

THE JEWISH-CHRISTIAN SCHISM (PART I)

by DAVID FLUSSER

I. Introduction

The Jewish origin of Christianity is an historical fact. It is also clear that Christianity constituted a new community, distinct from Judaism. Thus, Christianity is in the peculiar position of being a religion which, because of its Jewish roots, is obliged to be occupied with Judaism, while a Jew can fully live his Jewish religious life without wrestling with the problems of Christianity. From its very beginnings, Christianity understood itself more or less as the heir of Judaism and as its true expression, at the same time that it knew itself to have come into existence through the special grace of Christ. As the vast majority of Jews did not agree with their Christian brethren in this claim, Christianity became a religion of Gentiles to whom, from the second century on, it was forbidden to fulfill the commandments of the Law of Moses — a book which was, at the same time, a part of their Holy Scriptures. Already then the majority of Christians thought that the Jewish way of life was forbidden even to those Jews who had embraced Christianity, an attitude which later became the official position of the Church. While antisemitism existed before Christianity, Christian anti-Judaism was far more virulent and dangerous. The latter rejected most of the motifs of Greco-Roman antisemitism, as these were used also against Christians, but invented new arguments. Most of these existed as early as the first century — some of

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them have their roots already in the New Testament — and by the second century we can recognize more or less clearly the whole direction of Christian anti-Judaism. It is not our task here to describe its disastrous consequences or the horrible suffering of Jews in Christian countries throughout the ages. May it be that these were in fact the unhappy consequence of an ephemeral historical constellation around the year 100 C.E.?

In order to deal with our subject, we must examine a number of other questions. Throughout human history, most new religions or religious communities have arisen from a previous religion or religious community, and a new faith often claimed that it was the fulfilment of the older faith and that it represented its true meaning. The fact that in such cases the former religious community, or the majority of its members, did not recognize its own faith in this new interpretation, and that the old community did not disappear within the new one, was quite independent of the truth of the old or the new faith. The claim of the latter and the reluctance of the former to accept this claim caused tensions and hatred. As far as I can see, Christian anti-Judaism is probably unparalleled in its vigour and consequences. The nature of these splits in the history of religion varies, and it is difficult to locate the exact moment when a given group ceases to be a sect and becomes a separate religious community or even a new religion. For example, it is difficult today to determine whether Gnosticism was a Christian or heretical sect, or a different religion, while Manichaeism is today rightly seen as a specific religion, different from Gnosticism. In modern times, we have the case of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints, founded by Joseph Smith, Jr., whose members believe the Bible and the Book of Mormon to be the word of God and to contain all that God has revealed to mankind. Mormonism surely has its own peculiar values, but is it essentially a Christian sect or a new religion originating in Christianity? I dare not answer this question, nor another, related, question: namely, whether Mormonism is more or less Christian than Christianity is Jewish. I hope to show why I think that Christianity is more a Jewish possibility than Mormonism is a Christian way. One thing does seem to me to be clear, in any event: that the example of Mormonism demonstrates that, even if the elucidation of the historical background and the coincidence of circumstances may be useful for the understanding of the origin and development of a new religious concept, such research cannot explain the very essence of a new religious community, its impact, and the causes of its separation from the original community. These preliminary remarks are necessary, at least in order to explain the Jewish rabbinic view about the Church even in the early stages of Christianity. From the beginning, it was known both to Jews and to Christians that they believed in the same one God, and today both Jews and Christians are better able to appreciate the common Jewish values which Christianity inherited from her mother and which she developed in her own manner.

Paul says that Jesus was “born under the Law” (Gal. 4:4) and that he “became a servant of the circumcision to maintain the truth of God by making good his promises to the patriarchs” (Rom. 15:8). Today, many scholars recognize that Jesus was a pious Jew, living, as did other Jews, according to the Law of Moses as it was practiced in his days, and that he recommended this religious way of life to his disciples. It is also generally accepted that Jesus did not preach a new religion. His debates with the Pharisees, even according to the version of the synoptic Gospels, were not apt to arouse anger and enmity on their side, and his special way of interpreting the nature of Judaism was nevertheless not revolutionary and centrifugal. Had it been so, this would have been stressed by the authors of the New Testament writings, who wished to separate the new faith from the mother religion. As we shall see, with the exception of the Gospels, Jesus’ opinions are not reflected in the New Testament writings, and the tension with or negative critique of the commandments of the Law and the Jewish legal-oriented way of life found in the Epistles is never based upon Jesus’ words. Only later Church Fathers found support for their struggle against judaizers in the Gospels.

II. The Christological Factor

As Jesus’ teaching was Jewish, so was the Christology of the Christian communities in all its components. On the one hand, Christology developed from Jesus’ exalted self-awareness and from what happened to or was believed to have happened to Jesus and, on the other hand, from various Jewish religious motifs which became connected with Jesus Christ. Jesus’ personal experience of divine sonship came to be connected with the Jewish concept of the preexistence of the Messiah, and this paved the way for the idea that Christ was at the same time God’s hypostasis, that “the son is the effulgence of God’s splendour and the stamp of God’s very being and sustains the universe by his word of power,” and that through him God created the world (Heb. 1:2–3). The Jewish idea that the death of martyrs expiates sins was naturally applied to Jesus’ crucifixion.¹ Even the concept of Jesus’ resurrection is Jewish, as is that of the ascension. Jesus himself had spoken about the coming of the Son of Man; this figure is the highest concept of the Messiah in Judaism. Even if in the rest of the New Testament the title of the Son of Man did not play a major role, the concept itself was fruitful, and it came to be believed that at the end Christ would sit on the throne of God as the divine judge.

