The Essential Agus

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FATHER FLOROVSKY summed up the challenge of an interfaith dialogue in these well-chosen words—"It is delicate and painful, but not hopeless." The subject of this paper illustrates the aptness of his judgment. The long centuries of historic hostility demonstrate the anguish, yet the essence of both testaments, as Paul understood it, was precisely hope (Acts 28:20; Eph. 2:12).

Judaism and Christianity meet theologically on the following common ground: the Hebrew Bible, reverence for Wisdom, and the genius of prophetic inspiration. Beginning with the last element, we note that rabbinic Judaism maintained that biblical prophecy had come to an end. Yet, it also asserted that the Holy Spirit guided the deliberations of the sages. Hillel attributed this blessing to all pious Israelites—"You may rely upon the Israelites, the Holy Spirit is upon them. If they are not prophets, they are sons of prophets." The deliberations of the sages were aided by a divine echo. The medieval philosopher, Judah Halevi, expressed the general belief when he asserted that the Mishnah and Talmud were composed with divine assistance (The Kuzari 3:73).

The concept of prophetic inspiration consisted in attempting to penetrate the deeper meaning of Torah and the concomitant belief that God works through history, generating ever greater understanding of God’s revelation. So, in the rabbinic tradition a prophet could not set aside a halachah, or establish a new halachah, but could decide which halachot were to be applied in his day. Divine inspiration in the inter-
pretation of a biblical book was claimed by the writers of the Dead Sea Scrolls.4

A parallel development of the operation of the Holy Spirit lies at the very heart of Christianity. Whether the view prevailed that the Holy Spirit worked through the community as a whole or through the bishops or through the papacy or through the mystics, the obligation of penetrateing to the deeper meaning of the Bible was incumbent upon every generation. And Jesus illustrated this obligation by the comment on divorce, sifting the divine intent from "the hardness of the heart," which conditioned an earlier saying.5 We dare say that in every faith deriving from the Bible a renaissance took place whenever theologians returned to a fresh study of Holy Writ. The reinterpretation of Scripture, in the light of the prophetic emphasis on justice, compassion, and love, is the common task of Jews and Christians.

In our day, we bring to the study of the Scriptures in particular, and the past generally, certain tools and insights that were scarcely available in previous generations—which brings us to the second component of theological common ground, the element of wisdom. The obligation to pursue the quest of wisdom in order to understand the implications of faith is of the essence of biblical religion, since the books of wisdom formed part of Holy Writ. The sages formulated the matter succinctly—"If there is no wisdom, there is no piety; if there is no piety, there is no wisdom" (Abot 3:14). Similarly in Christianity wisdom was extolled, and Greek philosophy preoccupied the attention of the Fathers of the Church beginning with Clement of Alexandria.

Wisdom today has the added dimension of history-mindedness in all its facets—a recognition of the context in which every event must be viewed, a critical and comparative approach to all documents, an understanding of the fluidity of meaning, and its determination by psychological and sociological factors.

The duty to study history in order to understand the meaning of providence is already stated in Deut. 32:7. But while history was in the past the handmaiden of theology, it now asserts its own independent validity, compelling theology to take account of its data. History-mindedness need not degenerate into an all-questioning historicism; on the contrary, by deepening our awareness of our human limitations, as individuals and as heirs of a specific tradition, it heightens our appreciation of the third part of the prophet Micah's admonition, "to do justice, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with the Lord, thy God" (6:8).
When we speak of Judaism in relation to the New Testament, we have to make clear that we view Judaism as a river which contains many trends and flows on several levels. Modern Judaism contains a broad range of views, from a tenuous attachment of those who are primarily ethnicists to a whole-souled, mystical absorption in Torah as the embodiment of the divine will. We speak of three main branches of the Jewish faith—Orthodox, Conservative, and Reform. But, in actuality, each of these divisions is a loose grouping of diverse views. On the whole, there is greater emphasis today on the historical-cultural matrix of faith, hence a willingness to include within the tradition sects, trends, and opinions that were previously excluded. We include the Karaites, for instance, and appreciate the boldness of their founder's slogan—"Search well in the Torah, and do not rely on my opinions." These audacious rebels against the rule of the Talmud articulated a Jewish ideal, although their maxim proved to be impractical. By the same token, we look upon the spectrum of Jewish groups in New Testament times without identifying ourselves completely with any one of them.

The discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls expanded further our awareness of the immense fermentation in the spiritual life of ancient Israel. The Qumran sectarian groups drew a sharp line between "the children of light and the children of darkness," but in modern Israel their writings are ensconced in a special building, Bet Hasefer, as a great national treasure. Each sectarian group considered itself to be "the true Israel," as did the Pharisees, who spoke of their teachers as hachmai Yisroel, the sages of Israel; the Sadducees who stigmatized their opponents as Pharisees, or separatists; the Zealots; the Essenes; the Samaritans; and the Apostolic Jewish-Christian community in Jerusalem. The Pharisees captured the loyalty of the masses of the people even before the Great Revolt and, following that disaster, the Hillelite school of Pharisaic thought came to predominate. Because of a series of catastrophes, the treasures of Hellenistic Judaism were neglected. The sages of Yavneh were compelled to limit the range of Scripture, eliminating the apocryphal and pseudo-epigraphic works. They acted in order to lower the fever of messianic speculation and provide a protective shield against the inroads of Gnostic sectarians.

