THE FAITH and career of Paul are generally regarded as marking the tragic break between Judaism and Christianity. While many Jewish scholars maintain that Jesus lived and taught within the ambience of Judaism, they argue that Paul was responsible for the separation of the two faiths and their mutual hostility. So, Joseph Klausner can find in the case of Jesus only the “seed” of denationalized piety. Kaufmann and Buber include Jesus completely within the sphere of Judaism.

But as to Paul, Klausner blames his alienation on the fact that he was a Jew from the Diaspora, hence inauthentic and anguished by contradictions. Montefiore similarly asserts that Paul could not help but experience the serene piety of the Pharisees, had he lived in the land of Israel. Raised in an alien environment, Paul was troubled by foreign influences and familiar only with the unlovely exterior of Jewish observances. Paul seems especially ignorant of the central ideas of Pharisaic Judaism—namely, repentance and forgiveness.

In sum, it is said by Jewish scholars that while the religion of Jesus was part of Judaism, the religion about Jesus, inaugurated by Paul, broke radically and completely with the Jewish faith.

Christian scholars find in the life of Paul additional confirmation of the thesis that the Jews, as a people, were “rejected,” if not placed under a curse, and then replaced by the Gentiles.

Johannes Munck, in the Anchor Bible volume of Acts, commenting
on Acts 28:17–28, says: “Israel’s unbelief became the cause of his preaching the Gospel to the Gentiles.” The same author comments on Acts 21:20, where James speaks of tens of thousands who joined the Christian community, while remaining “faithful to the law”: “There could not be so many Jewish-Christians, since Jesus complained that his message was rejected.”

The axiom of a mutual rejection that was immediate and total distorts the teaching of the New Testament generally. Paul would have preached to Gentiles, whether or not all or most Jews had accepted his message. After all, Peter had also preached to Gentiles. Here, we are concerned with the Book of Acts.

May I suggest the following perspectives for the interpretation of this book:

First, the concept of monotheism, as it emerged in Judaism, *included a set of polarities that were reconciled only in the Will of God*. Judaism is what it is, and it is what it will be. Its being is also its vision of the future.

God was absolutely transcendent, beyond the grasp of man’s senses or man’s imagination or man’s intelligence. Already, Philo speaks of God as being unknowable. At the same time, God was revealed at Sinai, to the prophets, dimly also to the Sages. Mediating divine entities were conceived, such as “The Word,” the *Shekhinah*, Primal Man, Metatron, “whose name is the same as that of his Master.” In the interpretation of biblical oracles, God’s help was granted from time to time, through these entities.

The Torah, too, was bi-polar. Given at Sinai to Moses, it contained specific commands, whose purpose was “pedagogical,” “to refine human nature,” and inner principles, which corresponded to the structure of the cosmos.

The Temple in Jerusalem was believed to correspond to a heavenly Temple.1 God dwells in heaven and in the human heart, as well as symbolically in His earthly Temple; the Archangel Michael or Metatron functioned as the heavenly high priest offering the souls of the righteous, or “lams of fire,” by way of atonement for the sins of Israel.

Israel, too, was bi-polar. It refers to the empirical Jewish people, but also to “the pious among the nations of the world.” “Whoever denies idolatry is called a Jew,” says the Talmud. The so-called God-fearers of the New Testament were in this category.

This bi-polarity was evident in all the relations between God, Torah, and Israel—God deals in terms of law, but He also extends His mercy
freely; man is free, yet all is determined; God forgives, yet man must earn forgiveness by sacrifices as well as by repentance; Israel was chosen, by the fiat of divine love, yet only individuals are so chosen; Israel will be vindicated in time to come, yet all of redeemed mankind will constitute the Israel of the future, while not all Israelites will be redeemed. Characteristic is the language of the Mishnah: “All Israel have a share in the World to Come, but the following classes of people, do not...” (Sanhedrin 10:1).

This bi-polarity in every aspect of the Jewish faith is inescapable in a living faith, based on monotheism, that seeks to do justice to the fullness of human aspirations. It grows out of the realities of human existence, on the one hand, and the nobility of man’s ideals, on the other hand.