This entire metahistorical drama is composed of Jewish elements. The fact that passages from the Old Testament, speaking of victory over death and reflecting

1. See E. Lohse, *Martyrer und Gottesknecht* (Göttingen, 1963).

pre-biblical mythology, are used in the New Testament as an expression of the belief in Jesus' death and resurrection, shows the mythic aspect of this metahistorical drama of Christ. Indeed, the Church's Christology was a sublime expression of the tendency of Second Commonwealth Judaism to remythologize itself; Christianity showed the extreme possibilities of this remythologization. From the early subapostolic period on, Christianity drew further consequences from Christology: Christ was not only believed to be divine, but he could even be designated as God. This title was used by Ignatius of Antioch, but not by his friend Polycarp, even though there was surely no difference in their faith. Later, the doctrine of the Holy Trinity was developed, mainly, as it seems, to avoid the belief in two gods. Because of the Jewish stress on monotheism, it is difficult to see how Judaism could accept the belief in the complete divinity of Christ. This difference between Judaism and Patristic Christianity is reflected in the Rabbinic writings in which, with Christianity in view, the idea that God had a son and that this son was divine was rejected. This was also the point of view of Islam, the third monotheistic religion.

We have seen that Christology drew upon Jewish motifs; would it have been possible for the belief in Jesus' metahistorical biography — without its later extreme expressions — to have found a place in Judaism? It seems improbable that this could have become the faith of the whole of Jewry or even of its majority, as this would have required a radical change in the entire structure of Judaism: first, because Messianology is the expression of only one of the tendencies in ancient Judaism, namely, that of a strong remythologization in a specific direction, which even in mitigated form was not accepted by all the Jews. Second, for the majority of Jews, even the Christology contained in the New Testament was clearly unacceptable, not only because such a belief was unusual, but also because the whole cosmic drama of Christ and the superhuman nature and task of Christ was in disharmony with the Jewish belief in the God who is One and whose Name is One.

Moreover, from the beginning there were many Jews who were unprepared to accept that Jesus had performed the task assigned to the Messiah by tradition, because they expected that the Messiah would liberate Israel (Luke 24:21), and most of them were reluctant to believe that the Messiah was "bound to suffer thus before entering upon his glory" (*Ibid.*, v. 26). But even those Jews who believed that Jesus was the Messiah, and that by his death he had expiated the sins of those who believed in him, and that he had risen and would return in his Messianic glory, were not automatically prepared to accept as their own the cosmic drama of Christology and that Christ was the divine Son of God. But even if we are unable to show that there was a Jewish group which accepted the entire christological drama, we cannot exclude the possibility that such a sect once did exist, if not in Palestine than possibly in the Hellenistic diaspora. From the historical point of view, the situation is complicated by the fact that we know

about the existence of a fully developed Christology only from the period when Gentile Christianity had already emerged. A purely Jewish group, whose belief was identical with the developed Christology of the Church, if such existed, cannot be described as a specific form of Judaism; such a group would be a sect, which probably could not win over the majority of Jews, and it is questionable whether such a sect could have long endured. It would be unreasonable to underestimate the newness of the message of the Church and the difference between the main structure of the Jewish faith and the Christocentricity of the Church. Referring to Judaism and Christology, Martin Buber once said that in Judaism there is no knot on the cable leading from the creation to the final redemption of humanity at the end of days — and he was not completely wrong.²

III. The Historical Problems

But let us return to problems of history. When we examine the various writings of the New Testament, we discover a basic difference between the Gospels and Acts, on the one hand, and the rest of the New Testament, on the other. If we did not have the Gospels and Acts, our information about the person and life of Jesus would be extremely fragmentary, and we would know next to nothing about his teaching. Outside the Gospels, there are very few sayings of Jesus, and these are not theological or doctrinal, but “halakhic.”³ There we learn that Jesus was a Jew from the family of David, that he was born under the Law (Gal. 4:4), and that he became the “servant” to the “circumcised” (Rom. 15:8). In the Epistle to the Hebrews we read about the temptation of Jesus (2:18; 4:15; cf. Luke 22:28) and about his agony and his receiving of the heavenly voice (*Ibid.*, 5:5–7), which is also mentioned in II Peter 1:16–18 in connection with the transfiguration. This is essentially all that we can learn from the New Testament outside of the Gospels and Acts about Jesus’ life prior to his passion and death. Naturally, this latter is often mentioned, but we do not learn much about the attending circumstances. From Rev. 11:8 we can deduce that it occurred in Jerusalem and in Hebrews 13:12 we read that Jesus “suffered outside the gate.” In I Tim. 6:13 we find the name of Pontius Pilate mentioned, but outside of the Gospels and Acts the Romans are never mentioned in connection with the crucifixion of Jesus. Instead of this, in one passage Jewish guilt appears: the Jews killed Jesus Christ (I Thess. 2:15). According to the famous passage in I Cor. 15:3–8, Christ died, was buried, and was raised to life on the third day. The fact of the resurrection is often men-

2. M. Buber, “Ragaz und Israel,” *Neue Wege* 41 (1947), p. 507.

3. I Cor. 7:10–11 about matrimony; I Cor. 9:14 about those who preach the Gospel; I Cor. 11:23–26 about the Last Supper; James 5:12 about oaths is probably a quotation. According to I John 3:23, mutual love is a command of Jesus. The only purely non-halakhic passage based probably upon a saying of Jesus (Lk. 19:10) is I Tim. 1:15, but this is a paraphrase and not a reference.

tioned: it is both an historical experience and a cornerstone of Christ's metahistorical biography.

We have seen that, with the exception of the Gospels and Acts, the information in the New Testament about the "historical" Jesus is extremely fragmentary, while the christological drama, from the Creation through Christ to the End of Days, is richly presented: it is the very content of the message of Christianity. On the other hand, were only the synoptic Gospels preserved, we would have very little information about the Christological drama; indeed, I hope to show elsewhere that, in those places in the Synoptic Gospels in which more significant christological motifs do appear, these were incorporated in the texts at the Greek stage of development, sometimes by the Evangelists themselves. This is true also of the two passages concerning the expiatory function of Jesus' death (Mark 10:45 and parr.; Mark 14:24 and parr.). Only from the Synoptic Gospels do we know the faith *of* Jesus; outside them, it is the faith *in* Christ that is mostly presented and developed.⁴ From Jesus' sayings in the synoptic Gospels, we may conclude that Jesus' exalted self-awareness, the concept of sonship, and most probably his messianic task are authentic and go back to the "historical" Jesus and that this, together with what his disciples and followers believed about him, was the historical basis of the metahistorical christological cosmic drama.