Ever since the opening of the modern era, Jewish scholars endeavored to reclaim the works of Philo, the books of the Maccabees, and the entire library of intertestamentary literature. Judah Maccabee, unmentioned in rabbinic literature, was reclaimed as an exemplary hero. It is
now evident that the apocalyptic writers formed circles or schools within either the Pharisaic or the Essenic movements. And Philo's thought is now regarded as essentially and authentically Jewish.\footnote{As we see it, the tannaitic sages of the Hillelite school did not approve all that the Pharisaic order represented, either in fact or in popular fancy.} As to the high priestly hierarchy, it consisted largely of Sadducees, and the Talmud contains ample evidence of the resentment they aroused among the people (Pesahim 57a, Yoma 18b, Kiddushin 66a). Considerable latitude was allowed for differences of opinion among the tannaitic rabbis, heirs of the Pharisees. It was considered a blessing that "disputes for the sake of heaven" would endure (Abot 5:20).

In the historical interpretation of Judaism, which was begun in the nineteenth century, we take it as our task to acknowledge the dark shadows as well as the bright glories of the Pharisaic movement. We are also aware of the distortions and perversions that crept into the two Talmuds by reason of the fact that they were not edited, with the result that unworthy and unhistorical references to Jesus and Christianity found their way into the Talmud and Midrashim. We regard such passages as the debris of folk-myths, rather than as teachings of the faith. Modern Jewish scholars can find ample justification for this attitude in the authoritative works of the rabbinic tradition.\footnote{From all the above, it is clear that the theological spectrum of historic Judaism is far bigger and more diverse than either Bousset's concentration on the Apocrypha or Moore's concept of "normative Judaism" would suggest. Schechter's stress on rabbinic Judaism and Moore's classic description of the ideas implied in rabbinic literature were needed correctives of the previously prevailing views, especially among German scholars, which described first-century Judaism largely in terms of the Apocrypha. On the other hand, it is equally one-sided to ignore Philonic and intertestamental literature.}

The great historian, F. Baer, has proposed the thesis that a synthesis of Judaism and classical Hellenism was effected by the sages of the fourth and third pre-Christian centuries, when the ideal of a \textit{Hassid} emerged as a blend of the Greek philosopher and the prophetic disciple. There was born the concept of an earthly society of ascetics, striving heroically for spiritual perfection and for the establishment of a perfect society here on earth, mirroring the harmony prevailing in the cosmos. Even if Baer's theory is not accepted in its totality, we cannot doubt that
for generations Greek philosophers and Jewish sages recognized one another as kindred in spirit.\(^{11}\)

Philo, then, was not an exceptional figure who undertook an impossible task, but the heir of a long tradition to which, as a matter of fact, he refers from time to time. The Alexandrian school of Jewish thought helps us to see the roots of the New Testament in the teachings of diaspora synagogues. There is, for instance, the distinction in Philo between God who is unknowable, and God's manifest powers, chief of which was the Logos.\(^{12}\) Whether the origin of the "heavenly man" be sought in Persia or in Greece, this concept was employed by Philo in his description of the creation of Adam and Eve (Philo, *Legum Allegoria*, I, XII, 31, Ed. Loeb Classics).

The Alexandrian Jews and Christian historians were convinced that Plato and Aristotle were disciples of the biblical prophets.\(^{13}\) A bold, universalistic outreach to all people informs the entire range of Hellenistic-Jewish literature—from Philo to the author of the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs.\(^{14}\) Philo interprets "the reasons of the commandments" in purely human terms, as sign-posts for the human soul in its struggle to attain perfection. Even the name "Israel" is for him a title, rather than an ethnic designation—the mark of one who has attained the vision of God.\(^{15}\) Philo's use of the allegorical method to discover the inner meaning of Torah is today no longer regarded as an alien importation into Judaism. The authors of the Dead Sea Scrolls employed a similar method. Furthermore, Hillel or his teachers did not scruple to adopt the methods of Alexandrian grammarians in the interpretation of the written law.\(^{16}\)

Philo's description of the Therapeutae, Josephus' description of the Essenes, and the Dead Sea Scrolls allow us glimpses of the variety of schools within first-century Judaism. We now recognize the tremendous polarity between a gentle, all-embracing humanism and a fanatical dogmatism seeking to limit the circles of the "elect." In the Babylonian Talmud itself we encounter the two contrasting attitudes—the constricting one, limiting the rewards of heaven to the few pietists, and the outreaching one, opening its blessings to all "who direct their hearts to heaven."\(^{17}\)

From the standpoint of historical Judaism, the documents of the New Testament acquire a special importance. They reflect the process whereby the central concepts of the Jewish religion were transferred to
the great non-Jewish world. Yet this transfer was carried out in a way which cast the Jewish people in the role of the dark, satanic force. This double effect—an acceptance of the Jewish message in essence, and a rejection of the Jewish messenger in fact—has determined the character and destiny of Jewish history. Hence, there is a renewed interest in the study of the New Testament and its ancillary literature on the part of Jewish scholars.

For a long time, Jewish scholars studied the New Testament only for the purpose of holding their own in debates with Christian counterparts. Such disputations centered on the meaning of certain proof-tests or, as Nahmanides and Albo pointed out, on the logical tenability of certain Christian dogmas. By far, the vast majority of medieval rabbis ignored the New Testament and shunned interfaith discussions for fear of being accused of blasphemy. Even in our day, some rabbis maintain that, while Christianity must take account of Judaism, the latter does not have to evaluate the import and truth of the former. While for Christianity, Judaism is the foundation, they say, for Judaism, Christianity is simply a development outside its own walls.