Now, in the Jewish vision of the future, the Messianic Era shading off into the World to Come, the gentler, bolder, more dreamlike pole of hopes and ideals was expected to predominate—God will be more present to His worshippers, His Holy Spirit being “poured out” in abundance; the inner light of Torah will be revealed; Israel will become the redeemed nucleus of humanity; forgiveness will be offered freely, conditioned only on one’s willingness to accept; Jerusalem and the Temple that is Above will take the place of the concrete Temple in the earthly Jerusalem; the policy of Compassion, or love, will prevail over that of Law: redeemed mankind will be liberated from the body of flesh and join the company of angels, in whose company they truly belong.

Now, “the Time to Come” (leatid lavo) will begin with the days of the Messiah, eventuate in a cosmic Day of Judgment, and culminate in the revelation of the “World to Come” (olam haba), when the “Saints will sit with crowns on their heads delighting in the radiance of the Presence [Shechinah].”

Had the aeon of the Time to Come dawned already? At this point, the Christians diverged from the rest of the Jewish community.

Jesus and his disciples believed that the new aeon had begun. The religion of Jesus contained a firm belief about Jesus. Paul believed the culmination of the new aeon would come in his own generation. He was living in the Eschatological Age. It was incumbent upon him to be the instrument of saving those that were predestined for salvation. Otherwise, their “blood would be upon his head.”

All of Paul’s teaching is to be seen in the context of the appearance of the new aeon—hence, an Immanant Divine Presence, a Messianic
Torah, a new Israel, the redeemed nucleus of humanity, the assurance of the Holy Spirit, and the belief of the speedy coming of the Parousia.

Hence, the crux of the argument between Paul and the Jews, who did not accept his message, was whether or not the Messianic Age was truly begun and the World to Come would appear soon. All other differences were derived from this basic issue. Most un-Jewish as Paul's career seems to Jewish scholars today, he was utterly sincere when he claimed: "I have committed no offense either against Jewish Law or the Temple or Caesar" (Acts 25:8).

The exclusivism of the Apostolic community is understandable in this context: "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). In the End of Days, we are told, "the Lord will be one and His Name One" (Zech. 14:9).

Understandable also is the revelation concerning the Covenant, the Law, the formation of a new Israel, the concept of a high priest in heaven, and the idea of the Messiah "sitting on the right hand of God." The last notion, frequently described as blasphemous, is attributed to Rabbi Akiba (d. 135 C.E.) (Hagigah 14a).

In brief, the first perspective I would urge is that Paul be understood as far as possible within the context of his Jewish upbringing, though unconsciously he might well have absorbed the teachings of the "mystery" religions.

As the second perspective, I urge that neither the New Testament in general nor Paul in particular teaches that the Jews were "rejected" and the Gentiles were chosen in their place. Where such references occur, the meaning is that Judaism as such will no longer suffice in the coming Day of Judgment, inaugurating the World to Come.

Jews, on this view, are like the rest of mankind, that is "guilty" of the sin of Adam. Living under the Law, they were more conscious of their sinfulness. Indeed, a common motif in the High Holiday liturgy is "we and our fathers have sinned."

According to Luke in Acts, the nonacceptance of Jesus as the Messiah makes one "guilty" of human sinfulness and of the blood of Jesus. So, Stephen, addressing himself to a Jewish crowd, speaks of the murderers of Jesus in the third-person plural, "they," and to his audience directly as facing the possibility of becoming guilty: "They killed those who
foretold the coming of the Righteous One, and you now living have become his betrayers and murderers..." (Acts 7:52).

The "rejection," if any, will occur in the Parousia, in the Day of Judgment.

For this reason, Paul says to Jews who did not believe: "Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean; from henceforth I will go to the Gentiles" (Acts 18:6). But then he goes to the Jews in the very next town. And at the end of the book, he is still speaking to the Jews of Rome.

The third perspective is a recognition that the issue between Paul and his Jewish opponents was not universalism or humanism vs. Jewish particularism or ethnicism, but whether the Law remained valid in the new eschatological age, prior to the Second Coming.

It was not universalism as such, because the Jews accepted the "fearers of the Lord" in the fellowship of the synagogue and as candidates of the World to Come. Also, the acceptance of Gentiles in the Christian dispensation was qualified. So, at Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13:42-52), Luke writes: "As many as were destined for eternal life believed." Later he reports James as saying: "For the Gentiles to take out of them a people for his name" (Acts 15:14). Also, the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt provided a paradigmatic image of redemption, and Israel then included a mixture of many peoples (Exod. 12:38).