It has been necessary to explain all this in order better to understand the separation of Christianity from Judaism. The Christology of the Church originated neither in Essene circles nor in the broader movement⁵ within which Essenism crystallized. This movement has other characteristics, and the importance of the hypostatic aspect, which is of central importance and in fact constitutive for Christology, is there very unimportant and evidently came from outside. On the other hand, the concept of hypostasis is important in two spheres within ancient Judaism: first, the Rabbinic,⁶ as can be seen e.g., from the Aramaic Bible translations, the Targumim, and secondly, the Hellenistic, as in Philo, the Wisdom of Solomon, etc. Rabbinic and Hellenistic Judaism are therefore the most likely spheres for illuminating the Jewish origin of the Christology of the Church. It is in Gentile Christianity — a Christianity which came into existence through the missionary activity of Hellenistic Jews — that the christological drama is central.

4. Compare already G.E. Lessing, "Die Religion Christi," in *Gotthold Ephraim Lessings sämtliche Schriften*, ed., K. Lachmann. Fr. Muncker (Leipzig, 1902), XVI: 518–19; English translation in *Lessing's Theological Writings*, trans., H. Chadwick (Stanford, Cal., 1957). p. 106.

5. i.e., the circles within which books as the Ethiopic Enoch, the Book of Jubilees and the Testaments of the Patriarchs were written.

6. See, e.g., J. Abelson. *The Immanence of God in Rabbinical Literature* (London, 1912). See now, also, myself and S. Safrai. "The Essene Doctrine of Hypostasis and Rabbi Meir," *Immanuel* 14 (1982), pp. 47–57.

That drama is contained and developed in such texts and passages in the New Testament as were originally written in Greek, i.e. the Greek stratum of the Gospels, while the ancient Hebrew stratum of the synoptic Gospels not only fails to reflect the Church's Christology, but also the Christology of all known Jewish Christian groups which, to use the term of the Church Fathers, is poor. Yet it seems to me more probable that the Christology of the Church stems from Rabbinic Judaism. Not only is the entire characteristic atmosphere similar, but the authority of the Mother Church in Jerusalem and in Palestine was then quite strong in matters of faith and those who developed its Christology took as a point of departure Jesus' self-awareness and his concept of sonship. They also knew authentic traditions about Jesus, which became unimportant for Gentile Christianity and even for Paul. We can therefore imagine that during the period between Jesus' death and Paul's conversion some Jewish believers, whose Judaism was already strongly remythologized, reinterpreted Jesus' self-awareness, the Cross and the belief in his resurrection in the light of their own understanding of the Jewish faith. This was the hour of the birth of Christology.⁷ They were probably a minority in the Mother Church, as the Christological concepts of the Jewish Christian groups are poor,⁸ but it was this minority which, without desiring it, caused Christianity to become a new religion. It is impossible to know how far this Christology had developed before it became a cornerstone of Gentile Christianity. As already said, if such a purely Jewish group really existed, that is, one professing belief in the whole cosmic Christological drama, before the rise of Gentile Christianity and independent of it, it could not have converted the greater part of Jewry because of the different structure of its faith. It was this developed Christology, and not Jesus' faith, that became the main content of the Christian religion until the period of the Reformation, when in some Christian

7. An important witness for the Jewish Palestinian origin of Christology is probably the Book of Revelation. Its author was surely not a Paulinist, but evidently a Palestinian Jew, whose natural language was Hebrew (for the question see: G. Mussie, *The Morphology of Koine Greek as used in the Apocalypse of St. John: A Study of Bilingualism [Novum Testamentum]*. Supplements, 27. (Leiden, 1971)). It is difficult to decide what is the origin of his Christology, but further study is necessary. Meanwhile, see Trautgott Holtz. *Die Christologie der Apokalypse des Johannes* (Berlin, 1962).

8. Even so, a reexamination of the Christology of the Ebionites is badly needed. One thing is clear: the Ebionite Jesus is not only a superhuman figure, but a kind of divine being. This is probably a special development of the original tendency within the Mother Church to elevate Jesus to more than human status. It is impossible to know much about other Jewish Christian groups, with the exception of the Jewish Christians who were discovered by S. Pines, "The Jewish Christians of the Early Centuries of Christianity According to a New Source," *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, II [13] (1968) pp. 237-310; *idem.*, "Israel, My Firstborn and the Sonship of Jesus," in *Mekqarim ba-Qabbalah uve-toldot ha-datot [Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom S. Scholem]*, (Jerusalem, 1967), pp. 177-190; *idem.*, "Judaean-Christian Materials in an Arabic Jewish Treatise," in *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 35 (1967), pp. 187-217.

groups Jesus' message was again raised to life. Then the old discrepancy again became vigorous, even if those whose faith is centered in Jesus' message and those who stress more the faith in Christ do not themselves feel the difference.

The centrifugal power of the Christological system began to function in a far more effective way once Christianity became primarily a faith of Gentiles. It is not our task here to deal with all the causes for this astonishing change. Successful Jewish propaganda and the superiority of Judaism over paganism as a moral and monotheistic religion paved the way for the Christian mission, at the beginning especially among those who were close to Judaism yet did not dare to take the difficult step of becoming full proselytes. To become Christian meant, for these "God-fearers" and other Gentiles, an occasion to overcome their natural inferiority complex towards those of Jewish faith. By becoming Christians, they became not only equal to Jews, but also superior to them. The new elements of the Christian message and its structure, which differed from the basic form of main-stream Judaism, were the reasons why the overwhelming majority of Jews declined to join the Christians. Precisely this fact favored the success of the Christian mission among the Gentiles. As the Jews did not accept the Christian claim to be the true Judaism, Gentiles who embraced Christianity claimed to be not only equal to the Jews, but superior to them. The Jews were wrong and the Christians were right, and one was even permitted to hate the Jews. Even from a sociological point of view, Christology was an important factor fostering the departure of Christianity from Judaism.