Indeed, the Orthodox, who are comfortable with dogmatic walls, frequently take this view. But, if our self-awareness as Jews is determined by our overview of Jewish history, we cannot but regard the emergence of the Christian branch out of the Jewish stem as the most momentous event in our millennial experience. The Jewish self-image is largely affected by this development, as well as the image of the Jew among the nations. The “big idea” of our heritage was demonstrated in this phenomenon, in that “the God of Israel” triumphed over the pagan deities and all their works. But also the “big burden” of Jewish life was here heaped upon our shoulders, since the Jew was in effect compelled to wear the sign of Cain. While in actuality the Jewish spirit achieved a magnificent triumph, this process was associated with a systematic denigration, even the demonization, of the Jew.

Hence, the thoughtful Jew who desires to follow the ancient counsel, “know thyself,” must grapple with the many riddles posed by a study of the New Testament. To begin with, the Jew knows that the entire New Testament was composed by Jews. Luke was probably a convert to Judaism before he joined the Christian community. Yet, the Jew also knows that the various documents constituting the New Testament were edited by Christians at a time when the church consisted largely of Gentiles and was engaged in bitter fights against Jews. The two
communities broke apart in the generation following the destruction of the Holy Temple (70 A.D.), amidst bitter curses and implacable hatred.\(^{19}\) We cannot tell whether the *birchat Haminim* of the Jews preceded or followed the anathemas of the Christians. In any case, neutrality appeared impossible to both sides. The historical approach makes it possible for us to rediscover our kinship with one another, while repudiating the seeds of malice that the duststorms of history have scattered over the pages of sacred Scripture.

The central theses that emerge from the study of the New Testament in the context of Jewish rabbinic literature include:

*First,* that the teaching of Jesus did not imply the repudiation either of Judaism or of the Jewish people.

*Second,* that the closer we come to the Apostolic community centered in Jerusalem, the less we encounter any suggestion of the “rejection” of Israel.

*Third,* that the New Testament passages implying the “rejection” of the Jewish people, as a reversal of their having previously been chosen, were superimposed upon the earlier traditions of the church after the fall of Jerusalem; that the essence of Christian teaching, according to medieval interpreters, consisted in the repudiation of Judaism.

*Fourth,* that all such anti-Judaism and anti-Jewish passages resulted in part from the gradual transference of the Gospel tradition from the Jewish to the Hellenistic culture sphere, during the seventy-year period, 65—135 A.D., and in part from the impassioned bitterness of the second and third centuries when the New Testament canon attained its present form.

*Fifth,* that it is incumbent upon Christian scholars, as seekers of truth in love and love in truth, to eliminate anti-Jewish and anti-Judaism inferences from their interpretation of the New Testament.

*Sixth,* that it is incumbent upon Jewish scholars to reclaim the New Testament as an integral part of their domain of study and to develop the implications of the teaching that Christianity is an “ecclesia for the sake of heaven,” employed by God as an instrument whereby humanity is being prepared for “the kingdom of heaven,” *malchut shomayim.*

1. The first thesis has been established for several generations among Jewish scholars. Jesus was a supremely original personality, and his views did not coincide completely with those of any of the movements that existed in his day, but the building blocks of his spiritual edifice were
taken from the Jewish world of that day. Jesus stood closest to the Pharisees, in that he believed in the resurrection, in angels, in the worship of the synagogue, and in the role of providence within the life of the individual and within Israel; but he was also close to the Essenes, as is evident in his ethics, in his relation to John the Baptist, in his closeness to the apocalyptic circles, and in the life of the Apostolic community of Jerusalem.

But Jesus differed with some of the Pharisaic leaders. After all, James the Elder testifies that many Pharisees had joined the early Christian community without giving up their zeal for the Law (Acts 21:20). Jesus' arguments with the Pharisees referred to specific issues of the oral law, which were probably topics of disputation in the schools. His critique of the high priests reflected popular sentiments that are also echoed in the Talmud (Pesahim 57a). Jesus' chief complaint was the non-recognition on the part of most Pharisaic leaders of his claim to be the apocalyptic Messiah. As we learn from occasional references in the Talmud, some apocalyptic circles taught that the Messiah would bring down the Holy Temple from heaven and put it in the place of the earthly one.

2. The second thesis is proved by scholars through the comparative textual analysis of the Gospels. Paul Winter, in his book On the Trial of Jesus (Berlin, 1961), puts side by side the various references to the enemies of Jesus. He takes the passion chapters of Mark to be the most ancient portion, and he concludes his analysis as follows (p. 124):

The oldest synoptic tradition (however restyled it may have become in the process of literary formulation) does not include the Pharisees among the enemies of Jesus at all; there is not a single instance in which Pharisaic hostility towards Jesus finds mention.

A similar view was already put forward by the famous scholar, Daniel Chwolson, who suggested that the second-century editors changed in many places the word "scribes" for the word "Pharisees," since in their day there were no longer Sadducee scribes. Joseph Klausner pointed out that Jesus debated as a member of the Pharisaic movement. Paul Winter argues similarly: "Yet in historical reality, Jesus was a Pharisee . . . when an eschatological emphasis may have pervaded Pharisaic thought more strongly than in the tannaitic age" (p. 133).

