

## THE CULT OF JESUS THE CHILD AND HIS PRAISE OF A CHILD IN REFLECTION OF SELECTED SOURCES

### Summary

Jesus took a small child as an example of accepting the kingdom of God, since when people in all periods of Christian thinking have tried to have Jesus himself as an ideal of spiritual childhood. This has happened through literature, liturgical celebrations of feasts of the Child Jesus, paintings and popular traditions. This pursuit is the origin of the cult of the Child Jesus.

This work takes its form mainly from manifestations of the cult of the Divine Infant in Czech poetry. The main inspiration are poets like Friedrich Bridel, Adam Michna z Otradovic, Jiří Karásek ze Lvovic and Jan Zahradníček. In their works these poets showed the childhood of Jesus and its cult in the most expressive way in the history of Czech literature. The content of this dissertation underlines their works and wants to highlight them.

There were various attempts to give form to the childhood of Jesus and naturally they are of differing value. Since the early Christian times we have the gospels of Matthew and Luke which tell us about the childhood of Jesus. Apart from these gospels, there are two apocryphal accounts of the childhood of Jesus: the Proto-Gospel of James and the Infancy Gospel of Thomas. The Proto-Gospel of James deals with events which happened before the birth of Jesus, that is to say, about the birth of the Virgin Mary, the conception of Christ and his birth. It is inspired by the Lucan narrative but in comparison to Luke its literal level is much higher. Among apocryphal gospels this is the outstanding text. However Infancy Gospel of Thomas does not have any special literary value and it is rather a historical curiosity. The Gospel is a naive fiction of Jesus' childhood, where the almightiness of God covers the humanity of Jesus and we meet Jesus as a child who is shorttempered and revengeful. The stories in Infancy Gospel of Thomas are often rather cruel.

The contents of the Proto-Gospel of James and Thomas came into medieval literature through a literary fake, the so-called Pseudo-Matthew Gospel, a late Latin compilation from the 8th or 9th century. In its prologue the book describes itself as a secret book of Mathew which was found and translated into Latin by St. Jerome. In medieval times this book influenced literary and artistic works.

The development of the cult of Baby Jesus was influenced by mystical literature and

especially by work of St. Bonaventure De quinque festivitibus pueri Jesu. This document is inspired by the works of St. Augustine and the spirituality of St. Francis of Assisi, which is known for its strong interiorisation of the experience of Christ's life and their new actualization. In this spirit St. Bonaventure wrote his work about the five feasts of the Child Jesus. A devout Christian soul is a spiritual mother of Christ that can conceive him, give birth to him, adore him with the Three Kings and in the end offer him to the Heavenly Father in the temple. Bonaventure seeks to place this pious meditation suitably in the practical Christian life and makes out of it a truly inspiring spiritual reading.

The most significant aspect for the cult of Jesus is the celebration of his birth at Christmas. The Christmas liturgy and experience of incarnation are dealt with at length in this dissertation.

Above all it is a description of the Gospel story written by St. Luke which is confronted with later versions of the experience of this event in the Proto-Gospel of James and with the event of the crib of St. Francis on the mountain of Greccio and obviously the making of cribs in modern period. I also write about the feast of Epiphany which was in the Orthodox Church considered as the original feast of the birth of the Lord. The development of the celebration in the West and East shows the popularity of the cult of the childhood of Jesus in both parts of the Christian world at that time.

The Christmas celebration of the birth of the Lord is connected to the popularity of statues of the Child Jesus. In Bohemia there is the best-known such statue, that of the Infant of Prague, originally from Spain, and given to the Carmelites by Polyxena of Lobkowitz. The statue was lost during the Thirty Years War. Later it was found by Luxembourgian Father Cyril of the Mother of God. A lot of miracles were accredited to the statue, most especially the saving of Prague from the Swedes during the siege in 1639.

The work further deals with the attempts to restore discover something about the childhood of Jesus which have been made by Christians in all periods of time. But about the reality of the childhood we have only one source – the narration of Luke about the young boy Jesus in the temple.

There is more information about the life of Jesus, for example that his family lived in Nazareth, that Joseph and Jesus worked as tektones; further we have general information about life in Palestine in

Jesus' time. So, based on this information some scholars try to reconstruct the picture of Jesus' childhood. Subject of this description is a summary of images of small Jesus. The aim of these attempts is to identify the young Jesus perception of his identity as Messiah of the Jews and Son of God and how he actually lived his ordinary life in a conservative Jewish town in a Hellenistic area of Galilee.

The next part of the work is concerned with spiritual childhood, which was shown by Jesus as an ideal to his disciples. This phenomenon is studied from the point of view of contemporary biblical exegesis and through the view of this issue held by two different Carmelite saints, Therese

of Lisieux and Edith Stein. The tension between the demand to be like children on the one hand, and on the other to be adult and decisive in following Christ creates a vast opportunity for discussion. We should be aware that the childlike dependence on the Heavenly Father led both saints to mature and courageous acceptance of their personal fate up to and beyond the borders of death. The final part of the work is concerned with importance of cult of Jesus the Child for modern man.