We have seen that a developed Christology is attested in Gentile Christianity from its very beginnings: it was its shibboleth. Today, it is difficult to understand why Christology attracted so many Gentiles in the apostolic and subapostolic period. In the writings of the second century, after Melito of Sardis (d. 190 C.E.), Christology is weakened both in the apologetic literature and in most of the New Testament Apocrypha from this period; the struggle of Christian monotheism against paganism was then fought with Jewish weapons. Our difficulty in understanding Christian success in the first apostolic and subapostolic period is due to our superior knowledge of the pagan world. We are no longer so naive today as to think that in the first and second centuries the pagan world longed for salvation, and we no longer exaggerate the impact of mystery religions upon that world; it is now generally agreed that the Christology of the Christian Church was not influenced by pagan mystery-religions, though a similarity between them had already been pointed out by the Church Fathers. The real similarity between the beliefs represented in the mystery-religions and the content of Christology seems to be that both share a direct appeal to the primordial forces of the human soul, an appeal known in such archaic types of faith which are anterior to developed polytheism with its pantheon. In classical antiquity this archaic kind of religiosity was represented by Orphism and probably by the mysteries of Eleusis,

while in the period of the beginnings of Christianity this was done by the mystery cults. The belief in a divine being whose suffering and death redeem the believer from evil and whose resurrection is a victory over death was familiar to many non-Jews⁹ — although we do not know to what extent they were attracted by the similarity of this belief to that of Christianity to become Christians. This kind of attraction was surely weaker among Jews, and in later Rabbinic literature precisely these motifs aroused polemics against Christianity. At the same time, at the end of the second century, there was a revival of Christology in the Church; Christianity was then strong enough to deal with its own inner problems and could define itself. With the revival of Christology, christological conflicts arose and the struggle for orthodoxy began.

IV. Anti-Judaism Among Christians

But let us return to the beginnings of Christianity. Christology not only divided Christians from the majority of Jews, but it also fostered anti-Jewish feelings among Christians. Christianity is, so to say, the apotheosis of a catastrophe and there is a general tendency in religious movements of this type to develop, to a greater or lesser degree, a tension toward the mother religion within which the catastrophe occurred. This phenomenon can easily be observed in the relation of Christianity to Judaism. The traumatic experience of the Cross in the Christian faith was one of the reasons why the Gentile Church not only refused to accept the Jewish way of life, but even created an ideology of ambivalent tension towards Jewish law. In its ideological opposition to the law, the “catastrophic” implications of Christology played a greater part. “Christ brought us freedom from the curse of the law by becoming for our sake an accursed thing; for Scripture says, ‘A curse is on everyone who is hanged on a gibbet (my translation).’” And the purpose of it was, “that the blessing of Abraham in Jesus Christ might come upon the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith” (Gal. 3:13–14). It is easy for Christians to overlook the weight of such passages and their implications for Judaism and for Jews who were faithful to

9. Justin Martyr in his *First Apology*, Ch. 21, says that “in saying that the Logos was born for us without sexual union, as Jesus Christ, our teacher, and that he was crucified and died, and after rising again ascended into heaven, we introduce nothing new” beyond what pagans claim of the “so-called sons of Zeus.”

According to Justin (*Ibid.*, Ch. 24), the advantage of Christianity over Greek myth is that only that which is believed about Christ is true. This attitude is reminiscent of that of a Japanese Christian who once explained to me his conversion to Christianity, as follows: He already knew from Buddhism about the fact of redemption from the material world, but only the Christian message explained to him where and how it actually occurred. The superiority of Christology over similar pagan concepts was evidently the idea that “Christ died for our sins” (I Cor. 15:3), i.e., the expiatory aspect, taken from Jewish martyrdom. The notion of sin is a specifically Jewish one, without any real parallel in Greek and pagan thought. Thus, no pagan initiate could experience the redemption from sin in the manner of his Christian counterpart and become free of guilt.

their own religious way of life and tradition. I suppose that the rabbis did not read the Epistle to the Galatians, so they probably also did not know Paul's allegory about Hagar and Sarah in Gal. 4:21–5:1. Happily enough, such passages were evidently unknown to the ancient Jews, as they are unknown to their modern descendants, but the unhappy implications of the spirit which gave birth to such words were surely felt from the beginning.

We now examine what we can know about anti-Jewish feelings among the first Christians of Jewish stock. Because the majority of the Jews did not accept the new message, there is a very high probability that tension with and even hatred of the Synagogue existed among some Jewish Christians. Their fellow Jews did not accept what appeared to them to be obviously true. The rejection of the Christian message surely caused a growing aggressiveness on the part of Jewish Christians, and this was probably one of the reasons why, especially in the early Jamnia period at the end of the first century, anti-Christian feelings arose among the rabbis. As a consequence of the disappointment of Jewish Christians with the Synagogue, there were probably some Jewish Christians who invented the accusation that the Jews were guilty of the death of Jesus — an accusation possibly tantamount to that of deicide. Unfortunately, this assumption, though very probable, is highly hypothetical. The only evidence comes from two descriptions of the Crucifixion in the newly discovered Jewish Christian source in Arabic translation.¹⁰ In the synoptic Gospels, tendentious passages reflecting aversion against leading Jewish groups, and finally against the whole Jewish people, came into being only in the Greek stage of those Gospels, and one notices that in most cases these Greek changes in the originally Hebrew narratives and sayings originate from only *one* of the three Gospels (e.g., Mark 3:6, adopted by Matt. 12:14 and Luke 11:53–54) and are the work of *one* evangelist. Another fact, which is often forgotten, is that critical literary analysis reveals no traces of re-Judaization within the synoptic tradition. This is natural: the process within early Christianity was one of progressive de-Judaization.