The viewpoint of Jewish scholars was summarized in the old Jewish Encyclopedia, published in the first decade of the twentieth century (article on the New Testament):
... that the older and the more genuine the records, written or unwritten, of the doings and teachings of Jesus, the more they betray close kinship with and friendly relations to Jews and Judaism; but that the more remote they are from the time and activity of Jesus, the more they show of hostility to the Jewish people and of antagonism to the Mosaic Law.

The gulf between the Jews and Christians was deepened by the lynching of Stephen, and the persecutions directed by the Sadducee high priest were opposed by Rabban Gamaliel the Elder. Agrippa probably followed the counsel of the Sadducees. The Pharisees still resented the execution of James the Elder, but with the approach of the Great Revolt (65–70 A.D.) tempers were inflamed throughout the Jewish world. In some places, Jewish leaders sought to remove the protective mantle of Judaism, as a religio licita, from the proliferating Christian churches. Thus, the soil was prepared for Nero's persecutions. With the outbreak of the Revolt, which was spurred by intense messianic expectations, and punctuated by outbreaks of pogroms throughout Syria, the Christians left Jerusalem, according to a tradition recorded by Eusebius.

With the disappearance of the mother church in Jerusalem, leadership fell into the hands of Gentile Christians. The remnant of Jewish Christians were beset by pressures from both Jews and Christians. The Jewish curse formulated by Rabban Gamaliel the Second and the Christian anathema combined to crush the middle position. In addition, when the Roman Empire imposed a special tax upon Jews, the Christians were exempt; and when Marcus Aurelius Antonius was friendly to Jews, he was implacably hostile to Christians. The course of history raised a high barrier of hostility between the two communities just at the time when their respective traditions were taking firm shape. But it was the rise of Gnosticism that contributed most effectively to the introduction of mythological Antisemitism in Christianity.

3. The third thesis points to the most persistent anti-Jewish animus that is inculcated almost unconsciously by the New Testament. To illustrate its dark impetus, I will cite a recent popular scientific commentary on Matthew, edited by the late Professor Albright, who yielded to no one in his stout defense of Judaism and the Jewish people. Yet, in commenting on Matt. 9:17 (Matthew, Garden City, N.Y., 1971), he wrote (p. 108):

Romans IX–XI is evidence of the great concern felt about the precise relationship of the Messianic Community to Judaism. On the view that
vss. 16–17 are to be regarded as Jesus' teaching on the relationship of his Community to Judaism, then the final clause "and both are preserved" is either editorial comment, or a misplaced saying from another context in an attempt to deal with the question.

But this must be regarded as unsatisfactory. The whole tenor of Jesus' teaching, in all four gospels, makes it hardly possible to suppose that he looked to a continuance of his Messianic Community and Judaism side by side.

So, even Albright assumes that the establishment of the Messianic community implied the rejection of those who did not join it. But, is not this attitude a retrojection of later attitudes? If Paul could not reconcile himself to such a rejection, could Jesus, whose Jewish roots were far deeper, adopt such a judgment? Whether or not we adopt Schweitzer's interpretation of Jesus' eschatological attitude, we cannot deny that Jesus' central concern was to preach "the good news" to his own people. And his few acts of benevolence toward Gentiles were entirely in keeping with the teaching of Jewish ethics, certainly not a repudiation of his people. But the pervasive feeling to which Albright calls attention embodies an impetus, deep and strong. What is its source? The answer uncovers a fundamental struggle which continues to the present.

The canonization of the New Testament was brought about through the partial rejection and the partial acceptance of two contending philosophies—Judaism and Gnosticism. Marcion formed the first canon, and he excluded the Old Testament altogether, consigning the God of Israel and God's Law to the sinister role of demiurge, the creator of this world and its numberless evils. Jesus was the Son and Messenger of the good, transworldly realm, whose followers, by repudiating this world and all its works, would inherit that glorious realm. Marcion was repudiated by the emergent Catholic Church, but Gnosticism was too insidious and too deep-rooted to be altogether eliminated. The Church looked for the middle way between Judaism and Gnosticism.

What were the essential differences between these two poles of the spirit? We take Gnosticism to be the opposite of classical Hellenism as well as of prophetic Judaism. While the stars were "gods" to the Hellenes and noble creations of God, or angels, to Jews, they were part of the evil order of reality to the Gnostics. The essence of Gnosticism is the myth of catastrophe, describing how Sophia, or the heavenly one, or supernal light was imprisoned by Satanic forces, and the belief that the way of
redemption depends on a special knowledge deriving from beyond this world, whereby the soul reverses its path and ascends to heaven. Hence, the polarity is threefold—whether or not truth is co-extensive with natural human powers of reason; whether or not goodness is that of human effort and conscience; and whether or not certain people are provided from birth with a pneumatic soul, rendering them capable of redemption. Gnosticism asserts the discontinuity of human wisdom and redemptive knowledge, of sanctification through deeds and intentions, or through an inner spirit and Divine Grace. Similarly it asserts the dichotomy of the human race between ordinary people and pneumatics.