The Apostles were surprised to find that the Holy Spirit fell upon Gentiles also, though they had not accepted the Law.

The issue was not admittance into the national community of Israel, but into the Covenant. The rabbinic expression for entering into the Covenant was "to come under the wings of the divine Presence."

Luke's writing is understandable from the standpoint of the second generation, which was impressed by the preponderance of Gentiles in the Christian churches. So, we read of Jewish "jealousy" (Acts 13:45), and we get the general feeling that somehow, by a fresh divine fiat, the Gentiles were substituted for the Jews as the newly chosen people. The very word Gentiles is meaningful only in a Jewish context. Out of the Jewish context, the word Gentile places the Jews apart from the rest of humanity, as if they were metaphysically superhuman or subhuman, not like other people.

The Apostles and Jesus and the classical prophets, speaking to their own people, demanded more from them—hence, the tone of bitterness
and frustration. But this intra-Jewish family feeling must not be perverted by removing it from its historical context.

The couplet "Jews rejected, Gentiles accepted" must be put in its historical context. Paul finds the nucleus of his adherents in every city among Jews and their associates, the "God-fearers," sebomenoi, yirai Adonai. They were prepared by the synagogue for the understanding of the Gospel. When Paul preaches to a Roman like Festus, the Roman governor in Caesarea, the latter exclaims: "Paul, thou art beside thyself; too much learning doth make thee mad" (Acts 26:24).

Agrippa is not converted, but, as Jew, he understands what Paul is saying.

The number of Jews in the Roman Empire was between 5 and 10 percent of the total population. Suppose the Christian church obtained twice as large a percentage of converts among Jews as among Gentiles; the percentage of Jews within the churches would vary from 10 to 20 percent.

To illustrate the devious reasoning of some scholars—eager to maintain the simplistic couplet "Jews rejected, Gentiles accepted"—may I refer you again to Johannes Munck's comment in the Anchor Bible on Acts 11:1–18: "This Pauline view, which may suitably be named 'representative universalism,' represented a Semitic outlook. Where a part had accepted the Gospel, then, the whole, that is the nation concerned, had accepted it, and where a part had rejected it, the nation as a whole had rejected it."

Translated it means that the Jews rejected it, because a part did so; the Gentiles accepted it, not some Gentiles, because the part equals the whole. How even-handed! How Semitic!

The fourth perspective that is frequently ignored by Jewish as well as Christian scholars is that Pauline Christianity grew out of opposition to Temple Judaism, not the modified post-Temple Judaism that is reflected in the Mishnah and Talmud.

The theology of Paul and of the Letter to the Hebrews operates with the notion of forgiveness of sin through the supreme sacrifice of the "Son of God." Post-Temple Judaism maintains in practice the sufficiency of repentance, on the part of man, and forgiveness, on the part of God. However, in theory it cherished the hope of a reinstitution of the Temple and its sacrifices. Also, it speculated that in the heavenly Temple, "not built by human hands," the sacrifices of the righteous are
even now being offered in the shape of “lambs of fire” and the officiating priest is either Michael or Metatron (Hagigah 12b, Menahot 110a).

The latter speculation was never raised to the rank of a dogma. Interesting is a baraita which reflects the gulf between Temple Judaism and that of the rabbinic period: “A sinner, what is his punishment?—They asked this question of Wisdom. It responded, ‘a sinner, he shall die’; they asked it of prophecy, it responded, ‘evil pursues the sinner’; they asked it of Torah, it responded, ‘let him bring a sacrifice and his sin will be forgiven’; they asked it of God, He answered, ‘let him repent and all will be forgiven.’”

Here, then, is a policy, representing the true intent of God, which is superior to the Divine Will, as it is found in the Torah.

A similar thought is presented in the name of Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai, who assumed the leadership of Judaism after the destruction of the Temple (Abot di R. Nathan IV). He said to his disciple who wept over the destruction of the Temple: “We have an atonement of equal efficacy, deeds of lovingkindness.”

Now we know that many pietists were embittered by the administrators of the Temple.

The Talmud notes the popular resentment of the high priests and their aides. The Samaritans were implacable in their hostility, and Stephen may have been a Samaritan. The Samaritans referred to themselves as Hebrews, and the Epistle by this name may have been written to Samaritans.

