where they were, this very address as “men of Galilee” took some sting out of the reproach? They could have hardly have continued “gazing”, called as they had just been to take the message to the uttermost parts of the earth, —even the more unlikely ones, where faith can always find its Olivet and love its Galilee.

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