Paul wavered between Judaism and Gnosticism, inclining sufficiently to the latter pole to provide a handle to Marcion. Some portions of John contain the reverberations of Gnostic rhetoric. Generally, the Gnostics were bitterly anti-Judaistic and anti-Jewish. Within Christianity the Gnostic orientation, identifying the divine with the discontinuous, the transcendental, and the ascetic, triumphed especially in heretical movements. But, it frequently generated a powerful undertow, even within the official forms of the faith. And whenever Gnostic anti-Judaism prevailed, anti-Jewishness was always the result.

The Gnostic theory of pneumatics is easily translatable into mystical racism. Fichte, prophet of modern German nationalism, demonstrated the perennial appeal of Gnosticism in his philosophy of history, stigmatizing the Jews as the children of worldly cleverness, Verstand, and elevating the Teutons to the rank of people of Vernunft. A great deal of modern biblical study expatiated on the contrasts between Jewish “good deeds” and Christian grace; between Jewish intellectualism, which is presumably barren, and the noble intuition of Teutons, or Nordics, or Aryans; between the Jewish ideal of equality before the Law and the arbitrary “election” of the Gentiles. Naturally, in German Gnosticism, the Slavs and the Greeks are condemned equally with the Jews, though a special hell on earth was reserved for those who were “chosen” by the evil Creator. Ideas are “carried over” from religion to politics and back again. Gnostic, that is non-Hellenic and non-Jewish, was the asserted discontinuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, between the Old Covenant and the New, between the old Israel and the New, between the Old Morality and the New, between Jew and Gentile. It is time to allay this metaphysical mythology, wherever it appears—in Christian as in Jewish thought.

4. The fourth thesis purports to explain how what was originally a
fervently Jewish faith became so bitterly anti-Jewish. In part, the answer is simply the transference of the same rhetoric from a Jewish to a Gentile popular base. When an Isaiah or a Jeremiah castigates his people, he does not infer that they are indeed degenerate and God-forsaken. The prophet demands so much because he trusts the essential nobility of his people, and his words are preserved by the people as expressions of their own conscience. But, when the same words are taken out of context by external enemies, they add up to a verdict of condemnation.

A contemporary Jesuit scholar summarizes the import of the biblical prophets as follows:

Ancient Israel was played out and had to go. . . . This new Israel could, however, only be born of the downfall of the old. . . . The salvation of the new people of God was the reverse of the divine judgment passed on the ancient people of God.27

Yet, note that the same words which convey this meaning to the Catholic scholar were cherished by Jews as “the hope of Israel.”

So, the occasional bitter outcries of Jesus or Paul or Matthew or John were spoken in the revered vein of prophetic admonition, but their Gentile editors, living in a different milieu, edited them in keeping with their own lights. Following the fall of Jerusalem, the mother church fell apart, and the branches in the Gentile world had to establish their legitimacy on their own grounds, despite the fact that they were worshipping one who was condemned and executed by Rome. Modifications and qualifications that existed in the original document, describing various personalities within the Jewish community, were all generalized into the term which made sense only in the new social environment—i.e., the term “Jews” was substituted for “witnesses” or “crowds” or “opponents” or “skeptics.”28

In part, this editorial policy was a reflection of the bitter animosity between Jews and Gentiles during the Civil Wars of 65 to 135 A.D. By the middle of the second century the Jewish Christians were reduced to a marginal minority. How could the hatred of Jews coexist with the love of so much of the Jewish literary and spiritual heritage? The sad truths of human nature provide the answer, and history corroborates the insights of psychology. Josephus tells us that in Damascus the Syrian women were “God-fearers,” attending the synagogues on the Sabbath, while many of their husbands were Jew-haters, planning physical massacres of their Jewish neighbors.29
The fifth thesis is an appeal to Christian conscience and truthfulness. There is absolutely no reason to interpret the documents of the New Testament in such a way as to teach that the Jews are condemned or accursed or rejected, much less that they are eternally guilty of deicide. The Catholic Church is to be heartily commended for its decisiveness in confronting this issue. I can say without fear of contradiction that no passage in the New Testament gives aid or comfort to Antisemitism, if it is seen in the light of the social-cultural context of contemporary Jewish life.

The disputation with Pharisaic leaders are instructive examples of the arguments that went on in the schools. Their general import is an emphasis on inwardness and principle that is indeed laudable and by no means rare in Jewish tradition. The numerous parables, so rich in meaning, are all-human, not Jewish-Gentile in reference. Always the concept of Israel included an all-human dimension in hope and faith. And the narration of Jesus' life and death, read in context, is free of any anti-Jewish animus.

By way of example, the sentence of Matthew 27:25 which served as the foundation for the myth of deicide can be easily understood in its Jewish context. As it reads it is utterly incomprehensible. “All the people” could only refer to the crowd actually present. Why should people voluntarily take guilt upon their children as well as upon themselves? The medieval mind understood this action as the work of Satan, but medieval myths have a way of persisting beneath modern rationalizations.

If we see the crucifixion in the light of the practices then prevailing, then we know that witnesses were indeed warned, prior to the execution of the defendant, that the guilt for that death and the death of any potential descendants down to the end of time would rest upon them. In turn, the witnesses would reassert their testimony and say they are so sure that they are willing to assume this blame. Now, Jesus was condemned on the basis of the presumed testimony of witnesses, or of those present in the house of Caiaphas. The followers of the high priest, then, stated their willingness to be judged in heaven for the blood of Jesus and his potential descendants. When this incident was transferred to the milieu of a different culture, “his children” seemed blasphemous, if Jesus was God, and the term “witnesses” was simply generalized to the phrase “all the people”; as in most other cases, the specific term was generalized to the all-inclusive category, “Jews.”

