

July

From a series of monthly meditational essays by Eugene Halliday.

Our seventh month was named by Julius Caesar after himself when he reformed the Roman calendar, which had lost the proper relation of its festival dates with the seasons of the year they were supposed to celebrate. Caesar's own birthday fell on the twelfth of this month.

Roman religion was based chiefly on the needs of agriculture, the operations of which were naturally dependent on the season's characteristics. If the length of the year were not correctly calculated the seasons would not accurately be represented in the calendar.

The need to adjust the calendar brought into existence a group of religious experts called the Pontifices. Throughout Roman history they controlled the calendar and its festivals.

The year could be reckoned by the moon or the sun, but the two kinds of year resulting were not quite the same length. The pontifices had a method of harmonising the two ways of reckoning, but accumulations of errors over the years made necessary a number of successive adjustments.

The Roman year as known in history was based on a four-year cycle, and this way of reckoning lasted until Julius Caesar revised the calendar and gave us the year as we know it, needing only occasional adjustments such as those we make in a Leap Year.

All surviving portions of the Roman calendar date from 31 B.C. or later. After this the year began officially with the month of January.

The old religious agricultural year had begun with March when all living things, under the spring sun's heat and light, leapt into renewed activity. The next three months showed Nature's forces in the plant world opening in April, increasing in May, and maturing in June. The next month, the fifth, and thus called Quinctilis, was renamed by Caesar "July", probably to place his signature on the revised calendar. Here, then, we see an ambitious man placing his mark in *time*, an emperor whose whole attained power visibly expressed itself in the material might of Rome.

Strange coincidence that this man should have the same initials as Jesus Christ, whose kingdom was not at all of the world known to Rome. Let us compare these two men.

Julius Caesar, a Roman soldier-statesman, was by birth an aristocrat. Jesus Christ was the Son of Mary, wife of a carpenter of Nazareth.

Caesar as a young man in Rome went through all the usual public offices. There he worked to build up a popular opposition to the governing senatorial body. He allied himself with Pompey, the greatest soldier of his day, and with Crassus, a newly rich man seeking office in order to confer respectability on himself.

Christ, coming from eternity, having been baptised by John the Baptist in the river Jordan, withdrew into the desert and there fasted and overcame all temptations to seek material power, wealth and dominion. After this he made friends with simple fishermen and began to preach his new message of love, teaching the people that man cannot serve God and Mammon.

Caesar's military campaigns in Gaul brought France and other lands as far as the Rhine under the Roman yoke. Twice he invaded Britain. Crassus, playing his ambitious part, was killed in a war with Parthia. Caesar's military fame planted a seed of envy in Pompey's mind and brought him to terms with the Senate. Caesar replied by taking an army across the Rubicon, a little river in northern Italy, an act signifying rebellion. His enemies abandoned Rome, but the rival armies met at Pharsalus in Greece. Pompey was defeated and later murdered.

Christ's message of love brought Him fame of a different order to Caesar's. Brought before the Sanhedrin on a charge of blasphemy for claiming God as His Father, Christ stood at peace with himself. Before Pilate he offered no self-defence and witnessed only to the Truth of his divine purpose.

Caesar, an emperor, considered himself a god on earth, and aimed to reform a material empire's administration and politics.

Christ, accepting the title "Son of Man" and claiming the Fatherhood of God for all lovers of the Truth, declared that His kingdom was not of this world.

Caesar's material ambitions and inflexible self-will led inevitably to the Ides of March. In 44 B.C. he was murdered by a group of conspirators led by Marcus Brutus, his body pierced by many daggers.

Christ's spiritual purpose and the subjection of His will to the will of God led to the crucifixion. In 33 A.D. Golgotha saw Him silhouetted against the sky, his hands and feet pierced by nails, his side opened by a soldier's lance.

Strange that two men so totally opposed in purpose should both be murdered, and for totally opposite reasons, one because he was ambitious for power in the world, and the other because in this world He had no ambition whatever.

Caesar would have justified his actions by his declared liberal ideas for an improved material empire. Yet the oligarchy which had no desire for his "improvements" replied with the same violence that another oligarchy used against the Christ whose "reforms" pointed only to the extension of the love of God to all men.

Caesar had two allies, Pompey and Crassus, both of whom died as he did in pursuit of material goals. Christ was crucified between two thieves, Gestas the impenitent, and Dismas the penitent. Two stranger triads could not be imagined. How are we to relate them?

When men of material ambitions pursue their aims they have always some mental process devising some explanation of their actions. Self justification of some kind is an inherent need of the human soul. Caesar justified his ambitions by his dreams of a "better" material empire, an empire whose roads would extend over the whole earth, to bring Roman Law and Order to all men.

Christ justified his actions by His vision of the City of God, in which all men would live and move in the light of divine love, their mutual helpfulness a spontaneous expression of their more abundant life.

The ideal of the City of God must be evoked even by its greatest enemies, for if it is not invoked these men will receive no real backing from the "ordinary" men of the world. For "ordinary" men are so only because their deepest instincts are fed from the well-spring of God's love. There is an apparent mystery here, for the "ordinary" man's ordinariness springs from that in him which is most extra-ordinary, his respect for the uniqueness of each human individual soul.

When Caesar desired to overthrow the Roman oligarchy he had to appeal to the ordinary men of Rome. Without popular support to strengthen his arm, Caesar's purpose could never have been fulfilled. To gain this support, whatever his real purpose, he had to declare *a good* intent, not an evil one. This fact shows the deep action of the divine spirit in "ordinary" men.

When Christ willed to bring the message of God's Love of men to men. He knew the echo which would sound within every man's heart, the echo which no man can completely silence.

When Caiaphas uttered his self-justifying words to send Christ to the Cross, he had to say words of good significance. "It is fitting that one man should die *for the people*".

In July, let us meditate on the lives of the two men whose initials were J.C.