10. Pines, "The Jewish Christians." *op cit.*, (n. 8). In A.F.J. Klijn and G.J. Reinink, *Patristic Evidence for Jewish-Christian Sects* [NT. Supplements. 36 (Leiden, 1973)], pp. 220–224. fragments from a Jewish-Christian commentary to Isaiah are quoted from Jerome. They are strongly anti-Rabbinic, oppose the Oral Law, and betray a favorable opinion about Paul. It seems to me that these Nazoraeans were Hebrew-speaking Jews who were won to Christianity by the Gentile Christian mission.

It is difficult not to see centrifugal tendencies towards the Synagogue and the Law in the New Testament Epistles and the Gospel of John. These writings originated in Greek-speaking Diaspora communities, and most, if not all, of their authors were of Jewish origin and many of the polemical arguments appearing there are not directly related to the Christian message. It has already been suggested that the Gospel of John reflects some unknown Jewish Hellenistic heterodox circles. See D. Cullmann, *Der Johannäische Kreis* (Tübingen, 1975).

Previously, it was generally thought that Matthew reflects the anti-Jewish feelings of early Jewish Christians, but it has now become practically certain that the final redactor of Matthew was a Gentile Christian, and that he is responsible for the virulent anti-Judaism contained in this Gospel.¹¹ Matthew is the only synoptic Gospel in which Israel as a whole is dispossessed and the Gentile Church takes its place. This is not a Jewish Christian standpoint, but an extreme position of a Gentile Christian. Matthew's parable of the marriage feast (Mt. 22:1–10; cf. Luke 14: 16–24) shows that this Gospel was written after the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans. According to Mt. 22:7, this was the punishment for the wickedness of Israel. If so, it seems that the men who came to the feast symbolize the Gentiles. Matthew's concept becomes even clearer when we consider his reinterpretation of the original meaning of the parable of the wicked husbandmen (Mt. 21:33–46; Mk. 12:1–12; Lk. 20:9–19). Originally, the vineyard is Israel (Isa. 5:7), but Matthew deemed the vineyard to symbolize God's kingdom in which his elect have a place, and so he added to Jesus' words: "Therefore I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation that yields proper fruit" (Mt. 21:43). The kingdom of God will be taken from Israel and will be given to another *nation*, namely, the Gentile Church. That this kingdom will be taken from the Jewish people as a whole becomes certain from another passage in Matthew which he has rewritten, an addition to the story of the centurion in Capernaum (Mt. 8:5–10; Luke 7:1–10). The Matthean passage (8:11–12) is a rewritten second part of an original saying of Jesus, which is preserved in Luke 13:28–30.¹² The original saying had nothing to do with the exemplary faith of the Gentile centurion, but expressed Jesus' dislike of the "cult of personality" of those followers who did not do the will of his heavenly Father. Of those false followers, Jesus said (Luke 13:28–29): "...There will be wailing and grinding of teeth there, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrown out. From East and West people will come, from North and South, and sit at the table in the kingdom of God." This last sentence is an allusion to Psalm 107:2–3, which Jesus quoted as a prophecy of the future ingathering of Israel. Matthew (8:11–12) has rewritten this passage and changed its meaning completely. He quoted the first half of the saying elsewhere (Mt. 7:21–22) and the second part became the end of the

11. See L. Abel, "Who Wrote Matthew?," *New Testament Studies* 17 (1971), pp. 138–152; D. Flusser, "Two Anti-Jewish Montages in Matthew," *Immanuel* 5 (1975), pp. 37–45; Lloyd Gaston, "The Messiah of Israel as Teacher of the Gentiles, The Setting of Matthew Christology," *Interpretation* 29 (1975), pp. 24–40. About the tendencies in the description of the Crucifixion in Mark, see D. Flusser, "Der Gekreuzigte und die Juden," *Jahresbericht, Theologische Fakultät Luzern* (1975/76), pp. 18–29 and in *Freiburger Rundbrief* 28, (1976), p. 152–157. [English: "The Crucified One and the Jews," *Immanuel* 7 (1977), 25–37]; cf. *idem.*, "Do You Prefer 'New Wine?'," *Immanuel* 9 (1979), pp. 26–31. See also M. Lowe and D. Flusser, "Evidence Corroborating a Proto-Matthean Synoptic Theory," *NTS*, 29 (1983), pp. 25–47.

12. Its first part is preserved in Mt. 7:21–23 (and in Lk. 6:46; 13:26–27).

pericope on the Gentile centurion. According to him, Jesus then said: “I tell you this: among *nobody* in Israel have I found such faith.” The Matthean Jesus continues: “I tell you, many will come from East and West and sit at table with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven, but the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness, the place of wailing and grinding of teeth.” The kingdom of God will be taken from the sons of the kingdom, and the Jewish people, Israel, will be condemned to hell, while the believing Gentiles, a nation to whom will be given the kingdom of God, will come and sit down with the righteous patriarchs in the kingdom of Heaven. In asserting that Israel are condemned to hell and that the Gentiles will be the heirs of the kingdom of God, Matthew is, of course, far more extreme than Paul and even more simplistic than John. This vulgar anti-Judaism is found among many members of the early Gentile Church; a similar position was taken later by Melito of Sardis. This, and other considerations, compel us to believe that Matthew was not a Jewish Christian, but a Gentile who wrote his Gospel after the destruction of the Temple. Thus, his Gospel is not evidence of early Jewish Christian hostility towards the Synagogue.