A similar example may be taken from John 8:44, wherein the devil is said to be the father of the Jews. We have here a sermon, given presum-
ably in a synagogue, with Jesus addressing “those Jews who had believed him” (8:31). The author dramatized the tension between belief and unbelief within the soul of Jewish people. When this inner dialogue is transferred into a Gentile-Christian universe of discourse, the inner voice of admonition is transformed into an external verdict of condemnation. 31

6. The first part of the sixth thesis deals with the reclamation of the New Testament. It is part of Jewish history as literature and life, but with respect to the sacred heritage it marks the boundary between Judaism and Christianity. Frequently, we can see how the same words acquired different meaning as they were transferred from the Jewish to the Hellenistic context.

So the name “son of God” was applied to Jewish people generally, to righteous men, to the kings of the house of David, and by implication, also to the Messiah. 32 But, within the ideological context of Judaism, the concept of divine unity precluded any notion of a “son of God” in any essential sense. Precisely because Jews lived in a society where Caesar was proclaimed son of God and Kyrios, Jewish opposition to this notion was firmly established. Philo could speak of God being three in appearance—i.e., God’s sovereignty, benevolence, and unknowable being—but he added that, to the thoughtful, God is One. 33 So, the same series of titles of “Messiah,” “son of Man,” “Son of God,” and “Kyrios” could by degrees acquire totally different meaning as the Jewish culture-context was replaced by the Hellenistic. 34

Similarly, the concepts of redemption, faith, the Law and its inner meaning, the ideal congregation of Israel, the salvation of Gentiles, the replacement of the sacrificial ritual by deeds of “steadfast love”—all these and many more—are observed in the process of transformation.

In one century, the nascent Christian community underwent several transformations, brought about by a series of “scandals.” The first “scandal” was felt within the Apostolic community, which was almost entirely Jewish—the Messiah came unto his own people, and “they” rejected him. “They,” in this case, meant the leaders and teachers, the Pharisaic masters “who sit in Moses’ seat.” In the light of this “scandal,” the differences between Jesus and the Pharisaic teachers were magnified, but the belief prevailed that this resistance of Jewish leaders and their followers was provisional and temporary. The second “scandal” was felt on the boundary between Jewry and the Hellenistic world as a result of the progressive transference of biblical and rabbinic ideas to the Hellenistic realm of thought. What was “unthinkable” in Judaism became the mark of a transcendent wisdom, the sign of a fresh upsurge of the Holy Spirit.
in the churches which continued to develop the ideas of Paul and John, particularly after the church became entirely Hellenistic. While Philo represented the synthesis of Judaism and Hellenic philosophy, the Pauline churches represented the blend of Judaism and Hellenistic religion. The third “scandal” was felt by the Gentile converts, following the fall of Jerusalem. How could they adore one who was convicted and executed by Roman authority? Gradually, the notion prevailed that Jesus was condemned by the Jews, while Pontius Pilate was the passive reluctant agent of Jewish, or demonic, fury.

In the modern world, all of us are bidden to live in two universes of discourse—within our traditions and in spirit, in an all-embracing universe of discourse. *On the Boundary* is the title of Paul Tillich’s autobiography. And to live “on the boundary” is part of our universal experience.

The second portion of the sixth thesis might be called a Jewish theology of Christianity. This task will be carried out in diverse ways by the theologians of present and future generations if the contemporary irenic orientation within the Christian and Jewish worlds is maintained and deepened. It takes time for old ideas to fade away totally. Who can tell whether the old demons will arise from their graves and once again point to Jewry as anti-Christ, whose sin is the free intellect or a conscience geared into universal law or piety ossified in ritual? If the ecumenical movement endures, we can expect a deepening of the sentiment of community in the family of God’s children. Let me outline some of the sign-posts of a Jewish theology of Christianity:

a. God judges individuals, one by one, as well as groups as a whole. A rabbi who lived through the siege of Jerusalem taught “that the pious among the nations share in the World to Come,” even if they are not converted. According to their personal merit, the Holy Spirit rests upon them. Pious Gentiles are described in the Talmud as examples for Jews.35

b. Christianity, in all its variations, was declared by the Tossafists to be a monotheistic faith. Gentiles were allowed to associate other divine beings with God in their worship (*shittuf*), though this practice was not permitted to Jews. The “curse of heretics” (*birkhal haminim*) was not included in the prayers of European Jews, since the close of the Babylonian Talmud.36

c. Occasional hints of a still more affirmative relation to Christianity should now be developed systematically and in depth. Such an orientation is contained *in nuce* in the rabbinic characterization of the
church as an “ecclesia for the sake of heaven” that God causes to endure and expand through the vicissitudes of history.\textsuperscript{37} This estimation of the church as a divine instrument by no means implies the ending of Israel’s role. The high purposes of God require many instruments for their “fulfillment.” So, we return to the view of Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, as recorded in Acts 5:33, and to the opinion of James, “the brother of Jesus” (Acts 15:13–21). Highly significant is the imagery of the twelfth-century philosopher, Judah Halevi, who spoke of Israel as “the heart”; other faiths, like other internal organs, are equally necessary for life. He also employed the figure of a tree with three branches, growing out of the same seed (\textit{The Kuzari} 4:23).