More to the point, the Qumran community shows us a group of ardent pietists who disdained the high priests of the Temple as usurpers, since they did not belong to the family of Zadok. The Qumran Hasidim were organized by their Righteous Teacher, Moreh Zedek, as a holy community, in which God dwelt, a living sanctuary that could serve as a substitute for the Holy Temple. This community, or its governing council, azat hayahad, was “the true Israel.” Their sacred meals were probably modeled after those in the Temple. They looked forward to the descent of the heavenly Temple, the one not built with human hands. (As Bertil Gärtner comments: “We have seen that the Qumran texts contain a consistent Temple symbolism, in which the community is represented as the new Temple, and in which the true sacrifice is seen as being spiritual in character, offered in the holy and pure lives, the praise and prayer of the members of the community.”)

The Temple symbolism of Paul in I Corinthians 3:16 and I Timothy
3:15 and of the author of Hebrews is paralleled by similar symbolism in the Qumran community and by rabbinic speculations concerning the heavenly Temple.

The frustrations of many Jews with the Temple ritual are reflected in Paul's and Luke's criticism of the Law and its supposed inefficiency. A large portion of the Law dealt with the Temple and the laws of "purity," which related to it.

The complaints that the Law could not be observed fully cut to the heart of many Jews—mostly in the Diaspora, but also in Galilee. The offering of olah was to be brought for "meditations of the heart."^5 How often could a Jew from the Diaspora go up to Jerusalem? The bringer of a sin-offering or a burnt-offering had to lean with both hands on the animal, prior to its sacrifice (mishkah).^6 The laws of "purity" placed all Diaspora Jews in the category of the "impure," requiring a week of purification. Also, the commercialism of the priestly families and the legitimacy of the high priest were frequently questioned.

Apparently, before R. Akiba's time, the assumption was that anyone who did not observe all of the precepts of the Law was doomed. R. Akiba maintained that the observance of even one mizvah was sufficient to secure a share in the World to Come (Makkot 24a).

In brief, in Temple Judaism, many believed that "there is no forgiveness save in blood" (Yoma 5a). For the Apostolic community, the blood of Jesus has taken the place of the blood of lambs: "Him hath God exalted with His right hand to be a Prince and a Savior, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins" (Acts 5:31). Rabbinic Judaism asserted that both repentance and forgiveness required no sacrificial intermediary.

The greatest sin in Temple Judaism was pigul, to entertain idle thoughts while the sacrifice was being offered. Hence, Paul in I Corinthians (11:27) warns of punishment for thoughtless participation in the eucharist. It was the reenactment of a sacrifice.

The author of Hebrews argues that any sin committed after conversion cannot be forgiven: "For if we sin willfully after that we have received the knowledge of truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins" (Heb. 10:26).

Temple Judaism was not identical with the Sadducee mentality, but the two attitudes were certainly very close. So, the Sadducees, especially the Temple functionaries, persecuted the early Christians, while the Pharisees defend Peter and John: "But if it be of God, ye cannot
overthrow it...

"We find no evil in this man; but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God" (Acts 23:9).

Fifth, the perspective of universal history. If we look at the course of human history, as it unfolds in the succession of centuries, it is clear that some form of ethical monotheism, embracing the insights of Hebrew prophecy and Hellenic philosophy, was due to emerge in the Roman Empire. Paganism was spiritually bankrupt. Judaism appealed powerfully to the pagan population, but it was, after all, the religion of an ethnic community that was emotionally withdrawn, socially insulated, and politically subjugated.

The logic of spiritual development was directed decisively toward an integrated cosmos, governed by One God, Who is revealed in man's heart and mind. As Greek philosophy superseded previous speculations, so Jewish biblical thought advanced inexorably within the Roman Empire. Variations of Persian dualism and Chaldaic Gnosticism captured for brief moments the fancy of the populace, but they could not deflect the main current which aimed at the harmonization of all the demands of man's spirit.

A new synthesis was needed that included the impact of Judaism, with its antiquity and prestige, and yet was a new revelation, which non-Jews could enter on the ground floor.

As Toynbee pointed out, the external proletariat tends to embrace the culture of the nuclear people in some heretical form, which reflects their ambivalence of both admiration and contempt.