The broader concepts underlying Mt. 8:11–12 become evident from two early Christian parallels. The first appears in the so-called V Ezra (or II Ezra), a small Christian apocalypse preserved in the first two chapters of the Latin translation of IV Ezra.¹³ The Christology of this work is not developed, probably because the author did not wish to betray its Christian origins. The rejection of the Jewish people is not even motivated by their wickedness towards Christ. This small apocalypse was written after the destruction of the Temple. God is going to deliver the homes of the Jews “to a coming people who, though they have not heard me, believe” (1:35). This people will come from the East, and God will give them as leaders Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the twelve minor prophets (1:38–40), and the kingdom of Jerusalem “which I would have given to Israel... and... I will give them the eternal tabernacle which I have prepared for them” and the tree of life (2:10–14). The same idea is expressed by Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with the Jew Trypho* (26, 1; 80, 1). He and many other Christians believed that “this place, Jerusalem, shall be rebuilt” and that “the nation” of Christians “shall be gathered together and made joyful with Christ and the patriarchs and the prophets” and the saints from the Jews and those who became proselytes before the coming of Christ.

It is interesting to see that in both parallels to Mt. 8:11–12, the prophets appear together with the patriarchs, while they are lacking from the Matthean passage. On the other hand, Luke 13:28 speaks about “Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and all

13. For translation and commentary we used: *I and II Esdras*, Introduction, Translation and Commentary by Jacob M. Myers. (*The Anchor Bible* | Garden City, N.Y., 1947|), pp. 140–158.

the prophets in the kingdom of God,” but there the saying has not the same, secondary meaning as in Matthew and the two other parallels. On the other hand, in *both*, the designation of Gentile Christians as a “nation” appears, which is absent in the pertinent passages in Matthew and Luke, but is found in Mt. 21:43: “Therefore I tell you the kingdom of God will be taken from you and given to a nation that yields proper fruit.” According to both, Justin Martyr and V Ezra, this nation shall be gathered together in the rebuilt Jerusalem of the last days.

Does this mean that an older concept of rejection of the Jews was combined with the hope for an eschatological Jerusalem, which would now become, not the place of the gathered people of Israel, which God would have given to them, but the royal city of the nation of Christian Gentiles,¹⁴ (according to Justin, together with the saintly pre-Christian Jews) who would be presided over by Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets?¹⁵ Another question, even more difficult to answer, is whether it was Matthew himself who changed the original saying of Jesus into an anti-Jewish statement. It is possible that this reinterpretation is older than Matthew. The prophets are mentioned together not only in V Ezra and Justin Martyr, but also in Luke 13:18, while they are lacking in Matthew 8:11. It is therefore possible that the anti-Jewish form of the saying existed before Matthew and that Matthew forgot to mention the prophets. If so, the whole concept that Israel is rejected and that the “nation” of Gentile Christians have inherited their place might have been older than Matthew. In any case, we have seen how a saying of Jesus speaking about false disciples and the gathering of Israel became a violent anti-Jewish logion.

Matthew is the first known Christian who thought that the whole of Israel is rejected and that the Gentile Church became God’s chosen nation. In his day, it was easier to think so, because he wrote after the catastrophe of the destruction of Jerusalem (Mt. 22:7). There were then Gentile Christians who also believed that now the Jewish nation would even disappear physically. “Let them be scattered among the nations and their names obliterated from the earth because they held my covenant in contempt” (V Ezra 2:7; cf. 1:33–34). Melito of Sardis expressed the view that Israel would no longer exist even more clearly: Israel is destroyed, is dead (*Pascal Homily* 762–64), and all the nations are invited to

14. According to V Ezra 1:39, this people will come from the East. This may be an anti-Jewish reinterpretation of the Jewish hope for the gathering of the lost tribes in Jerusalem. This concept is also reflected in IV Ezra 13:39–50 and in the poems of the third century Christian poet Commodianus (*Instructiones* I, 47 and “Carmen de duobus populis,” verses 941–998, in *Commodiani Carmina*, eds., J. Martin, (*Corpus Christianorum*, Series Latina, 128 [Turnhold, 1910]), pp. 34–36, 107–110). The lost tribes shall pass the dried Euphrates and shall come to Jerusalem. About the future coming of the lost tribes from the East, see also I Enoch 57:1–3.

15. It is clear that this entire concept is older than V Ezra, as this author, rather than speaking about the prophets, enumerates the twelve minor prophets (1:39–40).

receive remission of sins through Christ (*ibid.*, 782–800). As this did not happen and the Jewish nation and the Jewish faith survived, the theological situation of the Church became more complex.

V The Law

The first adherents to the new faith among the Gentiles were recruited from among non-Jews who were already close to Judaism. These were the “God-fearers”,¹⁶ who accepted certain basic Jewish obligations, at least the so-called Noachide precepts; I hope to show elsewhere that the western text of Acts 15:29, giving the decree of the Apostles, is the original one. According to this, idolatry, shedding of blood, and grave sexual sins were forbidden to Gentile believers. These were originally the Noachide precepts accepted also by the Synagogue on which the Gentiles were obliged.¹⁷ It is logical that the Apostolic Church of Jerusalem should accept the view of the Synagogue on the conditions which Gentiles needed to fulfill in order to be saved. It can easily be shown that, according to Jewish opinion, the fulfilment of other commandments of Judaism was not prohibited to Gentiles. On the contrary, the Noachide precepts were only seen as the minimal condition for Gentiles to be recognized as God-fearers. They were so understood by the God-fearers themselves, who were attracted to the Jewish way of life and accepted many Jewish commandments without becoming full proselytes. This was also the attitude of Christian God-fearers, as may be seen from the Epistle to the Galatians;¹⁸ many of them wished to observe as many Jewish precepts as they could. It is evident that, while the leadership of the Mother Church decided to lay no burden upon the Gentile believers beyond the Noachide precepts (Acts 10:28–29; see Gal. 2:6), it did not object to their voluntarily observing more. Among the figures of the primitive Church who instructed Gentile Christians to observe more precepts than these essential ones was Peter,

16. See S. Pines, “The Iranian Name for Christians and the ‘God-Fearers,’” *Proceedings of the Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities*, II [7] (1968), pp. 143–152; and in Jacob Bernays, “Die Gottesfürchtigen bei Juvenal,” in his *Gesammelte Abhandlungen*, 2v (Hildesheim, New York, 1971 [Berlin, 1885]). II:71–80.