d. While Jews cannot accept the dogmatic framework of the New Testament, they can and do recognize its sublime teachings. Many scholars, including preeminently Martin Buber, saw in the revivals of Jewish pietism at various times, and particularly in Polish-Russian Hassidism, a similar efflorescence of religious genius—an emphasis on inwardness, an aspiration for “the nearness of God,” an anticipation in the present of the glories of the blessed future. Some modern Jewish philosophers regarded Christianity as the outstretched arm of the Jewish faith, seeking to redeem humankind.\textsuperscript{38}

Above all, the historical approach with its strong dash of relativism orients our thinking along the lines of pragmatism. Truth \textit{is} as truth \textit{works}. Does any proposed idea really motivate people to sow the seeds of justice and truth, of faith, hope, and love? Indeed, Jesus anticipated this mode of thinking in the maxim. “By their fruits shall ye know them” (Mt. 7:16).

In the pragmatic orientation we focus our attention on the task that faces us, the task of regaining for the living Word of God a society which is so largely atheistic, materialistic, and bitterly cynical. It is an overwhelming task, far more “delicate and painful” than the interfaith dialogue, but by no means “hopeless.”

All of us are called upon to share in the covenant of the spirit which transcends all ritualistic and historical differences. It is in this way that we see the contemporary meaning of Jeremiah’s “\textit{berit Hadashah},” which underlies the term “New Testament” (Jer. 31:30). Neither the old ritual nor the new is in itself decisive. What is decisive is the spirit in which rites are performed and the consequences that flow from them (Lk. 22:20; I Cor. 11:25). To the extent that any of us individually or collec-
tively achieves the prophetic ideal, we share in an enterprise that is eternal. Whether we derive our inspiration through the rabbinic tradition, which in turn is linked to the Hebrew Bible, or through the Christian tradition and the New Testament, which are also linked to the same sacred Scriptures, our ultimate quest is the same—malchut shomayim, the Reign of heaven in our hearts and in society.

NOTES


3. B. T. Shabbat 104a. He could revive a law that was forgotten. The term used here is “Tsafim,” which means mystical visionaries. In this sense, the sages were considered to be the heirs of the prophets. [B. T. Baba Bathra 12a, where the strange comment is given—"A Sage is better than a prophet." A prophet’s authority did not extend to concessions to idolatry, even as a temporary expedient (Sanhedrin 90a).]

4. "The Habakkuk Commentary," Pesher Habakkuk, is a case in point. Note particularly this sentence. "And as for what it says, that he may run who reads it, this means the teacher of righteousness, to whom God made known all the mysteries of the words of his servants, the prophets" [Millar Burrows, ed., The Dead Sea Scrolls (New York, 1955), p. 368]. The ideal of the prophet has continued in Judaism, down to our own day. See my essay, "The Prophet in Modern Hebrew Literature," in Dialogue and Tradition, p. 385.


7. Rabbi Akiba favored proclaiming the exclusion from Olam Haba of those who read "external books" (Sanhedrin 100b), but there is considerable uncertainty as to the meaning of "external books." The only example offered in both the Palestinian and Babylonian Talmud is the work of Sirach, or Ben Sira, yet Sirach was quoted in the Talmuds. It seems that Rabbi Akiba’s maxim was his own private opinion. In the Midrashim, echoes of apocalyptic writings are heard. Even the books of Enoch, so close to New Testament thought, are
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praised in Zoharic writings, which contain echoes of the ideas of Pharisaic circles in the first century. It is noteworthy that the Tossafot assert that in some areas we follow the teaching of "the external books," as against the Talmuds (Berochot 18a, Zohar, Bereshit 72b, 37b, Shemot 55a, Vayikra 10b. See also the Jerusalem Targum on Gen. 5:24.).


9. The description of "Pharisaic Plagues" in the Babylonian Talmud is already undecipherable (Sota 22a). Clearly, the condemnation referred to external acts of piety which were contrasted with "the Pharisee out of love," who follows the example of Abraham.

10. That some raw passages were inserted by "immature disciples" was already acknowledged by Judah Halevi (1085-1140) in The Kuzari, III, 73. Maimonides in the Introduction to the "Guide of the Perplexed," and in First Part, Chapter 59. Nahman Krochmal devoted chapter 14 of his classic work to this problem, Moreh Nebuchai Hazeman. In regard to the Pharisees, he stressed that they represented normative tradition only in a general way, not insofar as they defended their own sectarian interests (ibid., ch. 10, Edition Lemberg, 1863, p. 51).

11. F. Baer's studies appeared in the Hebrew magazine, Zion, vol. 27-28 (1952-1953), and vol. 37 (1962); in Molad (1964); and in his small book, summarizing his position, Yisroel Bo-amim (Jerusalem, 1956).

12. Harry A. Wolfson points out that God's "unknowability" was Philo's contribution to religious philosophy. While Plato considered that the human mind was closest to the Logos, Philo insisted that our mind is not self-activating, but that it reflects divine power and initiative. See Legum Allegoria, II, 69. Harry A. Wolfson, Philo, II, p. 110.


14. The universalist note in the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs is particularly striking. Test. of Benjamin, IX, 2; Test of Naphtali, II, 5; Test of Levi XIV, 4.


17. Berachot 18b: "... for I run, and they run. I run to the life of World to Come, and they run to the pit of destruction." Berachot 17a: "... The Sages of Yavne used to say, 'I am a creature and my colleagues (who do not study Torah) are creatures... Lest you say, 'I do more and he does less,' we have
learned. Alike are those who do more and those who do less, for all depends on the directing of one's heart to heaven. . . ."