So, the Samaritans embraced Judaism, but with a difference; the Germanic tribes took up the Arian form of Christianity; the Persians, the Shiya form of Islam; the Russians, their own variation on Byzantine Orthodoxy. Religiously speaking, Judaism was the nuclear community. The time was ripe for a form of Jewish monotheism that would embrace its living core and at the same time dispute its legitimacy.

This historic role was carried out by Christianity, with Paul laying down the two basic lines of acceptance and rejection toward the mother faith. In Romans 9–11, he acknowledged in his own way that the nonacceptance of Christ by the Jews was providential. The ambivalent love-hate relationship between Judaism and Christianity was itself dynamic and restless, with the Gnostics stressing the anti-Judaic side and the second-century apologists emphasizing the pro-Jewish elements.
The rapid spread of Christianity in the pagan world was due to its serving as the vehicle of the biblical faith. In the case of the Jewish people, no such historical function existed, for they had experienced this development in the biblical period. Hence, the appeal of Christianity to Jews was comparatively modest. Its anti-Temple mood was neutralized by rabbinic Judaism, which in practice substituted prayer and good deeds for the sacrifices of the Temple but maintained the hope of the restoration of the Temple.

The sixth and final perspective that I urge is the personal attempt of Paul and other Apostles to overcome the isolation of the Jew and to eliminate the scourge of antisemitism. Paul's complex personality contained a keen feeling for the broad sweep of history along with a deep concern for the destiny of his own people. He spared no effort to bring salvation to all men, but he loved the Jewish people with a passion.

Paul was a theologian, and all his actions had to be consciously systematized and related to his central conviction of "Christ crucified." He was also a great Jewish personality, who was deeply concerned with the endemic hostility between Jews and Greeks in the Eastern Mediterranean, especially in Syria and Egypt. Doubtless, he felt deeply the anguish of his fellow Jews when Caius Caligula ordered that his picture be worshipped in the Temple (39 C.E.) The anti-Jewish riots in Alexandria, Egypt (38–40 C.E.), and the anti-pagan riots in Jannia, Palestine, provoked outbreaks in many parts of the empire. Antisemitism had become a murderous mass-phenomenon (Josephus, Wars of the Jews II:18).

It was inevitable that Paul, a native of the Hellenistic Jewish Diaspora, would be deeply concerned with the need of bridging the tragic rift between the Jews and the Greeks. His conviction that the Eschatological Age had already dawned reinforced his determination to hasten the day when all ethnic rivalries and hatreds would be overcome. With fierce resolve, he battled against the notion of retaining the line of demarcation between Jews and Greeks within the Christian community. He would not allow the Law to enforce Jewish insularity within the community that was already living in spirit in the Messianic Age. Hellenistic Jews were keenly conscious of the social consequences of the Law, which surrounded them with an "iron curtain," as it were (Aristeas to Philocrates, ed. Moises Hadas, [New York, 1951], 139). They bore its
restrictions with amazing courage, so long as its educational function was necessary. But in the time of fulfillment, the prophetic vision of the fraternity of peoples could no longer be postponed.

Paul felt called upon to prepare the way for the coming with power of the Messiah—hence, to insist that in Christ all divisions shall no longer be tolerated. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female; for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28).

In sum, the perspectives that emerge out of Jewish scholarship are:

1. The bi-polarity and dynamism of the Jewish faith would be raised to the breaking point when the Eschaton was at hand.
2. The Day of Judgment was impending, but no “rejection” of the Jewish people had already taken place.
3. The core of the argument between Paul and the loyal Jews was not ideological but factual—had the Messiah arrived or not?—It was not universalism vs. particularism.
4. Temple Judaism was the stem out of which Pauline Christianity and Pharisaism diverged.
5. The macroscopic view of world-history, in which Paul's career is to be seen.
6. The microscopic view of Paul's complex personality and his dedication to the unity of the community of the newly “chosen people.”

NOTES

1. Jer. Yoma 1, “Why did the priests serve in white garments?—As the service is above, so it is below.”
3. Yoma 71a, Pesachim 57a.
5. Taanit 26a, “How can a person’s sacrifice be offered when he is not present?”
6. “Always an olah is brought only for meditation of the heart” (Lev. Rabba 7:3). (We can understand Paul’s predicament in Romans 7.)