17. On these three as the original version of the Noachide commandments, see Gedalyahu Alon, *Mehqarim be-Toldot Yisrael* [*Studies in Jewish History* Heb.] (Tel-Aviv, 1967), I 278–279. Meanwhile, S. Safrai and I intend to publish a lengthy study of this subject in the near future.

18. See Franz Mussner, *Der Galaterbrief* (Herder, 1974). The author is right when he sees that Paul polemicizes in this Epistle against Jewish Christians. As far as I see, the possibility that the Apostolic decree was understood as a minimum has not been recognized by scholars. From the description of the acceptance of Judaism by the kings of Adiabene in Josephus, Pines (*op cit.*) rightly deduced that there were also such God-fearers who, without becoming full proselytes, were circumcized (see Ant. XX, 41 and Acts 15:1). This explains Paul’s polemics in the Epistle to the Galatians against such a position (see especially Gal. 5:3). On the whole question, see D. Flusser, “Die Christenheit nach dem Apostelkonzil,” in his *Antijudaismus im Neuen Testament* (München, 1967), pp. 60–81.

as we know from Paul's criticism of him for demanding that Gentiles live like Jews (Gal. 2:14). Rather than interpreting the apostolic decree as a minimum, Paul evidently saw in the Noachide precepts the maximal obligations of Gentile Christians,¹⁹ even if he always strongly recommended a sympathetic understanding of individual Christians who observed personal restrictions. But at the same time, speaking about the incident with Peter at Antioch, he says (Gal. 2:15–21), among other things, that “no man is ever justified by doing what the law demands, but only through faith in Christ Jesus: so we too have put our faith in Jesus Christ, in order that we might be justified through this faith, and not through deeds dictated by law; for by such deeds, Scripture says, no mortal man shall be justified... If righteousness comes by law, than Christ died for nothing.” If this was what Paul thought about the Jewish way of life and of worship, we can easily understand why he did not accept the view that Gentile Christians should or could accept Jewish ritual obligations.

While Paul was not the only Christian who opposed Gentile “Judaizers,” he was the most influential. The liberation of Gentile Christianity from the yoke of Jewish commandments was a necessary step in order for Christianity to become a Gentile religion, separate from Judaism. It is impossible to know whether Paul, and other Christians of his time, were even aware that by his “Gospel” he helped to achieve this aim: he does not speak explicitly about the necessity of separating Christianity from its Jewish matrix and he never says that this was his intention, but it is clear that in fact such was his historical role. Paul was the most important factor in a trend which gave birth to Christianity as a distinct religion, because he deepened its Christology and stressed the inevitable necessity of accepting it for salvation, and he was the most extreme exponent of the doctrine that the Jewish way of life had no validity for Christians. The Gentile Christians in Rome, to whom Paul wrote his epistle, were surely Gentile God-fearers before becoming Christians: e.g., they knew the Old Testament (Rom. 7:1). Paul's opinion is that, by being converted to Christianity, they “have died To the law by becoming identified with the body of Christ.”

For Christian God-fearers it was not easy to accept Paul's demand; the complete rejection of Jewish precepts was for many Gentile Christians a painful operation.²⁰ But if Christianity was to become a world religion it had to become “free

19. Paul does not mention the Apostolic Decree. He writes only (Gal. 2:3) that when he visited the Mother Church in Jerusalem that his “companion Titus, Greek though he is, was not compelled to be circumcized” and that the apostles did not give him further instructions (Gal. 2:6). But on the other hand, according to Paul, idolatry, fornication and murder was naturally forbidden to Gentile Christians. See also Mussner, *op cit.*, pp. 127–132.

20. On this subject see my article, “Theses on the Emergence of Christianity from Judaism,” *Immanuel* 5 (1975), pp. 74–83.

from the Law” and reject “Judaizing”; only a Christianity free from the Law could separate itself from Judaism. There was also another element which made it necessary, from the historical point of view, for Christianity not to accept the Jewish way of life. Judaism is one of those religions that have a comprehensive system of prescriptions and prohibitions, including ritual law; several other religions in the east of the Roman empire, such as the Parsee and Indian religions, also belong to this type. By contrast, religions in the Roman Empire and in the rest of Europe did not have any such legal systems regulating daily life. Thus, if Christianity wanted to conquer the Roman empire, it had to become “law free.” In order to make itself independent of Judaism, it could not devise any new system of law different from that of Judaism, as that would have made an integration into the area in which Christianity operated impossible. There was a hypothetical possibility that the observance of Jewish law could have been permitted within Christianity to one group, namely, the Jewish people. Had all Jews become Christians, they would probably have attained a place of honour like that of the Brahmins in India; no baptism, wedding, burial or Mass could have been celebrated without their presence. But as Jewry as a whole did not become Christian, the observance of the Law even by Jewish Christians, or by Jews who converted to Christianity which, according to the original plan of Christianity, had to be a complementary aspect of the Apostolic decree and was a precondition of it, was finally considered heretical and incompatible with the spirit of Christian faith.

We know from Ignatius' *Letter to the Magnesians* (9:1) that already at the end of the first century Jews who had entered the Church ceased to observe the Sabbath on Saturday and celebrated it on Sunday. Some decades later, Justin Martyr expressed his personal view (*Dialogue with Trypho*, chap. 47) that Jewish Christians who observed the ordinances of the Law could be considered “brethren,” provided that they did not induce Gentile Christians to be circumcised like themselves, or to keep the Sabbath, or observe any like ceremonies. But he also says that there are Gentile Christians who did not agree with him and avoided intercourse with or the extension of hospitality to Jewish Christians who observed the Mosaic Law. Later on, everything possible was done to prohibit the observance of the Law as such to all Christians. This development had nothing to do with the Hellenisation of Christianity; it was actually completed even before that process took place.