18. Joseph Albo, "The Book of Principles," allows that two religions may coexist at one time and be equally divine. However, he disputes the validity of Catholic doctrine in his time, the beginning of the fifteenth century, on the ground of its logical impossibility. See I. Husik's edition, published by the J.P.S., volume III, chap. 25. Nahmanides argued at Barcelona, in 1263, as follows:

The core of the true dispute among us is not the concept of the Messiah . . . but the crux of the issue and the reason for the argument between Jews and Christians is the fact that you impute to the Deity things which are exceedingly repugnant. . . . For what you state, and this is the essence of your faith, reason cannot accept, nature does not permit, and the prophets never implied . . . (Sefer Havikukah Lebornamban, 12).

19. In a series of books, S. G. F. Brandon sought to uncover the implications of the catastrophic fall of Jerusalem on the formation and crystallization of the New Testament. His major works are The Fall of Jerusalem and the Christian Church, Jesus and the Zealots, and The Trial of Jesus of Nazareth. The disappearance of the mother church of Jerusalem is, in his judgment, the crucial fact.


22. Das letzte Passamahl Christ u. der Tag seines Todes (1892, 1908), p. 118. Jesus' condemnation of evil Pharisees (in Talmud, "Pharisaic plagues," Mishin Sota 3,4) was generalized by later copyists. This was also the view of M. Friedlander, Die religiösen Bewegungen innerhalb des Judentums in Zeitalter Jesu (1905).

23. One blesses God, "The Creator of the beginnings," on seeing the stars (Berachot 59b). While the stars were occasionally made responsible for a person's fate (mazal), this dependence did not apply to Israel (Shabbat 156a).


25. F. G. Fichte, Characteristics of the Present Age (1849).

26. It has long been noted that the prophets of Teutonism were also exponents of "cultural despair." Such men as Ludwig Jahn, Julius Langbehn, Paul de
Lagarde, Richard Wagner, Eugen Dühring, and Oswald Spengler were agreed that the values of the democratic West were all degenerate. They looked for the awakening of a dark, slumbering soul, a peculiar racial psyche.


28. The Gospel of Mark was believed to have been written in Rome after 70 A.D. It includes older Aramaic logia and personal reminiscences, but it was composed with the aim of separating the Christian community from the odium that was then attached to Jewish people.


30. B. T. Sanhedrin 37a and 44b. There was no independent rabbinic tradition regarding the crucifixion, else there would have been some consistency at least in regard to the time or the place of execution. But the time is supposed to be roughly a hundred years before, and the place Lydda, instead of Jerusalem (Sanhedrin 43a: 107b).

31. Raymond E. Brown, in his introduction to his commentary on the Gospel of John, *Anchor Bible*, vol. 29, p. LXXI, writes as follows:

> . . . there is one stratum of Johannine material, particularly evident in XI–XII, where the term, Jews, simply refers to Judeans . . . the Fourth Gospel uses “the Jews” as almost a technical title for the religious authorities, particularly those in Jerusalem, who are hostile to Jesus.

32. The messianic interpretations of Psalms 2 and 110 occur in the late Midrash Tehillim, ed. Bober, but with the qualification that “sonship” is metaphorical, “as when a Master says to his slave, ‘you are my son’” (Ps. 2:54). Midrash Tehillim, ed. Bober, 110,14. The Yalkut on Tehillim, 110,869, speaks of the Messiah sitting to the right of God, with Abraham sitting at God's left.

33. Referring to Abraham's vision of the three angels, Philo writes:

> Rather, as anyone who has approached nearest to the truth would say, the central place is held by the Father of the Universe, Who in the sacred scriptures is called 'He that is,' as His proper name, while on either side of Him are the senior potencies, the nearest to Him, the creative and the kingly. . . .

> . . . presents to the mind which has vision the appearance sometime of one sometimes of three (Philo, *De Abrahamo* (New York, 1962), XXIV, 121, 122).

34. W. D. Davies, in *Christian Origins and Judaism* and *Paul and Rabbinic Judaism* demonstrates that Paul's ideas were rooted in Judaism, though they were transformed in later years into concepts that could no longer be fitted within a Jewish ideological context.
35. Tosefta, Sanhedrin, 13. Rabbi Joshua ben Hanania’s opinion. The twelfth-century authors of Tossafot on the B. T. Avoda Zara, 2a, declare that Christianity does not fall under the category of idolatry. The contrary opinion of Maimonides in his Code is mitigated by his letter to R. Hisdai Halevi, in which he points out that “God seeks the heart.” Of Gentiles as examples, Jerusalem, Peah 1, 1. B. T. Kiddushin 31a.

36. Avoda Zara 2a. The Palestinian version of “birchat baminum,” which specifically includes Christians, was unknown to the Jews of Europe prior to its discovery by S. Schechter in the Cairo Genizah.

37. This application of a maxim in the Ethics of the Fathers (IV, 14) is offered by the eighteenth-century sage, Rabbi Jacob Emden, in his commentary, “Aitz Avot.”

38. See the original edition of Martin Buber’s Reden. Solomon Formstecher in the nineteenth century and Franz Rosenzweig in the twentieth century used the image of the sun and its rays as symbolizing the respective roles of Judaism and Christianity.