Some ideological aspects of the contrast between the “Law” and the “Gospel” have their roots in the religious ideology of the Essenes, a rigoristic and separatist Jewish sect whose writings were discovered in the caves in Qumran. Essene thought deeply influenced the anthropology and ecclesiology of the Hellenistic Church (via hidden channels) and the centrifugal separatist tendency of Essene ideology fostered the separation of Christianity from Judaism. Paul evidently thought that the originally Essene *theologoumena* were genuinely Christian, and

he drew his own conclusions from them. The Essene dualism between “flesh” and “spirit” could stamp as “fleshly” the Law of the Jews, and the Essene doctrine of grace was joined to Christology and became the basis of the contrast between “works of Law” and justification by grace. The author of the Essene Thanksgiving Psalms proclaimed (4:29–33) that man “is in iniquity from the womb, and in faithless guilt to old age. I know that righteousness does not belong to man, nor to a son of man perfection of way; to the Most High God belong all works of righteousness. A man’s way is not established save by the spirit which God created for him, to make perfect the way for the sons of man, that all his creatures may know the might of His power and the multitude of His mercy to all the sons of His good pleasure” (my translation). Paul would surely consent to these words written within the framework of an extremely “legalistic” Jewish sect, but drew from such ideas a conclusion opposite to that of the sect: as all works of righteousness stem from God, and man is justified by faith and by God’s grace, nobody can be justified through the works of the Law. (Gal. 2:16).²¹

Simultaneously with the progressive prohibition of a life according to the Law in the Church, there developed a tendency to decry the Jewish way in various degrees and forms. The final aim of this development was to promote abhorrence among Gentile Christians to life according to the Law. In early Christianity, opposition to the legal aspect of the Mosaic Law was never so extreme as in the Epistle of Barnabas.²² Already in Mark (7:3–13), in a passage dealing with the traditions of the elders, it is said that the Pharisees neglect the commandment of God in order to maintain the tradition of men (verses 3–5, 7–8, 9, 13 — parallel with Col. 2:8, 22). These are surely not Jesus’ own words, because the passage is based upon the inexact Greek translation of Isa. 29:13 (Mark 7:6–7). Mark inserted his own views within a real debate between Jesus and the Pharisees and it is therefore difficult to know how he understood the polarity between the “tradition of men” and the commandment of God. He evidently did not think that the Oral Law of the Jews nullified God’s word (verse 13), but we cannot know how he defined the Mosaic Law itself. Paul (Gal. 4:21–5:1) went further when, speaking about the two covenants, he said that the one bearing children into slavery is the covenant that comes from Mount Sinai, symbolized by the slave-woman Hagar, while the new covenant of Christianity is the free woman Sarah. Christian readers, to whom the passage is familiar, do not feel the full impact of this and other similar passages in Paul’s Epistles. Even if later on the attitude of the Church towards the old covenant often became more positive, the influence of

21 . See D. Flusser, “The Dead Sea Sect and Pre-Pauline Christianity,” *Scripta Hierosolymitana*, Vol. IV [*Aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls*] (1958), pp. 215–266.

22. See especially Hans Windisch, *Der Barabasbrief* (Tübingen, 1920), pp. 393–95. The whole passage is important not only in connection with the Epistle of Barnabas.

such passages, especially as revealed in patristic literature, did not contribute to a human understanding of Jewish religious life among Christians.

Already from the beginning of the second century the words of the prophets, criticising Jewish ritualism, were used as biblical proof that all the legal Mosaic commandments followed by the Jews were a wrong deviation. On the other hand, those commandments were written in the Bible. In order to explain this paradox, Justin Martyr already says that the Mosaic ordinances were imposed upon the Jewish people by reason of the hardness of their hearts. This theological, and later also emotional, abhorrence for the Jewish way of life became one of the mainstays of Christian anti-Judaism and in modern times an important motif of antisemitism. I hope to have shown that this is not the fruit of a later development, but an inevitable result of a centrifugal trend which came into existence when Gentile Christianity arose. For the God-fearers, who had become or wanted to become Christians, the radical turning away from Jewish Law was no doubt a painful step, but in the end they gained from it, for now they could fully compensate for their inferiority complex before Jews and Jewish Christians. Since life according to the Law led to condemnation, the Jews were clearly not equal to those who would be saved. Moreover, the latter's law-free way of life enabled them to be integrated into their law-free environment. The attempt to consider themselves as a "third kind" next to Judaism and paganism did not succeed. Although the Christians were hated and bloodily persecuted by the Gentile world, they felt a basic solidarity with their environment. Paul was an outstanding example of the possibility that even one who strongly criticized Jewish positions could feel a solidarity with and love for the Jewish people,²³ but he was an exception. At the same time, even Paul was able to ask the question, "Has God rejected His people?" (Rom. 11:1), because Israel failed to recognize the message. Paul did not think so: he believed that the whole of Israel would be saved (Rom. 11:26). Not everyone agreed. We have seen²⁴ that the author of Matthew already believed that the Jewish nation as a whole was condemned. The internal Jewish critique by the prophets in ritual matters was interpreted by Christian writers as a rejection of the entire Jewish religious way and as a proof of the inferior value of the commandments. Polemical utterances of the prophets were also used to show that the Jewish people was wicked, or at least unable to accept Christian truth. Isaiah 6:9–10 is quoted somewhat hesitantly in the latter sense at the end of the Book of Acts (28:25–28): "this people" does not understand the message; "this salvation of God has been sent to the Gentiles; the Gentiles will listen."

(To be continued in *Immanuel* 17)

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23. An exception is I Thess. 2:14–16. The passage, as known, not only accuses the Jews of having killed the Lord Jesus (and the prophets), but is also influenced by pagan antisemitism. But we must not forget that this is Paul's earliest Epistle.

24. See above, note 10.